



Issue 1

*New Directions*

September 2013

## A Message from Leonard Kincaid, Director of Operations

Welcome to the first issue of the Houston Center for Sobriety's newsletter. Known as "the sobering center", we opened our doors for client services in April. Since then, we are pleased to announce that the number of clients we have served continues to increase as we strive to make a positive impact in the Houston community.

Three years ago, having a sobering center in Houston was just a dream. And today, not only are we open, but we have served nearly 1,800 clients. This dream come true was made possible by the hard work and support of countless people. Considerable credit goes to Lt. Mike Lee from the Houston Police Department and his graduate intern at the start of this project, Ashley Reeder. The two of them, in addition to HPD's Executive Assistant Chief Timothy Oettmeier and Lillian Ortiz with OneVoice Texas, did much of the background research on sobering centers from around the country and developed reports that went to HPD and City Administration. Mike, Ashley, and I also traveled to San Antonio and spent a night in their sobering center to see the operation first hand. We also cannot overstate the support we received from Mayor Pro Tem, Ed Gonzalez and our Mayor, Annise Parker. This program would not have happened without their leadership and the faith and trust they had in our Board of Directors.

My staff and I are truly grateful for this opportunity. In addition to fulfilling our primary objective of providing a jail diversion for those arrested for public intoxication, we are providing the considerable number of individuals that pass through our doors an opportunity to get the help they need to make positive life changes. And although we are faced with limited resources in some critical areas of need such as detox services, we are having some incredible success and are making a profound impact on many of the individuals we see.

Our goal is to make long-term recovery a realistic option by providing immediate access to recovery services that match the clients' individual needs.

You can become a part of our efforts to serve this population by supporting our mission. Visit our website at [houstonrecoverycenter.org](http://houstonrecoverycenter.org) to learn more.

## What is the Sobering Center?

The Houston Center for Sobriety (aka the sobering center) is the first major initiative for the Houston Recovery Center Local Government Corporation (LGC), which is wholly owned by the City of Houston. While funding for the sobering center is currently provided by the city, it is independently managed by a Board of Directors, with Director Leonard Kincaid overseeing the daily operations.

The center provides safe, short-term monitoring and management of persons under the influence of alcohol and drugs. When an individual is arrested by the Houston Police Department for public intoxication, the officer brings the individual to the sobering center, instead of taking him/her to jail. Once our staff of trained professionals gives the individual a satisfactory basic health screening, he/she is allowed to rest until sober. Before leaving, each individual is provided the opportunity to meet with a Recovery Support Specialist, who assesses the issues, identifies resources and provides referrals and connections to those resources. By addressing the root problems and providing methods of empowering the client to set goals, the specialist aims to help the client improve his/her overall quality of life, thus preventing a return to the center. While some clients may be experiencing a one-time event, many suffer from life altering issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence

*(continued)*

or mental health or medical problems. Those in need have the option of meeting with a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor who can provide counseling, assessments, and referrals to treatment.

While a person must be checked in to the sobering center by a member of the police department, all services thereafter are strictly voluntary. Although we encourage those brought in to stay until they have reached sobriety, those who choose to leave are not detained. Upon release, individuals have the option of calling a cab, a friend or family member, or asking for a referral. Only those who are willing to accept assistance in transferring to a recovery facility will be provided with the transportation to do so.

Providing a safe environment serves an immediate need for individuals under the influence, but long-term recovery is the goal of the sobering center. The staff aims to build rapport with clients to help them on the road to recovery and support them as they continue down that path. To accomplish this, the sobering center collects data from clients and the community to see what gaps exist in the continuum of care for those in need. Our vision for the future is to help fill in those gaps so that everyone who is ready to accept help has the opportunity to receive it.

## History of the Center

The idea of a “sobering center” is not new. Indeed, there are similar centers open around the country, some of which have been in operation for decades. The inspiration for the Houston Center for Sobriety stemmed from a visit to the Restoration Center in San Antonio, a 27 bed facility that has been in operation since 2008 and saved the city nearly \$26 million in its first three years.

After visiting the facility in 2010, Leonard Kincaid, who was then with The Council on Alcohol and Drugs, returned home with the idea of bringing a similar service to Houston. He first discussed it with Dr. Steve Schnee, Executive Director of the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA), before bringing it to the attention of Mayor Pro-Tem, Ed Gonzalez, a former Houston police officer. Steve Williams of the Harris County Health Department and Lt. Mike Lee of the HPD Mental Health Unit were

also consulted. All understood the effect that such a center would have on the city, not only in terms of cost savings, but also in terms of public safety and substance abuse issues. With these key professionals on board, Ed Gonzalez helped bring it to the attention of Mayor Parker.

With approximately 17,000 arrests in Houston each year for public intoxication, the benefits of a sobering center were clear. Not only would it divert non-criminal offenders from the city jail, saving millions in related fees, it would also provide a safe place for citizens to recover without incurring an arrest record, and allow police officers to return to the streets faster without the hassle of the booking process. Thus, the Houston Center for Sobriety was put into motion.

