

## Treatment Alternatives – The importance of having sober houses in residential areas –

"I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see. I sought my God, but my God eluded me. I sought my brother and I found all three ..."  
...Martin Luther King Jr.

Alcoholism and drug addiction are considered impairments under the definitions of a disability, because as a medical matter, addiction is a chronic illness that is never cured but from which one may nonetheless recover. It is a truism that the longer one is in alcohol or drug abuse treatment and surrounded by recovering people, the better the outcomes for long term sobriety. Group living arrangements in a sober house help recovering addicts to keep sober because of the transparency, and they also provide residents with fewer opportunities to be lonely -- a major trigger for relapse into addiction.

I had the pleasure of representing Treatment Alternatives in their attempts to develop a larger group home for persons recovering from addiction. For over 25 years, Treatment Alternatives has offered a continuum of care approaches to treatment, providing residents with a step down or up a level of treatment, determined by need. Men and women live in gender-specific, tight-knit communities that allow them to go to school or work. There are strict schedules about rising, treatment, work, evening house meetings and mandatory curfew. To help clients learn how to engage in life without drugs or alcohol, weekend activities are conducted as a group. Everyone participates in activities - whether it is going bowling, fishing, going to the movies, going to the beach, boating, or go-carting. The residents learn to support each other as they individually and communally meet the challenges of early sobriety. The family environment at Treatment Alternatives creates a safe, secure, and compassionate environment in which men and women can build their foundation for sobriety.

It is important to have such facilities located in residential communities because it gives these people the opportunity to reintegrate into community-based living. Although there is no danger in it, many neighbors object to living near these homes. However, the Fair Housing Act prohibits a city or town from refusing to allow these

people the ability to live in a dwelling when the refusal is based on generalizations and stereotypes of people's disabilities and the attendant threats of safety that often accompany these beliefs. While a city or town can regulate land use and pass zoning laws, the Fair Housing Act was intended to prohibit the use of zoning regulations to limit the ability of persons with disabilities to live in the residence of their choice in the community. This means that a municipality must change, waive, or make exceptions in their zoning rules to ensure people with disabilities the same opportunities as those without disabilities, taking into consideration the impact of the zoning rule upon the disabled person.

For sober living homes, you have several unrelated people living together in a single dwelling, and this may require a request to change a zoning regulation that limits a dwelling to a single family of related persons. This request to change – or reasonable accommodation – depends on many factors, including the size of the group home, the neighborhood surrounding the group home, and the utilities available for the group home.

For Treatment Alternatives, the goal is for the client to return to his or her life as a productive human being. Each resident must acknowledge, understand and address the basic responses to the life that he or she has lived, and unless that is done, the addict will endlessly repeat thought and behavior patterns; thus leading to relapse again and again — a painful but common occurrence.