



OXFORD HOUSES EVALUATION – summary

The Oxford Houses Australia program is run by The Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) and Mind Australia, who commissioned Turning Point to conduct an evaluationⁱ across 2016/2017.

Oxford Houses provide safe, supportive, and stable living environments in which residents can pursue long-term recovery from alcohol and other drug dependence. The houses are 4 bedroom rental properties leased by Oxford Houses Australia. They are democratically-administered by the residents, who are required to contribute equally to the upkeep of the household by paying dues, completing chores, and fulfilling particular roles in the house. As long as they conform to these requirements, remain abstinent and maintain recovery, and don't engage in disruptive behaviour, there is no prescribed length of stay

Summary of Findings

Residents use alcohol and other drugs less frequently

The findings indicate that, so long as they remain in an Oxford House, residents are almost certainly successful in maintaining sobriety. Residents themselves reported a remarkably high commitment to abstinence and to their continuing sobriety.

Residents have increased recovery capital

The Oxford Houses program provides residents with a peer-support based environment that is conducive to them developing personal strengths and helps them engage with community resources that assist their recovery.

Residents participate in meaningful activity

A high proportion of residents had re-engaged with employment and furthering their education. Residents reported less absenteeism, were less likely to lose or be fired from their jobs, and less likely to drop out or fail school than before admission. More than 90% of Oxford Houses residents were engaged in meaningful volunteer activities.

Residents have more and more-supportive social connections

Oxford Houses residents are more likely to identify and associate with other individuals in recovery; be less likely to identify and associate with active AOD users; have larger and more, active, diverse and supportive social networks; spend more time with their families and have improved familial relationships. A high proportion (approximately 94%) of residents reported actively assisting and being assisted by other individuals in recovery through participation in

mutual aid activities such as self-help groups and intra-Oxford House provision of social support.

Residents report higher wellbeing

Residents reported better psychological health, physical health, and quality of life. Compared to active users, more residents exercised regularly, maintained healthy eating habits, and received medical supervision.

They were dramatically less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system, engage in antisocial behaviours or be arrested and/or incarcerated for those behaviours. Fewer residents had outstanding debts, and more residents reported paying their bills on time and planning for the future.

Program specific elements are associated with positive outcomes

These include: availability of social support, secure housing, identification with other housemates, and the roles residents played in their houses.

Being a resident of Oxford Houses helps people build recovery capital, facilitates a sense of, and practice of, connectedness and increases engagement with meaningful activities.

Study Conclusion

This study describes a model that, in addition to being economical and practicable, is highly effective.

Compared to their time in active addiction, and in a relatively short period of time after admission to Oxford Houses, residents experienced considerable improvements in health, finances, legal issues, engagement in meaningful activities and family and social connectedness. As well as improved wellbeing, they reported decreased substance use, decreased usage of costly acute-health care services and reduced contact with the criminal justice system.

Oxford Houses offers residents support beyond acute-care and provides them with opportunities to build connections with others, engage with a larger community of recovering people, find and become involved with meaningful activities and develop a sense of hopefulness.

Scaling up the implementation of the program may enable more people to experience the positive impacts reported by residents in this evaluation.

Further research is needed to examine the long-term impacts of Oxford Houses in Australia.

The researchers acknowledged the generosity of the residents of Oxford Houses for their help with this evaluation.

ⁱ Thorn, P. Savic, M., Campbell, S. & Manning, V. (2017) Oxford Houses evaluation findings. Turning Point, Eastern Health, Fitzroy.

Note: the full report can be accessed via SHARC's website www.sharc.org.au