Less than three years later, we have a fully operational facility with the capacity to serve up to 84 clients at any one time.

## By the Numbers

- Since opening city-wide in mid-May of this year, the sobering center has averaged 100 clients per week
- Current demographics vary in terms of gender, race and living status, with ages ranging from 18 to over 70.
  - 51% of clients identify as White, 23% as Hispanic, 25% as Black and 1% as Asian.
  - 86% are male and 14% are female.
  - 65% report living in a private residence and 35% are homeless.
- The sobering center serves clients 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with the highest concentration of visits on Saturdays and Sundays.



## Who We Serve

- Both residents and non-residents who are arrested in the city of Houston for public intoxication while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Men and women are welcome, with dedicated rooms for each. The sobering center has the ability to hold up to 68 males and 16 females at any given time.
- Special needs clients, who have the option to request a private room for health or safety concerns.
- While the center serves all populations without discrimination, the majority of our clients are professionals who have a one-time need of our services.
- The Houston Police Department, by decreasing their time spent booking and processing intoxicated individuals and allowing them to return to their patrols.

## Who We Employ

- Recovery Support Specialists - who provide counseling to support substance abuse recovery options.
- Emergency Medical Technicians - who monitor the vital statistics of incoming clients and identify any health emergencies.
- Nursing Assistants - who provide a stable environment during the sobering process.
- Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselors - who offer clients counseling and assessment as a way to arrange treatment resources.
- Psychiatric Technicians - who assist any clients in need of mental health attention.
- Off-Duty Sheriff's Deputies - who provide safety and security for staff and clients during their stay.
- Administrative Support - who manage supplies, program evaluation and other needs, allowing the rest of the staff to focus on client care.

## Client Success Story

After steadily drinking for two weeks, Mark reached his limit and flagged down a police officer for help. The officer brought him to the sobering center on April 22nd, where he ended up staying for more than 45 hours. While it is unusual for the center to house someone for that long, it was important to the staff to find a detox facility that could admit him. With assistance from the Star of Hope, Mark was provided meals, clothing, counseling and referrals while the staff monitored him and continued their search for a facility.

Mark was eventually referred to the Salvation Army's Harbor Light 90-day recovery program. A counselor from the Houston Recovery Center visited him on May 22nd, and was happy to report that Mark was maintaining his abstinence from alcohol and enjoying participation in faith-based life skills classes. He had also connected with MHMRA, and was successfully managing his medications. As a result, he had a very positive attitude and was in a bright mood.

As of August 20th, Mark had remained abstinent from abusing alcohol or other non-prescribed drugs and continues with his medications. Mark had only recently moved to Houston before that fateful day in April, and he is incredibly grateful for the service and assistance he received from the Houston Recovery Center and its staff.



## Staff Success Story - Donna Perkins

My drinking started at the age of 10. I got so sick that it was 2 years later that I decided to drink again. It wasn't about the drink, but I knew that I wanted to fit in at the new school, at any cost. Once I took the drink a joint became the next thing I tried. "I had to fit in!" I was amazed that I woke up the next morning! Prior to that night I was told as a child that drugs were bad, and that they could kill me. I told myself that "I will never do anything more than alcohol and weed," yet one drug at a time was added to my list; each choice I made to try something new was expected to be able to fit in. I kept taking the drugs that made me feel confident and a part of the group. From junior high through dropping out of high school in the tenth grade to go to beauty school full time. A nine-month course took me two years to complete. The partying became a lifestyle I adopted seven days a week. That was the beginning when I noticed that I couldn't stop like the "Normies". As I look back on my early childhood, that's all I wanted, was to be normal and have the life I saw other families having.

At the age of 19, I became pregnant with my first child. With that came the cravings to have the life I had seen growing up. Not knowing the first thing about obtaining that life, I continued to party after my son was born. A year later I got married to a good man hoping that it would be a happily ever after. Before my pregnancy I was introduced to cocaine, which allowed me to party long hours and even during the day. Because my husband didn't want that, even though I talked him into trying some of the drugs I was doing at the time, the marriage didn't last. It couldn't last! I couldn't stop even to save my marriage, or for my son. My addiction progressed and the consequences with the law started. My mother was now raising my son, and I started the walk/dance with the devil (crack cocaine). I went places I never would have believed I would ever go. I tried to sell the stuff, but became further in debt, and further down the street of no hope.

*"I couldn't stop even to save my marriage, or for my son."*

My shame and guilt kept me from my family that I was infecting both with my disease and with the choices I was making. Choices that caused the pain to cut even deeper, guilt and remorse grew daily as the dance with the devil spiraled out of control. I had spurts of clean and sober days, even months. So hard to face the facts/truths and believing that there just wasn't any hope for someone like me. I wanted with every fiber of my being to stay clean and sober. I just couldn't see my life being restored to a state worth living - like so many that I meet at the Sobering Center. I only saw the damages I caused and never the progress I would be making. I knew the only solution that allowed me not to feel this pain were the drugs and I would choose them once again. I can remember the inner battle the last few times I went back out, I cried and begged myself to turn around, but I couldn't. The choice was no longer mine. The vicious cycle of addiction continued. The fear of jail, being pistol whipped, or raped or killed didn't stop me. With each year my addiction grew and so did the hate for myself. I don't know which one was worse.

