

## ADDICTS

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Many centers boast a high success rate, but professionals agree that, for people who leave these centers, all too often a brief period of sobriety is followed by a relapse.

And as 10 or even seven days replace the standard 28-day inpatient programs, the battle to stay sober is even tougher.

For the addict, it's the exception rather than the rule to recover completely the first time through treatment, experts say.

Oxford House says that's a rule that can, and should, be broken.

"People accept too easily that this is a disease that has relapses," says Paul Molloy, founder of Oxford House Inc. and a recovering alcoholic.

"It doesn't have to be a disease with relapses."

"You can send someone to the finest treatment center in the United States, but if you send them back to a drug infested house and they don't have a job, they aren't going to stay clean and sober," says Anthony Mulvihill, director of the Alcohol and Drug Counsel of North Carolina.

"People recover from addiction by changing people, places and things in their lives."

Oxford House and other types of transitional housing give people a

place to do that, Mulvihill says. But Oxford House is different from halfway houses that have counselors, cooks, house managers and mandatory classes.

Oxford House, Molloy says, forces recovering addicts to take responsibility for themselves.

At Oxford House Hayworth in High Point, four house residents gather for their Sunday night meeting. They are joined by Chris Marlow and Bobbie Woolbright, both field technicians who set up Oxford Houses in North Carolina.

The Hayworth house opened in June and its residents still are learning the ropes.

"I think we need to get more into recovery," says Ron Ketchum, 23, who has lived at Oxford House for one month and recently was in an inpatient treatment facility. "I think we need to go to more meetings."

He's referring to 12-step, Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

"I'm not Mr. AA or Mr. NA here, but I want to recover."

Chris Thompson, 29, a recovering cocaine addict who moved to the High Point Oxford House from one in Danville, says, "We all need to share more, too."

Recently, one of the house members had a relapse, and Ketchum, Thompson, Leon Jackson, 31, and Danny Berry, 25, had to kick him out

of the house.

"Recovery is doing the hard stuff," Marlow reassures the group, especially Jackson, who saw the other member use drugs.

It's solving these problems together, and taking care of the house, mowing the grass and paying the rent, that gives Oxford House residents the skills they need to stay sober.

"It's part of having manageability in our lives," says Thompson, explaining why simple things like household chores are so important for recovery from addiction.

"We always paid the dope man or the liquor man before" instead of paying rent, he says. At Oxford House, "We learn how to be manageable so when we do leave here, we can do it on our own."

"It's a learning process," says Berry. "It's like starting over for us."

Being responsible also helps addicts rebuild their self-esteem, which is usually in ruins from the years of lying and failure that becomes a way of life for most addicts.

"Really, it's about feelings," says Ketchum. "I spent extra time on the yard last week and I did a good job. I've never lived in a nice house, in a nice neighborhood. It felt good."

Emotional support is another aspect of life at an Oxford House that residents say is important to their

recovery.

"For me, I need Danny's friendship and Leon's friendship to stay clean," says Thompson. "I don't know how long I'll need it, but I need it now."

Margaret (not her real name) lives at Echo Farms Oxford House in Wilmington. She is a 33-year-old crack addict and alcoholic. She also is the mother of two young children who are staying with relatives while she is in recovery.

"My self-esteem and everything was gone" when I was using drugs, she says. "I lost it spiritually, physically and mentally. I couldn't cope with reality anymore. I was living to use."

Margaret says inpatient treatment taught her about the disease of alcoholism and drug addiction, and that Oxford House is teaching her about life.

"I learned that it wasn't that I was stupid all the time, but that I had a disease, a sickness. It was an illness that needed to be arrested."

Margaret went through treatment in 1992 and then moved home and immediately had a relapse. She's been clean since she moved into Oxford House in August.

"I feel good today. I still have headaches and a few bad dreams, but I have a job, I'm going to [AA] meetings. I've got a family and I'm around people that love me and I love them back."

"We can face reality together. If one of us has a problem, we can work together."

Margaret plans to stay at Oxford House at least a year.

