community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower and Outer Cape

A Key to Recovery is a Safe Place to Live

"Living with others going through similar challenges helped me stay on the path to a healthier life." – ***Canal House Resident***

Cape Cod, known for its beautiful landscapes and lively summer scene, is not immune from serious health issues. The region is no exception to what the nation has experienced with the opioid crisis as well as alcohol abuse. Addressing the issues is complex, given the region's isolation and limited treatment options. For example, the lack of regular and reliable public transportation on the Outer Cape can prevent people from getting the help and treatment that they need.

To help tackle these challenges, the CDP's Canal House in Orleans has been providing hope and support since 1998. It is the only sober living facility on the Lower and Outer Cape, offering affordable housing and structured living conditions for individuals completing drug rehabilitation programs. Residents can work towards stability in a safe and program-oriented environment, laying the foundation for a drug and alcohol-free life.



Canal House is centrally located in Orleans, next to the bike trail and within easy walking distance to job and volunteer opportunities, public transportation, stores, and services. As many residents do not have their own transportation, or have lost their driver's licenses, Canal House's location is beneficial.

The property houses up to eight men, and an on-site manager. All residents are low-income individuals in recovery from alcohol and substance use disorder including addiction to opioids. Canal House offers private bedrooms and shared common spaces. Most residents have participated in a formal medical treatment program, are facing potential homelessness, and are seeking a post treatment transitional living program that will support their recovery. Six rooms are reserved for homeless individuals and are subsidized through HUD's Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program; residents in these six units must have an annual income at or below 50% area median income (currently $40,300) and pay 30% of their adjusted monthly income towards rent. Two rooms are unsubsidized for people who exceed 50% area median income, or

no subsidized unit is available. The current monthly rent for an unsubsidized unit is $700. The average age of a Canal House resident is 40 years old.

More than 145 individuals have successfully participated in the two-year program, "graduating" by maintaining sobriety and fulfilling the expectations of being a Canal House resident. During their stay, all residents must participate in recovery wellness, which may include treatment services that may be peer lead and recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. They also must participate in an individualized treatment plan and participate in school, volunteering, or have a paid job; obey house and program rules; and participate in random drug testing.

In 2022, CDP forged a partnership with Duffy Health Center to provide clinical services to the residents at Canal House. A trained Duffy Recovery Coach offers peer-to-peer support to the residents as they work to reach personal recovery goals. In addition, the Homeless Prevention Council (HPC) provides crucial transitional services, including housing and employment assistance, ensuring residents have the resources and benefits needed to reintegrate successfully into the community. The collaboration is a unique model among sober living residences in the Commonwealth. Cindi Maule, the CDP's Chief Property Management Officer, says that the increased level of services has allowed the CDP to remove a 90-day sobriety requirement for new residents. "Through our partnership with Duffy and HPC, we can offer inclusive wrap-around services to a larger number of people in need and more quickly and effectively assist them in their recovery," says Cindi.

The success stories of former residents underscore the transformative power of Canal House. Many graduates of the program have found stable employment in various sectors vital to the Cape's economy, including landscaping, retail management, and commercial fishing. A former resident is now the on-site House Manager at Canal House, exemplifying the program's success in fostering long-term recovery and leadership.

Access to Substance Use Treatment Services is Top Health Concern

In Cape Cod Healthcare's 2023-25 Community Health Needs Assessment, nearly half (46.9%) of community survey respondents identified substance use as a top health concern at the community level. When survey respondents were asked to rate their level of concern for specific substance use issues at the community level, the issues of 'opioid misuse' (42.4%), 'alcohol or binge drinking' (40.9%), and 'other illicit drugs' (31.4%) were rated as a high concern by the largest percentage of survey respondents. Further, feedback widely acknowledged the consistent volume of overdose and potential overdose cases on the Cape. Many noted insufficient substance use disorder treatment resources are available to curb the problem effectively. They noted a dire need for more detox centers, treatment beds, sober houses, and community-based services. Residents also highlighted that current substance use treatment services are very geographically centralized, making them harder for individuals in other parts of the Cape. In addition, survey respondents perceived alcohol and drug treatment services as difficult to access. More specifically, about a third of respondents rated 'alcohol or drug treatment services for youth' and 'alcohol or drug treatment services for adults' as significantly hard to access (35.7% and 34.0%, respectively).

One resident shared how Canal House completely changed his life. After struggling with alcohol addiction for many years, living at Canal House gave him the tools and discipline he needed to turn his life around. "They watch over you and help you get where you need to go," he shared. "Living with others going through similar challenges really helped me stay on the path to a healthier life."



Photo of kitchen at Canal House. Rental units include the comforts of home to support residents on their recovery journey.

Much of Canal House's operational costs are covered by rent from the residents (including rental subsidies for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development). However, rent does not cover the cost of providing staffing, wraparound services, and addressing larger capital needs. The CDP relies on philanthropic support to fill those gaps. Last month, the CDP received news that the Orleans board of health approved funding for Canal House over the next five years. The funding came to the town by way of a federal settlement with opioid manufacturers and distributors in 2022. The abatement money will help better support programming offered through Duffy Health Center and the Homeless Prevention Council designed to keep tenants on the path to sobriety and recovery.

While solutions to stem substance abuse are far-reaching, local sober homes and recovery programs like Canal House are a vital part of the response. For many, Canal House represents the final test before going back to living on their own. "Having a safe place to live is a key part of addressing addiction and supporting sobriety," says Jay Coburn, CDP President & CEO.

Canal House's impact on the Cape Cod community is profound and far-reaching. As the only residential treatment facility on the Lower and Outer Cape, it fills a vital gap in the region's healthcare infrastructure. By helping residents achieve and maintain sobriety, Canal House alleviates the broader social and economic burdens associated with substance abuse.