*"I wanted with every fiber of my being to stay clean and sober."*

Another child being raised by another family member - deeper and deeper I dove into the pool of numbness. In some brief intervals of living and working the 12 steps, I got to experience some good living and even saw some blessings in my life. I believe my number one hang-up that would never leave my consciousness was that the pain I caused my kids and family kept the hate and the guilt strong. Believing that I didn't deserve the life I was living without my kids, but also that they were still better off without me. I kept returning to the streets where I began to believe that I belonged. Leaving jail one last time on October 2, 2007, the thought - and why I never thought this before - is still a mystery: I claimed that I loved my children and that I would give my life for them, yet I chose the drugs to numb the pain of my choices. That meant that my children and family would endure all the pain for me. So that faithful day of October 2nd, "no matter how I think or feel, I will not hurt my kids today." I had a sponsor that was willing to take a chance on me once more. I am forever grateful that she led me through the 12 steps that introduced me to the truth of my life. Because when I am armed with the facts, there is opportunity to change things that I could never see, like how my behaviors took me down every time. (continued)



## Donna's Story - Cont'd

*My desire is to help others that think life is hopeless.* I was invited by my sponsor to join the movement coming to Houston: "ROSC". I heard things like bridging the gap (I had fallen in many times myself) from treatment to long term sobriety. While trying to reach recovery, doors slammed and opportunities shut off. Paying bills and being responsible in society often left many of us running for the hills. After taking the "recovery coaching class" to be a volunteer, the day came that there was going to be a sobering center opening early in 2013. I received a call to interview for employment at the center. After hanging up, I began to think, "Could there be a better way to pay back the city which I grew up in and tarnished the streets with my disease?"

Opening day came and I receive gratitude by sharing and understanding exactly how the clients are feeling. I'm able to plant the seed of hope that they too, can make changes in life that allow them to hold their head up and be proud of who they are. Alone we can't, but together we can. I am forever grateful for my past, because today, my past is now my asset. I've walked the path of the people we serve and I ask "How can we help you today?" The resources that this city has that help us to make these changes are countless. Prior to October 2, 2007, I was the woman on the streets. Today, in 2013, I'm allowed to be a part of the Houston Sobering Center.

## About Leonard Kincaid

Leonard Kincaid has spent over 30 years working in the behavioral health care field, specifically on the issue of alcohol and drug abuse and dependence, HIV and AIDS, and the co-occurring disorder of substance abuse and mental health. He has worked in program development and management for 25 of those years. His experience includes organizational planning and management, grant writing and administration, budget development and management, and coalition development and maintenance.

Mr. Kincaid has dedicated much of his career promoting positive social change in the community, especially in relation to substance abuse issues. He worked at The Council on Alcohol and Drugs Houston for 23 years in positions ranging from Counselor to Director of Community Services to Chief Operating Officer, and most recently, as Chief Government Relations Officer. It was through his work with The Council that he became aware of the concept of a "sobering center".

For the past three years, Leonard has been working with city officials to bring the Houston Recovery Center to fruition. As a first step towards positive change for many individuals suffering from substance abuse or mental health issues, he is excited about the possibilities the Center has to offer, and is thankful for the opportunity to be a part of it.



## Special Thanks

There are many individuals and organizations that we would like to thank for helping launch the Houston Center for Sobriety. A very special thank you goes out to these organizations for their continued support:

The Star of Hope Mission - [www.sohmission.org](http://www.sohmission.org)

The Salvation Army - [www.salvationarmyhouston.org](http://www.salvationarmyhouston.org)

Houston Recovery Campus - [www.riversidegeneralhospital.org](http://www.riversidegeneralhospital.org)

Santa Maria Hostel - [www.santamariahostel.org](http://www.santamariahostel.org)

HPD Mental Health Division - [www.houstoncit.org](http://www.houstoncit.org)

HFD Emergency Medical Services - [www.houstontx.gov/fire/divisions.ems](http://www.houstontx.gov/fire/divisions.ems)

Most of all, we would like to thank the city of Houston and its residents for supporting our work in the community. We look forward to being a resource for those in need and welcome your questions or comments.



## In the News

Want to learn more? The Houston Center for Sobriety has received several favorable reports in the news. The links below will take you directly to those articles and reports.

Houston Chronicle - *[Sober center: just what the doctor ordered](#)*, March 15, 2013.

Fox 26 News - *[City offers new alternative to jail if arrested for public intoxication](#)*, March 11, 2013.

KHOU - *[Houston center offers intoxicated people hope for sobriety](#)*, September 6, 2013.

Read [Mayor Parker's](#) comments after the grand opening of the Houston Center for Sobriety.

*Thank you, Houston, for supporting the Houston Recovery Center in our opening year!  
We look forward to being a resource for the community and welcome your questions or comments.*