

## **Victory House Report 2020**

### **Summary**

Overall it was a successful and unusual year at the Victory Houses. October 2020 marked the closing of our temporary Women's House. The house was a rented property, and while Victory looks forward to another Women's House one day, our purchase of 24 E Oneida Street prompted us to not want to spread our resources too thin. There are currently other resources for women right now such as Kristina's House of Hope.

We continue to work with Aaron Cass and Bridge to Hope to provide affordable housing for individuals coming out of our Victory Houses.

Logistically, the program is working well. By 9:00 am, the men are at Victory or taking care of their needs. They return to the home between 6:00 PM when a supervisor is available. The participants take pride in living in the house and take care of the house and yard. Participants are required to go through a screening process and sign a contract for participation. We have tweaked the application to meet state requirements as well as address problems or concerns as they arise. It has been a privilege to work with these individuals and help them get on their feet.

We continue to work with AmeriCorps volunteers, at present only two, with the possibility of others if the right candidates present. This has been helpful in assuring we have consistent help with advocacy and has made us more efficient. Continuing to improve our Independent Living Plan (ILP) process. We're required as certified shelters to do an Independent Living Plan with each of our participants. Our advocates review them with participants weekly. When we use ILPs as living documents, they contribute to the success of our participants. In addition, it helps us to prevent problems and understand an individual's strengths and weaknesses. This process definitely helps us to help our people out of their hard places; even the State of New York reported it is one of the best ILP's they have seen.

We continue to operate by a zero tolerance policy with one exception. If someone is high or drunk at the house and is removed, they cannot come back unless they go into inpatient drug treatment immediately. This is discretionary. Other reasons that they may not be able to come back is violation of parole or probation violation. Word is out that this is a great opportunity but if you abuse it you will not have it again. Victory will continue to help participants who have violated contracts and are asked to leave the house – we don't turn people away for help.

### **Details Victory Men's House**

There were 69 unduplicated men participating in the program. Out of a total of 69 men:

1600 room nights = average stay of 24 days. Charge per person to Oswego County before Nov 14<sup>th</sup> was \$25 per room/night totaling approximately \$580.00 on average. After Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, our rates increased to \$40.00 per room/night so that we may hire an advocate. Although we will remain a volunteer community, the complex needs of the people we serve require that we have a paid staff member. Part of why people stayed an average of 4 days longer (1) we had a number of individuals who had severe and persistent mental illness and were difficult to place. (2) with Rapid Rehousing we kept some individuals longer while they waited for housing through this program. If we find something for even a few months while they wait for housing they will no longer be considered homeless and will lose the housing; and 3) during the spring and summer, there was no apartments available for our clients to go particularly because of the COVID ban on evictions.

- Oswego County Department of Social Services paid for 69 participants. There is overlap as individuals become employed and transition to self-pay or partial self-pay.
- Seven were self-pay.
- 43 men have been successfully housed in the community.
  - 9 of these men left the house employed; 7 were on SSD/SSI and 19 remained on public assistance when they transitioned out of the house.
  - 8 have been placed in treatment programs.
- 26 men were removed or asked to leave due to non-compliance
  - 3 violated parole/probation requirements (there may have been drug/alcohol use but primary reason for leaving was the violation)
  - 14 violated Department of Social Service rules
  - 9 were non-compliant due to drugs/alcohol
- Eight had significant mental health issues that made communal living or other aspects of the Victory House an incompatibility. Although we did our best to leverage community resources for individuals with SPMI (severe persistent mental illness), it is difficult without professional support and affects the quality of the individual's stay as well as other participants. Not all of these people had to leave; some we kept longer to make sure they were placed in a safe and healthy environment.

### **Details Victory Women's House**

There were 26 unduplicated women participating in the program. Out of a total of 26 women:

492 room nights = average stay of 19 days. Cost per person: \$532.00. This is a higher rate than at our Men's house to cover the cost of rent. Our rates are \$28.00 per room/night. Oswego County Department of Social Services paid for 24 participants. There is overlap as individuals become employed and transition to self-pay or partial self-pay.

- 2 were self-pay.
- 16 women have been successfully housed in the community.
  - 6 of these women left the house employed; 4 were on SSD/SSI and 4 remained on public assistance when they transitioned out of the house.
  - 2 has been placed in a treatment program this year.
- 10 women were removed or asked to leave due to non-compliance.
  - 1 violated Department of Social Service or Victory rules.
  - 7 were non-compliant due to drugs/alcohol.
  - 2 had significant mental health issues that made communal living or other aspects of the Victory House an incompatibility. Although we did our best to leverage community resources for individuals with SPMI (severe persistent mental illness), it is difficult without professional support and affects the quality of the individual's stay as well as other participants.

In general, there are some significant differences between the circumstances and mindsets of the homeless men and women that we house. The men tend to be older, leaning towards 45-60 age group where about 2/3 of the women we are getting in the house are between 20-35. The women also present greater disciplinary problems as they typically find it easy to leave the house and have someone to move in with if the rules are not suitable for them. The women need more time to get on their feet and have a greater overall motivation problem.

The easiest population to work with generally is those coming out of prison and jail who are on parole or probation. These people are either all in to get on their feet or they fall to drugs/alcohol or other violations within the first two weeks.

Transitioning people into permanent and transitional housing has become easier and more seamless due to the experience of Victory volunteers until COVID-19 hit and orders to remain inside and landlord's inability to evict other tenants left the availability pool of available rentals depleted. Our Monday morning case review meetings are long but effective. The interventions that are being employed contribute to successful placement. According to our information, about 12% of people in permanent and temporary housing lose their housing in the first year. We do not intentionally follow participants once they leave the shelters; typically, people continue to come to Victory even following disciplinary action and removal from the Victory Houses. This allows us to further work with people who have chronic addiction or mental health issues and be more effective in our helps. A little over half of the people that are discharged from the program for violation continue to use the Victory Center.

**Strengths:**

- At any given time, 5-6 men at house regularly volunteer at Victory
- There are at least 5 weekly participating in Wednesday Night Dinners
- 12 have went or continue to go to church and we had one baptism
- Our relationship with the Department of Social Services is a great strength. DSS works closely with us to help individuals have the best possible outcomes.
- Our relationship with the City of Oswego and partnership with the Oswego Police Department has been instrumental in our service delivery.
- Our growing relationship with local churches has been an excellent resource.

**Weaknesses or needs:**

- Victory needs more people to minister or mentor at the houses on weekends and during evenings
- Victory needs help with maintenance/repair in the men's house.
- We need a plethora of items for homeless bags.