

# A HISTORY OF TRANSITION HOUSE, INC.

*The following history is a collaborative effort between June and Larry Lee and Bonnie (Dunn) Perutzi originally written in November, 1995.*

*Updates made in January 2020*

## **From June Lee**

On July 1, 1979, which began Fiscal year 1980 for State agencies, Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center became separate from Griffin Memorial Hospital, which at that time was called Central State Hospital. Because of State requirements, an Advisory Board for the new COCMHC was formed. Various persons were chosen to be interviewed as members of that Board. I was recommended by Mayor Bill Morgan, and became a member of the original Advisory Board of COCMHC.

During 1981, Dr. John McAlister, then Director of COCMHC, asked me as a member of the Advisory Board to attend a state-wide meeting which was to be held at COCMHC. Representatives from all districts of the Mental Health Department in Oklahoma were to be in attendance. A special guest speaker from Dallas shared with those in attendance the success story of transitional living facilities which had functioned successfully for sometime in Dallas. George Tomek, from one of the local TV stations was there. Theda Starr from the State Department of Mental Health was the facilitator for the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to start the various districts in Oklahoma thinking about ways and means to establish transitional living facilities in the Mental Health districts, or catchment areas. The meeting lasted most of the day.

At the next meeting of the Advisory Board of COCMHC, LaQuita Rogers, who was then assistant to Dr. McAlister, asked me if I would be willing to come to work for COCMHC for the purpose of working with other staff to bring about a transitional living facility in Norman. I told her I could give only two or two and one-half days to the job. She told me that was more than anyone currently employed had to give at that time. I agreed to do so.

I was told to go to the Jim Thorpe Building in Oklahoma City to take the Merit test for that particular position. I did so, passed the test, and soon reported for work at COCMHC.

My immediate co-worker and supervisor was Bill Marion, a Social Worker at COCMHC. Dr. McAlister asked that a letter be written and sent to certain chosen people in the community who were thought to be interested in helping hammer out the details of forming a transitional living facility in Norman. The letter was sent and a meeting was held one evening at COCMHC. Those who were present, about 35 to 40 persons, were asked how they would choose to have the transitional living facility operated; either by COCMHC or by a governing board chosen from citizens of the Norman community. The overwhelming vote was to have the facility run by a governing board.

For the next year, meetings were held regularly at the Department of Mental Health in Oklahoma City. Bill Marion and I, LaQuita Rogers and from time to time community members attended those meetings. One of those persons, Dr. Dale Kunkel, was an instructor at O.U. There were also in attendance various representatives from room & board homes located around Oklahoma. Each week we brought our suggestions and what we thought to be suitable rules and regulations to be considered by Dr. Frank James, the Commissioner of Mental Health for Oklahoma.

During Fiscal year 1981, on May 7, 1981, the State Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 49, by Randle Kilpatrick and Terrill of the Senate and Deatherage and Barker of the House for the Department of Mental Health funding for the year. In this bill was a line item appropriating \$150,000,000 to be used to establish 10 transitional living facilities throughout Oklahoma. Of the ten yet to be facilities, only Cleveland County chose to have the Norman facility overseen by a governing board. All nine others chose to be under the care of the Mental Health Center in that catchment area.

It didn't take more than a month or six weeks to gather a group of about twelve people who were interested enough to give their time working on the actual establishment of the facility in Norman. Those I can remember were Dr. O. Dale Kunkel, Ida and Leonard Snyder, June Morgan, Hollis Scott, Bill Henderson, Louie Stevens, Dr. McAlister, and myself. There were others that came as the weeks passed whose names I can't recall right now. We realized we would need a slate of officers, at least for the time being, and Dr. Kunkel was our first President of the Board.

After almost a year, the final Rules and Regulations were approved by Dr. James, and we began in earnest to look for a site that was properly zoned and would meet other qualifications necessary for such a residence. Advertising began for a Director. There were many applicants. This was in the late winter of 1982, and there was as yet no money available with which to hire a director or pay rent for a facility. We were told that we could not buy any real estate; only furnishings, supplies, salaries and rent.

All of you are aware of the feeling among communities in the various cities nation-wide about homes for people who are "different" from us. It's a good idea but "not in my backyard." Late in March of 1982 we received our share of the \$150 million, which was \$150,000. We eventually chose a Director and began hunting for a site. That was very difficult to say the least. We thought we had a site and the neighborhood rose up and "smote" us.

