

HRC Turns One!

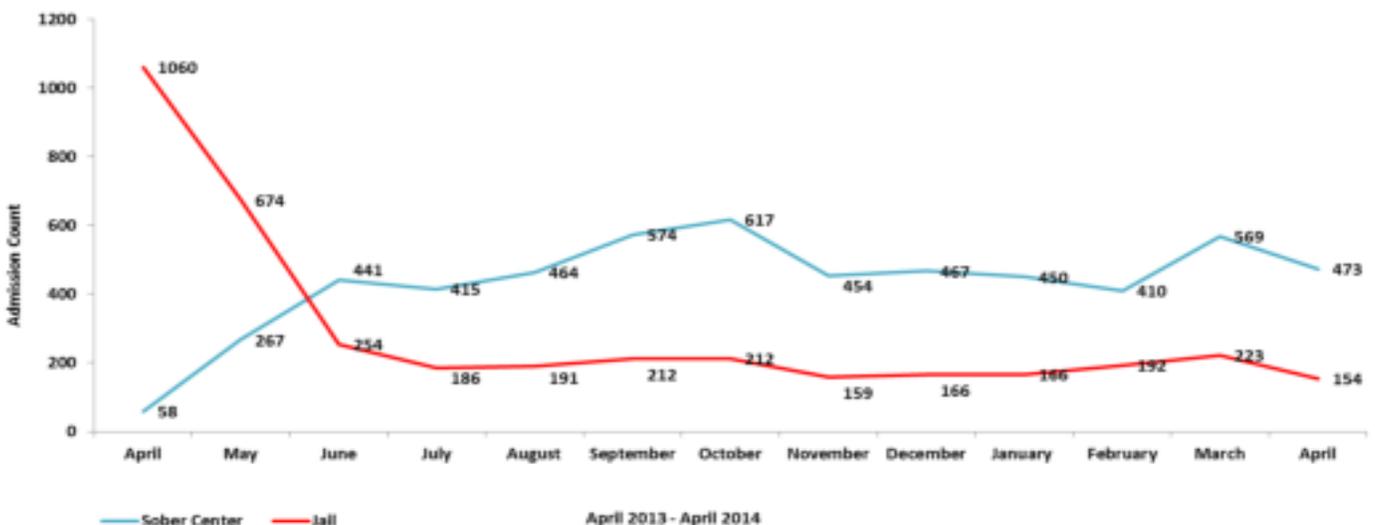
April 10, 2014, marked one year since the Houston Recovery Center opened its doors to clients. Formed by the City of Houston to divert public inebriates from jail in order to reduce the jail population and preserve the city's law enforcement and emergency response resources, our first year of operations proved to be very successful. With a goal of achieving 5,000 diversions in the first twelve months, we actually served **5,345** individuals, while the city of Houston saw a significant decrease in the number of people admitted to jail for public intoxication.

We are very proud of these numbers, but we also know there is more work to be done. Our vision is to serve the community with a fully-integrated recovery care continuum where anyone seeking help with a substance disorder or a co-occurring substance use and mental health disorder can access appropriate levels of care in a timely manner. With the help of our supporters, the team at the Houston Recovery Center will continue to move towards this goal.



Leonard Kincaid, Director of the Houston Recovery Center, commemorates our one year anniversary with the Board of Directors.

Sober Center and Jail Public Intoxication Admissions



Seeking Solutions

The sobering center has celebrated many successes during our first year of operations, but it has also become even more apparent that longer term solutions are needed for some individuals. While the majority of our clients are brought to our facility for a single incident, there are some who become familiar faces. As we began to delve deeper into their situations, we realized it was part of a much larger issue affecting the city. It then became a question of how we could help facilitate a coordinated effort to help those who need it most.

Four months after the sobering center opened our doors, a client was diverted to our facility for the **15th** time. Out of concern for the individual, we contacted the Houston Fire Department and learned that the same individual had been transported by ambulance to various local area hospitals **40** times in the past 6 months. 40 trips to the emergency room and 15 trips to the sobering center in half a year. Not only was it obvious that this person was in need of serious help, it was also clear that such repeat pickups overextended the city's already scarce emergency response resources.

Within a month of his 15th visit, we organized a meeting with representatives from the Houston Fire and Police Departments, the Harris Health System, and the City of Houston Health and Human Services Department. The objective was to develop a comprehensive care plan for public inebriates coming through the sobering center multiple times in a short period. What developed was the Care Coordination Planning Team, a cross-functional unit designed to explore solutions for public inebriates who are high users of community supported resources.

At our first meeting in September, there were six people in the room. In the months since, the team has grown to over 60 people, including representatives from the city, county, mental health, law enforcement, medical and legal fields. We are pursuing solutions to help those who are chronic users of the city and county resources due to their struggles with substance abuse.

Breaking Barriers

Several barriers exist to managing chronic substance abusers as a community. The lack of shared data between organizations is certainly a key factor, as we discovered firsthand when working with repeat clients. If we had the ability to share medical and mental health data on repeat users, the community would have a solid grasp on the extent of the problem. Of course, even with such shared information, the lack of resources available to individuals without insurance or means of private payment prohibits many of them from receiving treatment. To make matters worse, the one publicly funded detox center in Houston ceased operations earlier this year.

Physical and psychological barriers exist as well. It can be difficult to locate some individuals after they leave a facility. Stigma of addiction, treatment and recovery can prevent people from seeking help. Add homelessness or mental health issues, and the odds of someone receiving the professional attention they need continue to decrease.

