

# How to Open and Operate a Peer-Run Recovery House

Disclaimer: we do not endorse any house. If you choose to open and operate a recovery house, it is a lot of work and you and your team should be highly competent, conduct operations professionally, and be committed for the all the right reasons.

HOPE Conference  
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Eric Skillings, Director of Operations  
Jesse Harvey, Founder & Director of Mission  
Crystal Waugh, Director of Women's Services

Journey House Sober Living



Journey House  
Sober Living

Journey House's mission is to provide low-barrier and low-cost sober living to people seeking recovery in Maine.

# How / where we see ourselves

- Just one part of the CoC / ROSC
  - Prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery management
- We don't tell people how to recover. Open to all pathways that are safe for the individual AND the other residents
  - Moderation and cannabis may work for some individuals, but it would be a trigger to other residents, so we cannot house these individuals, but we will not deny them their own personal truth.
- Dedicated to advocacy as well
  - The best nonprofits are engaged not only in direct service work but also advocacy. Our vision is *a Southern Maine where all who seek recovery have a place to live.*
- Mission-driven (not profit-driven)

# About Journey House

## **High Quality**

One of only 6 organizations statewide certified by Maine Association of Recovery Residences (as of 1/28/18).

## **Low-cost**

\$200 move-in fee. \$500/mo for months 1-3, \$450/mo for months 4-6, then \$400/mo.

Over 60% of our residents have paid nothing at time of moving in, and are awarded scholarships and/or put on payment plans.

## **Low-barrier**

Not necessary: insurance, clean record, money, good credit, etc.

Necessary: desire and willingness to work strong program of personal recovery.

Journey House cannot house individuals convicted of arson or sex offenses.

Journey House cannot house individuals requiring inpatient or other higher level of care.

## **Peer-run**

Run by individuals in recovery. Eric and Jesse have a combined 5.5 years of recovery.

Jesse is certified in Intentional Peer Support (IPS) and Recovery Coach Academy (RCA). Eric is extremely involved in the Sanford 12 step recovery community. Jesse has two years of experience in peer support for Portland nonprofits and is the recipient of awards for his contributions to the field of peer support in Maine. Both Eric and Jesse have significant experience connecting individuals to non-peer resources and providers.

## **Evidence-based**

Recovery-oriented housing itself is an Evidence Based Practice (EBP)

Destigmatized and person-first language is shown to increase rates of help-seeking behavior and improve clinical outcomes in individuals with SUD.

Journey House proudly affirms and supports multiple pathways to recovery

Prescribed medication is allowed and is stored safely in double locked system and self-administered using Daily Observed Therapy (DOT).

Residents are connected with community providers to provide such EBPs as counseling, CBT, DBT, medication, etc.

## **Recovery-oriented**

Expectations include mandatory urinalyses, pro-social events, weekly house meetings, household chores, and adherence to treatment plans, probation requirements, etc.

Additional layer of structure and peer support provided by top and house leadership.

## **Community-focused**

Requirement to interact positively and productively with all members of community.

Monthly requirement of 5 hours of community service per resident.

## **Collaborative**

Seeking strong relationships with medical, law enforcement, social services, employment and education providers, etc. to better integrate residents back into society and a productive life.

## **Highly cost-effective**

Cost savings for municipality, county, and state agencies, as well as hospitals, etc. Reduced incidence of alcohol- and drug-related crime and acute and chronic health conditions.

# Legal Context

“A number of cases or controversies have arisen as some communities or companies have [attempted] to treat [a recovery house] different than an ordinary family would have been treated. Oxford House, Inc. took the lead in defending the right of any Oxford House™ to establish a house in a good neighborhood – particularly in light of the 1988 Amendments to the Federal Fair Housing Act adding ‘handicapped’ as a protected class.”

“A watershed in those efforts was the decision by the United States Supreme Court in May 1995 in the case *City of Edmonds, WA v. Oxford House, Inc. et. al.* 514 U.S. 725 (1995). In that case, the Supreme Court ruled in a 6-3 decision that recovering alcoholics and drug addicts were a protected class under the handicapped provisions of the Federal Fair Housing Act Amendments of 1988.”

“Oxford House and The Rule of Law.” *Oxford House*. N.d.  
<http://www.oxfordhouse.org/userfiles/file/ohrol.php>

Also see <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/912366/download>

# Olmstead v. L.C.

"On June 22, 1999, the United States Supreme Court held in *Olmstead v. L.C.* that unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities constitutes discrimination in violation of title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act."

"The Court held that public entities must provide community-based services to persons with disabilities when

- (1) such services are appropriate;
- (2) the affected persons do not oppose community-based treatment;

The Supreme Court explained:

"institutional placement ... perpetuates unwarranted assumptions that persons so isolated are incapable of or unworthy of participating in community life."

"confinement in an institution severely diminishes the everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural enrichment."