There was a woman who had operated a room and board home for O.U. football players many years before this time. For the past ten years she had kept three women as room and board residents in her home, providing them with supervision and supervising their medications. They were all outpatients of Griffin Memorial. The local code allowed a maximum of three boarders without a license from the City, County, State and both Mental Health and Health Department of Oklahoma. The provisions were that they be living together as a family, not in separate apartments or dwellings. After many visits by quite a few people to speak with and work out details with this lady, a lease was agreed upon between the Board and this woman to lease certain parts of her house, those parts being the five bedrooms and one bath upstairs, the kitchen and patio room downstairs, and part-time use of the downstairs bath for the staff. The patio room was an area that had been closed in on two sides by windows 3/4ths of the way up, the other two sides being of the house, with a door opening to the outside at the long end of the area. There was no heating or cooling, no floor covering, other than large slabs of patio rock. This was to be the office; I am estimating the area to be 8 feet by 24 feet. The rent for these portions would exclude the formal living room and dining room, and a second kitchen area. The lease was for a year, and could be cancelled at the end of that year by either party.

At the finalizing of the lease, and the hiring of a director, who was provided office space at COCMHC until we had the lease, I was told gently that my work at COCMHC was over. I was not expecting that but should have been aware that it would be that way. Upon telling the new Director of the fact, she immediately asked me to come to work for the facility as secretary, treasurer and bookkeeper. I accepted and remained in that position for one year, at which time I resigned my job and became a member of the Board of Directors, serving two full three-year terms.

After moving into the house where we were to operate our transitional living facility, the first thing we had to do was hunt for appropriate staff, have telephones installed, and furnish what we called "our office." The first residents we had were the three women who had been living in this home for the last 10 years. The first member of the staff hired was Pam Sanford, now Shell, who is the current Director of Thunderbird Clubhouse. Pam was given the title of "Team Coordinator". Over the first few weeks, five more staff were hired and we had scheduled 24 hours coverage by staff seven days a week. We went about the business of deciding upon a name, becoming incorporated, receiving income tax exemption and setting up our books with the help of Murrell, Hall, McIntosh, & Co. PC CPA, and Harold Heiple, Attorney at Law helped with incorporation. With the help of Social Workers from COCMHC, after about two to three months our first three clients graduated to live on their own in an apartment. They continued to receive regular visits from the Mental Health Center social workers, and were outpatients for their medications and checkups. After these women graduated, we refurnished the bedrooms upstairs with new beds, window blinds, installed a window air conditioner in the upstairs bathroom and made other repairs in the bathroom. Also, during that first year with the help of the City of Norman Code personnel, we persuaded our landlady to build an outside stairway, allowing a fire escape. We had an outside street light installed at no cost at the back of the house for further safety. We purchased a station wagon from Reynolds Ford Agency for a very low price, with help from Dick Reynolds, the owner. Also, during that year, we rented for a short time a small house not far away that served the purpose of what our Drop-In Center now serves.

As the end of our first year approached, we reached a mutual decision with our landlady that we would terminate our lease. By that time, I was no longer with the staff, but was very much active as a Board member.

The next site rented was another two-story house a few blocks away. The office rented quarters in a house that had been made into an office building on West Boyd; this site is no longer in existence due to the building of the strip mall just west of Jenkins. During that time, Carol Barfield became a staff member, and still is to this day, I am proud to say. All other staff from that time have moved on, some to impressive positions. Also, during this time our first Director resigned and Pam Sanford was named as interim Director, then as permanent director. Two small apartments were added for use of our clients and the office was moved into quarters at 706 Asp. After two years, Pam resigned to take a job in Connecticut and after a search in August of 1986, Bonnie Dunn our current Director was hired. Subsequently the office has moved to 700 Asp. Ste.2 and has been over time enlarged to its present size and capacity. One of the original Board members, Ida Sloan Snyder, resigned from the Board in order to be able to rent some of her property to Transition House for use as residences for our clients. Ida's husband Leonard succeeded Dr. Kunkel as President of the Board when Dr. Kunkel resigned after two or three years. We continue to rent this property today, although both Ida and her husband Leonard have since died. The buyer of the property agreed with what our philosophy is, and has continued to benefit our community by making the property available to us.

Our Board has had many members; some professionals, some lay persons, but all interested in preserving a betterment in the lives of persons who without help from such as we might not have a life at all. Through all the years the Board members have sought to do what is best for the people that come our way. And I must say with emphasis that Bonnie Dunn has been our rock and stabilizer. She has begun several groups of interested agencies for the benefit of all concerned. She has worked tirelessly for funding from United Way of Norman, and for our annual Golf Classic, to name two ways in which her work as benefitted Transition House, Inc. I hope the efforts of all involved, from beginning until the present will continue championing those who cannot live what we call a "normal" life without help from those who care enough to do something about it.

And let's hear it for the staff, past and present, wherever they may be for their genuine concern for those who have passed through our doors, and for those whom I hope will have the chance to come our way.

