



**2007/2008 Our Common Welfare Program
Community Needs Assessment
Focus Group Results**

MARICOPA COUNTY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2007 Women In New Recovery's Our Common Welfare (OCW) Program embarked on a community needs assessment process to explore and capture the views of various stakeholders regarding the current state of recovery housing in Maricopa County, Arizona. The OCW program, through financial support from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is building a work plan to expand peer-to-peer recovery support services throughout Maricopa and Yavapai Counties by 2011. OCW's peer support services strengthen the ability of recovering individuals to sustain long-term recovery and re-enter society as productive members of their families and communities.

Critical to the program planning is the gathering of input from individuals and organizations that stand to benefit from or will be impacted by the program. OCW's needs assessment process includes the use of focus groups, surveys, discussion and planning groups. Other sessions are planned as the program continues to unfold, but this report provides the results for the first three events which included focus groups and surveys involving participants in Maricopa County between December 2007 and January 2008. In all, 37 individuals participated in this process, with 37 focus group attendees and 32 surveys completed.

The resulting data were organized and reported under two primary groups—recovery housing providers and other community stakeholders. The first focus group was attended by community stakeholders and included, almost exclusively, non-housing providers, e.g., several law enforcement personnel, a regional planning agency representative, representatives of the justice system (including a judge), nonprofit social services personnel, health care professionals, an employer and members from the community-at-large. The second and third focus groups were largely comprised of housing providers. Surveys were tailored to each of the audiences; one survey was designed for and completed by community stakeholders and an altogether different survey form was designed for/completed by housing providers. A detailed explanation of the needs assessment methodology, all data gathered from each event including participant demographics and evaluator's suggestions for further exploration are described in the full report.

AUDIENCE

Participants included family members of individuals in recovery; treatment providers; an employer; a local elected official; health care professionals; nonprofit social services representatives; government employees representing law enforcement, probation/parole, and the regional planning agency; justice/court system representatives; a housing/real estate representative; and members of the community at large, in addition to housing providers. Many of the attendees were also personally in recovery from substance abuse.

The following chart summarizes the participant's reported demographics and backgrounds.



Participant Characteristic	Housing Providers	Community Representatives
Gender	59% Male, 35% Female (6% unreported)	47% Female, 40% Male (13% unreported)
Ethnicity	88% White, 6% American Indian (6% unreported)	80% White (20% unreported)
Highest Level of Education Completed	53% Completed an Associates, Bachelors or Masters Degree	80% Completed an Associates, Bachelors or Masters Degree
Longevity in the Recovery Housing Industry	Average = 12.8 years Median = 5 years	N/A
Formal Education/Training in Substance Abuse Treatment	53% reported some formal education/training	N/A
Personal Experience Related to Recovery	59% have lived in a halfway house 71% are in recovery	20% have lived in a halfway house; 60% have a close acquaintance who lived in a halfway house*; 80% are acquainted with someone in recovery*; 73% are acquainted with someone transitioning out of prison or jail* <i>* Many emphasized that these relationships were on a professional rather than personal basis.</i>

TOPICS EXPLORED

The focus group discussion provided opportunities to better understand recovery housing providers' perspectives on status of the industry, perceived opportunities for improvements, and challenges to such improvements. Both audiences were asked to consider the ideal supportive environment for individuals who are in the early stages of recovery from drug/alcohol abuse.

- Surveys: The survey solicited input on specific halfway house features considered to be most critical in supporting resident's recovery. Community stakeholders ranked these features in terms of their achievability, while housing providers ranked them in terms of their level of importance to sustained recovery. Respondents also provided additional recommendations, suggestions for additional stakeholders to include in future needs assessment activities, and an indication of their personal interest in continued participation in program expansion activities. Housing providers also completed a questionnaire regarding services/components currently offered at their facility(ies). Copies of the survey forms are included as attachments to the full report.
- Focus Group Discussion: Participants discussed the types of resources that are critical to recovery, pros and cons of using a halfway house, assumptions on the community's impression of the halfway house "industry", changes needed, and challenges to making such changes. Housing providers also expressed interest in the formation of a statewide association of recovery housing providers, and offered suggestions as to the level of leadership necessary and the support which could be available through such an association..

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Survey results revealed that *the most important recovery housing features*, as defined by housing providers, *are considered to be those most achievable* by community stakeholders, with the exception of *accessibility of resources*.

- **Housing providers** ranked having a *well defined program with written rules as significantly most important*. *Adequate space, experienced staff and accessible resources for residents* are the next most important features, listed in relative order of importance. *Accessible resources*, as presented within the survey, include:



- *Transportation*
- *Health care*
- *Mental health services*
- *Employment assistance*
- *Assistance for prison re-entry*
- **Community stakeholders** ranked a *well-defined program with written rules for residential participation* as most achievable, with *adequate space* and *experienced staff* as the next most achievable.
- With the exception of *accessible resources*, those recovery housing features viewed by housing providers as less critical were also seen by community stakeholders as less achievable.
 - *24-hour supervision*
 - *Opportunities for sober socialization/recreation*
 - *Follow-up—Ongoing recovery support*
 - *Community and neighborhood orientation*
- When prompted to identify the components of an ideal halfway house during the focus group discussion, the community stakeholder audience indicated that *being certified, licensed, and/or accredited*, *having standards of care based on best/evidenced-based practices*, and *offering community involvement opportunities for residents (formal/informal)* were the most important features.