Olmstead: Community Integration for Everyone. *United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division's ADA.gov*. N.d. [https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/olmstead\\_about.htm](https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/olmstead_about.htm)

# Maine Human Rights Act

## Maine Revised Statutes

← §4576

### Title 5: ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND SERVICES

§4581-A →

#### Part 12: HUMAN RIGHTS

#### Chapter 337: HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

#### Subchapter 4: FAIR HOUSING

### §4581. Right to freedom from discrimination in housing; exceptions

The opportunity for an individual to secure housing in accordance with the individual's ability to pay, and without discrimination because of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin or familial status is hereby recognized as and declared to be a civil right. [2011, c. 613, §10 (AMD); 2011, c. 613, §29 (AFF).]

Title 5, §4581. N.d. *Maine Revised Statutes*.

<http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/5/title5sec4581.html>



# 2016 Joint Memo by DOJ / HUD

"The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, and persons with disabilities have the same Fair Housing Act protections whether or not their housing is considered a group home. State and local governments may not discriminate against persons with disabilities who live in group homes" (p. 8).

"Neutral laws that govern groups of unrelated persons who live together do not violate the Act so long as (1) those laws do not intentionally discriminate against persons on the basis of disability (or other protected class), (2) those laws do not have an unjustified discriminatory effect on the basis of disability (or other protected class), and (3) state and local governments make reasonable accommodations when such accommodations may be necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling" (p.10).

Joint Statement of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Justice: State and Local Land Use Laws and Practices and the Application of the Fair Housing Act. November 10, 2016. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/912366/download>

# Tsombanidis v. City of West Haven

“The case involved Oxford House, the City of West Haven and the State of Connecticut and the issue was whether or not the particular house had to install a fire safety sprinkler system even though there was no requirement placed on families living in similar houses.”

“Federal Judge Gerard L. Goettel, in his decision, explains in detail the different types of discrimination under the Federal Fair Housing Act and such basic requirements on government and others to make reasonable accommodation.”

“Oxford House and The Rule of Law.” *Oxford House*. N.d.  
<http://www.oxfordhouse.org/userfiles/file/ohrol.php>

# Ideal Community Involvement

- Spreading the word about Journey House and the recovery house model
- Reducing the stigma associated with recovery and recovery-oriented housing
- Referrals, as well as connections with peer leaders who would be interested in applying to join the organization (eg. a live-in house manager or peer mentors, etc.)
- A holistic and integrative understanding of what recovery-oriented housing is and how you or your agency can interface with our organization and its residents. Examples include:
  - Providing case management
  - Assisting with in-house therapeutic, peer support, or other groups
  - Acupuncture, nutrition classes, resume writing workshops, etc.
  - Committing to drive residents weekly to a mutual aid group / meeting, etc.
- Donations, especially in the beginning:
  - Furniture, appliances, cookware, art, and household items
  - Financial contributions
  - Professional services
    - Legal, financial, etc.
- Making a collective impact

# Current Challenges

- Code Enforcement offices
- General Assistance
- Landlords (bad ones and reluctant ones)
- Financial
  - Opened with \$4,000 in December of 2016
    - Went into a little more debt for two months
  - Three months of “profit” was invested, along with \$4,000 more dollars, into the Sanford men’s house (Eric joined)
  - After breaking even again, invested “profit” in the Sanford women’s house (Crystal joined)
  - Lack of awareness / referrals from professionals
- Lack of buy in (internship, clinical groups, funding, etc.)





# Process prior to opening

- Assemble **stakeholders**
  - People in / seeking recovery. The recovery community
  - Medical (incl. BHH, primary care, ED & treatment, both inpatient and outpatient), Law Enforcement, Social Services (incl. Harm reduction services), etc.
  - Business, foundations, service organizations, and private philanthropists
- Determine **vision and mission**
- Identify suitable property and friendly landlord (or explore buying)
- Identify "staff" or volunteers who will devote their time
- Obtain **liability insurance**, begin advertising, etc.
- Local government: 2 options
  - Notify Code Enforcement and other municipal offices (not required & be prepared for resistance)
  - Don't notify Code Enforcement (100% legal in Maine, where recovery houses are not regulated & easier in municipalities that have never encountered this)
- Coordinate furniture and other donations
- Order **drug and alcohol tests** and **breathalyzers** and tips. Obtain **naloxone**
- Create **Policies, Procedures, and Directives**. Create **Resident Agreement**
- Apply for **certification** with Maine Association of Recovery Residences
- Move in furniture and turn on utilities

# Operations once open

- Live-in house management ideally
- Weekly required in-house groups (at least one)
- Peer support and structure
  - Chores and accountability
  - Outside groups
  - Culture of recovery
- Urinalyses and breathalyzers (12 panel POC + strips)
- Being "on contract," verbal vs. written
- Asking someone to leave
- Organizing community events
- Management of rent and expenses
- Continued outreach and community presence