Serial Inebriate Program

In the spring of this year, we visited three sobering centers on the west coast. We wanted to understand what others are doing, as well what is and isn't working. We were particularly impressed with what is happening in San Diego, CA, which has developed a serial inebriate program for repeat offenders.

Individuals arrested for public intoxication in San Diego can be court ordered to attend the serial inebriate program, with a six month maximum treatment term. The program is abstinence-based and starts with basic rehabilitative skills. Participants start in the least restrictive setting by residing in an outpatient sober living facility. After six months, if additional treatment is required, they can move to a residential facility, where each person pays only \$12.25 a day for a bed.

If a person chooses not to attend the court-mandated program, they may be placed on probation instead. This gives people a choice - six months of treatment vs. three years of probation - thus, placing the decision to get sober in their own hands.

Staff Success Story - Kearn Ardoin

In 1986, I married my high school sweetheart. We had a beautiful daughter and were living happily ever after. Ten years into the marriage, my husband became addicted to drugs. Everything unraveled. We ultimately divorced. I soon had a nervous breakdown, and my life spiraled out of control. Depressed and lonely, I began hanging out with the wrong crowd, frequenting clubs and bars, and drinking excessively. I was young, naïve, and inexperienced to street life, and I felt I was simply having fun. However, the more time I spent with the wrong crowd, the deeper I was pulled into the life of drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, and street hustling. It did not take long for the inevitable to happen. I was eventually arrested and sentenced to ten years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

After 7 years in TDCJ, I felt I was not moving forward and that my life lacked meaning. While contemplating suicide, God spoke to my heart and told me that I wasn't worthless. God reminded me I had a daughter who needed her mother, and I had family that loved and cared about me. Thinking about them inspired me to live. On June 2, 2002, I attended a prison worship service that changed my life. A minister from the Potter's House Prison Ministry came and ministered inside our unit. When she shared her testimony, I felt like she was speaking directly to me. After the service, I spoke with her, and I will forever remember her words. She said: "Begin to love yourself. You can't love others unless you love yourself first." That evening after service, I went back to my cell, cried out to God, and asked Jesus into my life. I asked God to help me love myself and not repeat the same mistakes. I made a commitment to change my life.

In 2005, I was released from TDCJ. Despite the commitment I made to myself in prison, I went back to the same environment and began hanging out with old friends. Soon a nun opened her transitional living facility - the Angela's House - to me. Her program gave me the foundation I needed to begin to reestablish my life. Her program met my basic needs - food, shelter, and safety. The program also met my emotional and spiritual needs through providing counseling services, Bible studies, and life skills classes. Most significantly, the program introduced me to St. John's Downtown Church, a wonderful, loving church family.

Upon completing the transitional living program, I returned to my old environment once again. After spending two weeks with old friends in old places, I determined that I had to go. I knew that if I did not leave I would return to prison. I did not want to go back down that road. Hence, rather than settling for a life of hustling, I committed to live a life of integrity. I decided that I would rather be homeless and free than to risk returning to jail by engaging in illegal activity. For twenty-two months, I moved from shelter to shelter. Eventually, I was blessed to find a job, working 40 to 60 hours a week for the City of Houston.

While working, I attended weekly Bible studies and support group meetings. I volunteered to serve and feed the homeless community every Sunday after attending the 10 am service at my church. In 2007, I became a member of the Path to Freedom. Besides volunteering inside prisons with our ministry team, I helped spearhead our Letter Writing Ministry and Pen Pal Ministry as well as Back to School programs and Toy Drives for children who have incarcerated parents. Remembering the impact that prison ministers had upon my life while I was incarcerated, I am grateful to allow God to use me to give prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families hope. I have learned that the key to maintaining my sobriety and freedom is loving God, loving myself, and loving others. In a nutshell, I stay focused by staying busy serving God and serving others.



Staff Success Story (cont'd)

In conclusion, I have been home eight years now. I am clean and sober, and I have a completely new circle of friends. For the last five years, I have worked two jobs, working with men and women seeking to rebuild their lives. When I learned about the Recovery Coach Class, I knew I could make an excellent recovery coach given all of my experience. My employment as a Recovery Support Specialist with the Houston Center for Sobriety is not only a job, but it is an opportunity to fulfill my calling. I am thankful for the chance to give back freely what has been given to me. It is a blessing to show clients unconditional love, to meet them where they are, and to share words of inspiration and hope.

Looking Forward

As we move into our second year of operations, we look forward to applying the lessons we have learned both from others and as an organization. While we recognize the magnitude of the task, we also have a greater understanding of the cost of not acting. Combined with the Care Coordination Planning Team, we will continue to seek long-term solutions for chronic substance users and the community as a whole.

A Lesson Learned

The greatest lesson I have learned after working the first year at the sobering center is my understanding that if relapse occurs in a person's life, it's just a detour and not the destination of the journey. This has become not only my understanding, but my belief as a recovery coach. I say this because a client I had coached returned for a visit one week to thank the staff for helping him get into recovery. He was looking very good and was well-dressed.

He came back a week later on March 28, 2014, but this time, he was in handcuffs with his head down. He felt so bad and ashamed. I told him never confuse a detour with your destination, hold your head up, there are no judgments here. I thought about something I read many years ago by Abraham Maslow. He said that you should always put your attention on what it is people can do to improve rather than on what is wrong. What is necessary to change a person is to change his/her awareness of self.

I've learned that many of the clients that we serve just need someone to believe in them and encourage them until they believe in themselves. Then they will get the confidence needed to surmount the obstacles they will run into along the way to recovery.

Taji Reeves, Recovery Support Specialist

The staff at the Houston Recovery Center celebrates one year of serving clients.

