

# THEory into ACTion

A Bulletin of New Developments in Community Psychology Practice

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## Better Outcomes for Substance Abuse Addiction: Spotlight on Leonard Jason and the Oxford Houses

Alcohol and drug addiction is a complex and pervasive chronic condition that causes substantial harm, not only to individuals suffering from addiction, but also to those around them. Recognizing the importance of understanding this complex condition, a team of Chicago-based community psychologists, led by **Dr. Leonard Jason** of DePaul University, has focused its efforts on studying recovery outcomes for those in recovery from addiction.



Oxford House: Self-Help for Sobriety without Relapse

At a young age, Dr. Jason discovered the atrocities of the Holocaust, and this knowledge motivated him to work for social change. He understood that most community changes are not brought about by authority figures such as politicians, but by ordinary members of the community. After learning about the **Oxford House** model, he recognized it as a prime example of individuals successfully using the support of their communities to overcome their difficulties. For over 20 years, Dr. Jason and his team have been researching the role that Oxford Houses play in substance abuse recovery.

Oxford Houses (OH) are self-governing recovery homes that are rented by six to ten people who are in recovery from alcohol or drug addiction. Oxford Houses are run democratically, require residents to pay an equal share of rent and expenses, and have a zero tolerance policy toward alcohol and drug use. What makes OH's distinct from similar institutions is that there are no residency time limits, something that current addiction research deems very important, as there is no universal timeline for a successful recovery process.

For years, the results of Dr. Jason's research have provided food for thought to many who are interested in addiction and recovery within the scientific community. Through a number of multi-million dollar grants from the National Institute of Health, Dr. Jason and his team have empirically validated the positive effects of Oxford House residency when compared

to usual care facilities, such as higher abstinence rates (69% vs. 35%), higher monthly income (\$989 vs. \$440), and lower incarceration rates (3% vs. 9%). These findings led the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMSHA) to recognize the OH model as a successful recovery model and also resulted in the reinstatement of Illinois's revolving fund to help open new houses, among other benefits. Outside of academic publications, descriptions of Dr. Jason's past and current research are systematically distributed at the Oxford House conferences.

Ed Stevens, a graduate student in **DePaul's doctoral Community Psychology program**, believes that the team's research answers three very important questions about the OH model: 1) Does it work? 2) Can it be replicated? and 3) Can its elements be used for other systems? Ed calls OH a "grassroots model" and a "classic form of empowerment" in which people are trying to solve their own problems and overcome their own obstacles. Olya Belyaev-Glantsman, a doctoral student in DePaul's Community Psychology program who has worked with Dr. Jason since 2001, states, "It feels great knowing that thousands of lives are positively affected by Dr. Jason's work." Ed Stevens adds, "I love the topic. I love people we are involved with; it's an honor to work with them."

The feedback from Oxford House representatives on their experience working with the DePaul University research team is also overwhelmingly positive. For example, when asked about his involvement with the OH research team, Rory, a state coordinator and an Oxford House resident for seven years, said that it makes him feel good to be a part of this team, and that he is glad the team sought his help. "After being part of a problem for so long, I feel like I am now part of the solution," he continued. Rory has been working with DePaul's team for three years, helping with recruiting, tracking, and placing individuals into Oxford Houses. He also holds another important role – through his own experience, as well as his active involvement with Oxford House, Inc., he helps the team to better understand the addiction and the recovery process. Rory laughs when he reflects on his first experience at the team's weekly meeting: "[Coming in with no research skills,] at first I was lost," but over the years he has become comfortable interpreting data and is often the one the team turns to when it needs help explaining the results of its studies.

The topic of recovery is extremely important and through this truly collaborative partnership, the Oxford House Inc. and the DePaul's research team are constantly sharing resources and learning from each other on the road to better outcomes for substance abuse addiction. The years of systematic research by Dr. Jason's team helped raise awareness of this successful and cost effective recovery approach.

***Olya Belyav-Glantsman***  
***DePaul University***

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For more information about Oxford House Inc.,  
see <http://www.oxfordhouse.org/userfiles/file/>

For more information on Dr. Jason's work, see <http://condor.depaul.edu/ljason/>

To see Dr. Jason talking about OH,  
see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15IIOW1VVCw>

*This is the second in a series of bulletins highlighting the use of community psychology in practice, written by the members of the Outreach Group of the **Community Psychology Practice Council**. For more information about the series, contact Bill Berkowitz at [Bill\\_Berkowitz@uml.edu](mailto:Bill_Berkowitz@uml.edu).*