### **From Larry Lee**

I've just completed a six-year stint as a Board Member, and would like to add a few things.

First, I would agree with June that Bonnie has been a wonderful light leading Transition House. She's completely consumer oriented and she has fronted for Transition House in the community, making the community aware that TH is not an adjunct of either Griffin, COCMHC or Connections.

As to funding, a major part of our budget comes from the State of Oklahoma. The State Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services receives its budget, then in turn funds the various Mental Health Centers. Our contact is with the State Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services but is processed through our local Mental Health Center.

I mentioned that Bonnie has worked for recognition in the community. She has also kept in touch with State Legislators on Mental Health committees. This year we received a funding increase requested sometime ago of several thousand dollars.

Even though the major part of our budget is funded by the State, we remain a private non-profit entity. I want to emphasize the private. We meet all State Mental Health requirements and reporting but we still are an autonomous private entity. At times in the past other Mental Health agencies have been of the opinion they should be able to use TH for their overflow or should be able to send clients to TH solely on their own evaluation. This battle has been fought in various areas and alleys, but so far we have remained autonomous and have not had funding cut. We do interview consumers referred to us by other agencies, but acceptance of any client into our unique program is only after consultation with the proposed client and evaluation by our own staff.

I am happy - very happy - to tell you that no such battle has occurred for sometime. We now deal with the same agencies but have beneficent and supportive relationships with them. Changes have come and we may expect more.

It ain't always easy, but with the dedicated staff we have, with a flexible program and with a vigilant, working Board of Directors, TH and its clients can expect good things.

## Transition House. Inc.

### Facilities and Office Space:

	1986:	1999:
<b>Office location:</b>	706 Asp (440 square feet)	700 Asp, Ste. 2 (1,000 square feet)
<b>Drop-In Center location:</b>	612 Asp, #11 (400 square feet)	700 Asp, Ste. 4 (600 square feet)
<b>Apartments:</b>	743 DeBarr	201, 203, 205, 207 West Duffy (900 sq ft/apt)

### Staffing:

1986:		2020	
<b>Executive Director (FTE):</b>	Pam Sanford/Bonnie Dunn	<b>Executive Director (FTE)</b>	Bonnie Peruttzi, MHR
<b>Client Services Coordinator (FTE):</b>	Rachelle Hardin, LSW	<b>Clinical Director (FTE)</b>	Rayna Cumbie, MHR
<b>Case Aide (FTE):</b>	Casey Hunter	<b>Recovery Coordinator (TLP – Transitional Living Program focus) (FTE)</b>	Amanda Sherf
<b>Case Aide (PTE):</b>	Carol Barfield		
<b>Community Outreach Coordinator (PTE):</b>	[position began in 1/88 - 7 hrs/week]	<b>Recovery Coordinator (COP – Community Outreach Program focus) (FTE)</b>	Powell Benalioulhaj
<b>Staff Assistant (PTE):</b>	[position began in 3/94]	<b>Business Manager (FTE)</b>	Ilene Dickson

### Agency Vehicle:

1982:	1996:	2012:
1982 Ford Wagon [capacity--8]	1995 Chevy Van [capacity--15]	2012 Ford Van (capacity - 12)

### Highlights:

- Freedom, Inc., a mental health consumer group, signed an agreement with Transition House, Inc., to volunteer to open the Drop-In Center and host consumer activities. This proved to be rather ineffective in meeting consumer needs. This activity was replaced by the Community Outreach Program.
- Relatively consistent use of practicum students, primarily from OU's School of Social Work since at least 1986
- First became a United Way of Norman member agency--1986
- First Membership Drive--1987
- First Golf Tournament--1988
- First Newsletter, Transitions--1988
- Community Outreach Program began--1988
- First computer at the office--1989 (we now have 3, 1 of which is designated for consumer's use)
- Formalized a Mentor Program--1991 (however, found it was most effective done informally)
- Featured in the United Way video--1991 & 1995 and featured in the United Way poster--1993
- Began contract with Norman Housing Authority--1992
- Program modification that allows for an extension in the Transitional Living Program for an additional year--1992
- The Community Outreach Program was modified to have two components--the Structured Activities Component and Drop-In Component--1992
- Drop-In Center re-opened at 700 Asp, Ste. 4--1995
- Began Targeted Treatment with consumers in the Transitional Living Program—1998
- Began Music Wellness Program – 2001
- Began the transformation to the Recovery Model – 2005
- Began utilizing concepts from the Sanctuary Model – 2012
- Began work to advance skills development groups curriculums – 2013
- Began work using materials from Brené Brown's Connections, a psycho-educational shame resilience curriculum
- Began the Wellness Project – Jan. 2015