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**INTERVIEW
SERIES**

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
eteam
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TRANSITION HOUSE, INC.

Introduction

Transition House, inc. is a provider of mental health and addiction services in Norman, Oklahoma. The organization works toward its mission of “Changing lives by creating pathways for mental wellness” through two programs: The first is Transition House’s Transitional Living Program (TLP) which focuses on supervised apartment living and skill-building for adults with severe mental health or addiction challenges. Space in the program is limited, with applications exceeding capacity. Clients may participate in TLP for up to a year, and upon completion of TLP, they are enrolled in Transition House’s second service, the Community Outreach Program (COP), which continues to provide all TLP clients with additional support such as social/recreational events, drop-in services, and crisis intervention.

The E-TEAM at the University of Oklahoma College of Continuing Education conducted six interviews with Transition House clients between February and March 2023 with the goal of highlighting areas that clients felt contributed most to their successes in Transition House’s Transition Living and Community Outreach Programs.

Client Interviews

Structure

Each client interviewed was asked about their experience with the program agreement and TLP handbook set out by Transition House. These documents contain guidelines and expectations for living in TLP housing, which every client is expected to abide by for the duration of their program. These are not just limited to matters of TLP living space and behavioral expectations, but also integrate treatment benchmarks such as daily and weekly goal-setting to encourage client participation in their treatment. Several clients mentioned that they received mentorship and support to adjust to these guidelines both from TH staff and their peers/outreach clients that are part of their recovery community. Two of the clients interviewed praised these expectations as thorough and transparent, which made meeting those expectations easier.

Most frequently, clients said that the program agreement provided much-needed structure to their lives while in TLP and that they maintained



some or all of the expectations as part of their lives as they entered the Community Outreach Program. One client remarked that they never had a stable routine prior to their participation in TLP and cited it as one of their biggest takeaways from the program while another client said that the guidelines “let me set boundaries with myself” after moving from TLP into Outreach client status.

Culture

A common theme across clients and their responses was the emphasis on how the culture at Transition House supports both program goals and the individual treatment of clients. True to Transition House’s own statement on their culture-- “We listen. We respect. We support. We empower.”--respect features profoundly in the interviews that were conducted. Five out of six interviewees discussed respect culture as an aspect of their success in the program.

One client felt more comfortable in their adjustment to TLP, knowing that Transition House afforded them privacy by not opening client mail, which they contrasted with previous treatment programs they had undergone in Oklahoma. This built trust, according to the client. Another client characterized this trust and respect built into the TLP approach as allowing them to “Respect myself for the first time in my life.” In no uncertain terms, one client concluded their interview saying, “The most important thing about my time at transition house was the respect I was given.”

Related to respect and trust-building in the TH client community, interviewees also mentioned the program’s emphasis on accountability, especially self-accountability. The TLP Handbook checklist for clients posits “I understand that part of the learning process involves staff holding me accountable to my goals and healthy behaviors” as one of the criteria that potential clients should consider when applying for the TLP program. This is corroborated when clients express that “Transition House rewards people who put in the work.” Two interviewees mentioned that TLP empowers clients by giving them skills to complete steps in their recovery themselves, which supports an environment where self-accountability is fostered in clients alongside independence. One client did feel that the emphasis on self-reporting and accountability regarding substance abuse relapse created friction. Specifically, the interviewee stated that when a peer in TLP relapsed and was not truthful with TH staff, their relapse behavior went without intervention for longer than it would have with a drug testing policy. This affected the interviewed client as it created a tempting and stressful environment for substance abuse recovery clients such as themselves.



Bonnie is a superstar.

—Transition House client



Interventions that do not rely on self-reporting and accountability exist in tension with Transition House’s goals of building trust and respect culture within its programs. The concerned client conceded in the interview that policies like drug testing would be unpopular and could run counter to TLP’s goals as a result.



Integration with Community Resources

One client characterized TLP’s approach to treatment as “They’ll drive you to the door”, meaning that Transition House will facilitate everything a client needs to be able to meet their recovery goals, stopping short of doing the work on behalf of the client. In order for Transition House staff to drive clients to the proverbial door, however, they must know where they’re going. Transition House’s 41 years in operation have given clients access to decades of local relationship building and knowledge of community resources.

**Thank you
for the love,
support, and
healing.**

—Transition House client



One way this expertise comes in the form of helping clients navigate available resources. For example, one client interviewed reported applying for Social Security Disability benefits while participating in TLP and was denied. While this client was enrolled as a COP client, staff encouraged them to reapply and helped with their application. The client now receives disability benefits. Another client related that they were involved in Alcoholics Anonymous while in TLP. Transition House worked alongside AA and their sponsor to ensure that the client could utilize both treatment options. As an Outreach client, Transition House provided mental health support in much the same way that Alcoholics Anonymous provided addiction support. Clients also reported assistance from TH staff in enrolling in Oklahoma’s Medicaid program, SoonerCare, as well as finding local mental health community groups such as the Thunderbird Clubhouse. Transition House’s community involvement is integrated into all levels of the organization from the composition of the board of Directors to TH’s partnership with the University of Oklahoma’s Southwest Prevention Center to provide Social Work practicum students with hands-on experience. These connections support and enhance TH’s work in the community.

Community Outreach Program

Five of the clients interviewed were presently Community Outreach Program clients. COP provides a means of holistic support for TLP alumni by providing some of the services that clients utilized as TLP participants

on an as-needed basis. Clients described community social events and resource navigation as among the most commonly used COP services. However, each client's described experience with COP entailed a different utilization of these services, tailored to their needs. One client disclosed that TH staff have continued to act as their mental health provider since transitioning out of TLP due to difficulties in finding other local providers. Frequency of usage differs among clients based on support needs, with some clients receiving weekly check-in calls, while others reported going several months between check-in calls.

In the Community Outreach Program, clients are just as likely to reach out to Transition House for their needs as Transition House is to contact Outreach clients. "The doors at Transition House are wide open," said one client, who reported using drop-in services several times following the completion of TLP. The Outreach relationship also fosters a strong sense of duty to give back to Transition House. Half of the clients interviewed expressed that they were willing to participate in the interview because they saw it as giving back. Another client reported that they visited Transition House daily after work to engage with the client community and staff, contributing to a larger support community that current TLP clients have at Transition House. Finally, Transition House appointed an Outreach client to the Advisory Council, a non-voting attachment to the Board of Directors tasked with acting as a liaison between clients and board members. This appointment formalized the relationship that Transition House fosters with clients, where clients are grateful and eager to give back to the organization. This only further improves TH's community involvement as described above.

Conclusion

With forty-one years of experience, Transition House has built a robust network dedicated to serving its clients. In interviewing six of Transition House's success stories, we have identified some of the systems, attitudes, and approaches that allow Transition House to change lives.



**Transition House has given me
the best 15 years of my life.**

—Transition House client



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