Housing providers were more concerned over “internal features” such as rules, guidelines, resources, and adequate space for residents. Stakeholders, on the other hand, view indicators of quality—such as licensing, standards of care that are consistent throughout the industry, and written rules/guidelines for residents—as critical to create a supportive recovery environment. Stakeholders also ranked resident’s engagement with the community, such as in a voluntary capacity, to be more critical to recovery than the availability of more tangible resources such as transportation.

RESULTS IN CHART FORMAT

The chart below details the audience rankings of *critical halfway house features* based on survey and focus group results. Bold/italics indicate features that both groups agreed are important; however, it is important to note that housing providers were rank ordering the features based on importance and community stakeholders were rank ordering them based on achievability.



SUMMARY OF MARICOPA COUNTY SURVEY RESULTS

Halfway House Features	HOUSING PROVIDER GROUP			COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS		
	Rank Order of Importance	Currently Offer This	Would Provide this if Affordable	Essential Feature	Preferred Feature	Highest Level of Achievability
24 HR SUPERVISION	5 th	62%	31%	✓		4 th
EXPERIENCED FRONT LINE STAFF (2+ YRS SOBRIETY)	3 rd	77%	15%	✓		
ADEQUATE SPACE FOR COMMUNITY LIVING	2 nd	85%	8%	✓		
• Affordable		100%		✓		
• Basic housing standards in place		92%	8%	✓		
• Regularly scheduled inspections		77%	8%	✓		
• Established ethical standards		85%		✓		
WELL DEFINED PROGRAM WITH WRITTEN RULES	1 st /Most Important	92%		✓		1 st /Most Achievable
ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES	4 th					5 th (tie)
• Transportation		77%	15%		✓	
• Health care		31%	23%		✓	
• Mental health services		54%	15%	✓		
• Employment assistance		77%	8%	✓		
• Assistance for prisoner re-entry		62%	15%	✓		
FOLLOW UP/ONGOING SUPPORT	7 th	69%	23%	✓		6 th
OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOBER SOCIALIZATION/RECREATION	6 th	85%	8%	✓		5 th (tie)
COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD ORIENTATION	8 th	54%	15%		✓	7 th

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FROM COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS (Focus Group Dialog):

Top Priorities for Halfway Houses

CERTIFIED, LICENSED, AND/OR ACCREDITED	1 st	ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES	5 th
STANDARDS OF CARE BASED ON EVIDENCE-BASED BEST PRACTICES	2 nd	FINANCIAL SUPPORT/SUBSIDIES	6 th
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AMONG RESIDENTS (FORMAL/INFORMAL)	3 rd	EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATION ASSISTANCE	7 th
TRAINED PEER SUPPORT	4 th		

The focus group discussion revealed more shared beliefs among both groups.

- There was a general consensus that the halfway house “industry” is not well respected and has a poor reputation within the community at large, with the exception of those that make a concerted effort to get to know and become involved with their community (particularly in the area of

R E C O V E R Y

U N I T Y

S T R E N G T H

S U P P O R T



community improvement). Successes are generally unknown due to lack of communication. Providers do not do a good job of making their successes known, but also struggle with how to do so given the confidential nature of the work.

- Housing providers are often challenged to balance their concern for the well being of residents with the well being of the business.
- In the absence of consistent standards for quality of care or some sort of ranking system, stakeholders are often uncertain about how to determine the most qualified and appropriate housing provider for individuals in need of referral.
- There is a shared belief among both groups that the industry *must* become proactive in self-regulation in order to avoid intervention by regulatory agencies. Recommendations included:
 - Creating clear, objective codes and standards of care to promote safety (much like the hotel “star” rating system)
 - Formation of a coalition to “manage ourselves” led by a coalition director and community liaison focusing on community partnerships, improved credibility, and increased financial resources
 - Increased accountability
- Some of the expressed challenges to these and other discussed changes included:
 - Lack of money
 - Difficulty in maintaining a corps of mentors
 - Lack of a consistent voice and consistent interest in a coalition by all providers
 - Relapses
 - Difficulty in communicating standards and requirements to support decisions by other agencies, e.g., probation
- Possible roles and responsibilities of a statewide coalition included:
 - Meeting/training/seminar organization and facilitation
 - Facilitation of dialogue between stakeholders and providers
 - Grant writing and fundraising
 - Self regulation using such tools as industry standards, codes of ethics and a rating system

Also noteworthy; housing provider participants consistently expressed appreciation and relief over the opportunity to convene as a group. They discussed feeling isolated and at times uncertain in their role as business operators and expressed a strong interest in continuing to congregate in future forums for idea exchange, learning opportunities, and sharing experience, strength and hope with others in a similar field.

Finally, suggestions were made on additional stakeholders that need to be at the table as the program planning and rollout continue, and participants identified specific strategies and examples of the manner in which they wish to continue their personal involvement.

NEXT STEPS

The OCW Project is continuing the community needs assessment process by expanding inquiry efforts into Yavapai County, and developing several follow up strategies that are a result of the initial findings outlined herein. Examples of next steps include the gathering of input from recovery housing program residents to compare resident feedback with the input of housing providers and community stakeholders. Dialogue groups will be scheduled to further explore and understand the Maricopa County findings in depth. Participants (housing providers and community stakeholders) who expressed an interest in remaining involved in the project planning activities will be invited to continue their participation as desired.