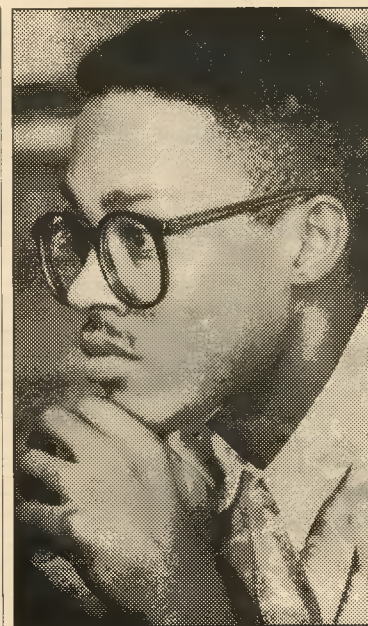
"My kids want their Mama back," she says. "I told them they'll get her back one day, but I've got to help me first."

Not everyone agrees that Oxford House is the answer. Some say its lack of structure is exactly what addicts don't need.

"I think they're great for people who are ready to be more on their own," says Alice Harrison, director of Hope Haven Inc., a nonprofit in Charlotte that runs halfway houses. "For people who are just coming out of treatment, they need that structure" of a halfway house.

Molloy of Oxford House disagrees.

"I've never seen the case when Oxford House wasn't right for someone because they needed something



Danny Berry listens during a meeting at Oxford House in High Point

more structured. Peers will be harder on each other than if you have an authority figure."

Holly Summers, a 20-year-old former college student and recovering alcoholic, lives at Echo Farms Oxford House. She lived in a halfway house for seven months after going through inpatient treatment.

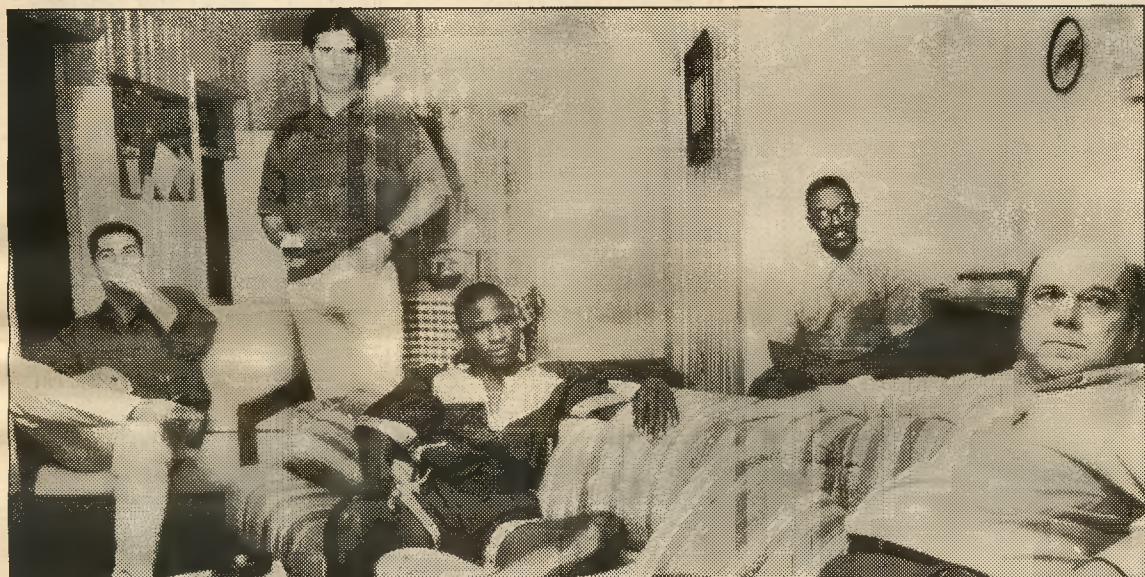
At the halfway house, she says, "We weren't allowed to talk to or see men, and we attended scheduled meetings, seminars and videos. It wasn't a home atmosphere but a facility. There was a counselor on duty 24 hours a day."

Summers likes the home environment of Echo Farms and being surrounded by women she has grown to love as family. But she says she doesn't think she would have stayed sober had she moved into an Oxford House straight out of treatment.

"I was still a 15-year-old child inside," she says. "I needed to be in a safe place where they wouldn't let you out."

For Arnita James, a 29-year-old mother who has lived at Echo Farms for several months, Oxford House is just what she needed.

"Halfway houses are so structured. I would have become very dependent on them. I probably would have stayed clean, but I wouldn't have had a clue about responsibility."



At Oxford House, participatory management is the rule. From Left, Ron Ketchum, Chris Thompson, Leon Jackson, Danny Berry and Chris Marlow of the Oxford House in High Point.

Photos by John Fletcher Jr.

### Model of self-management

# Recovering alcoholic starts his own nonprofit

When the halfway house that Paul Molloy was living in 20 years ago lost its funding, he could have headed back to the streets and a life of alcohol abuse. Instead, he started what is now a model for hundreds of transitional houses throughout the U.S. for recovering addicts.

By KATHERINE NOBLE

In 1973, Paul Molloy hit bottom. A husband, father of five and successful attorney, he found himself living on the streets.

"Today, I suppose I would be called homeless," he says. "In those days I was just thought of as a bum."

Molloy is an alcoholic. He's also founder of Oxford House Inc.

Some years ago, Molloy wound up in a 21-day, in-patient treatment center, and then in a halfway house. He'd been living at the halfway house for a few months when the program that ran the house lost its funding.

"I know I would have relapsed if I had to move out," Molloy says. Other house members felt the same way and, with encouragement from a local Alcoholics Anonymous support group, the men decided to rent the house, and run it, themselves.

"The first thing we did was take

away the six-month rule." Molloy says. Most halfway houses have a four- or six-month limit on the length of time someone can stay.

"Someone is paying for a halfway house, and to make sure everybody has an equal chance at being in the house, they have to turn over the beds," Molloy says.

At a halfway house, paid staff typically includes a counselor, house manager and cook.

Not at Oxford House. The men couldn't afford to hire a staff. Instead, they cooked their own meals. They cleaned the house themselves. And they made all their decisions democratically, in the style of a New England town meeting.

The only requirements were absolutely no drug or alcohol use, and everyone paid their own way. The residents decided for themselves when they were ready to move out.

To Molloy's surprise, the concept worked. And it worked better, he says, than a halfway house.

In Molloy's first three months at the halfway house, 12 men moved out. Eleven of them had relapses within 30 days.

"Recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction is not something that happens according to a time schedule," Molloy says. "Oxford House has no time schedule. As long as a resi-

dent is paying rent and staying clean and sober, he or she can stay forever."

Residents stay for an average of 15 months.

"The best tool for determining when a person is ready to move on," Molloy says, "is when that person feels they are ready to move on themselves."

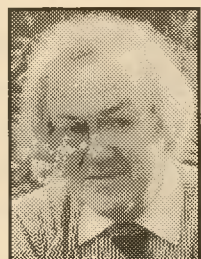
Thirteen men lived in that first house, and soon they'd accumulated \$1,200 in savings.

They decided to open another Oxford House. Those first two then opened a third. Pretty soon, there were 11 houses.

A few years later, Molloy and the other original members moved out. Molloy figured that would be the end of his involvement with Oxford House.

"We kind of assumed it would fall apart without us," he says.

More than a decade later, Catholic University in Washington, D.C., did a study of the 11 Oxford Houses and discovered that 80 percent of the former residents had



Paul Molloy

remained clean and sober - a high figure in the world of recovery. Then, in 1988, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, including a section that required states that received federal money under the act to set up a loan fund for self-supporting, self-run recovery houses.

The legislation was based on the Oxford House model.

That year, Molloy quit practicing

law and began expanding the program.

A \$100,000 revolving loan fund now operates in 35 states and the Virgin Islands by making loans of up to \$4,000 to Oxford Houses.

Doug Baker of North Carolina's state agency for substance abuse services, says the state's relationship

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