

The Florida House Experience: A Sober Living Campus Community

In the famous myth the phoenix was a beautiful bird that built its nest out of twigs. The bird then ignited the twigs and out of its ashes a beautiful new bird was born. We often hear this story as an analogy for our recovery. Many of us know of grateful individuals in recovery who having achieved sobriety go on to work in the field of addictions and dedicate their lives to the service of other recovering addicts and alcoholics. The Florida House CEO, Sherief Abu-Moustafa has become a living embodiment of this experience, not only in his personal life but in his awe inspiring transformation of the Florida House from a traditional halfway house to an all encompassing, comprehensive, quality treatment program. The Florida House Experience is located on a beautifully landscaped, 3 acre self contained sober living campus. The programs include intensive residential licensed treatment, intensive outpatient treatment, with housing as well as long term sober living. The Florida House Experience offers an innovative, reality-based approach to treatment and is dedicated to providing consistent long term quality care at all levels of treatment. The commitment is continuity of care that is conducive to recovery and long term sobriety.

Sherief was an exceptionally skilled psychiatric nurse when his own addiction led him to the doorstep of the Florida House in search of recovery. While there he was greatly influenced by the twelve step approach to recovery as personified by Dave DeOreo, the Florida House manager at the time. Sherief came to realize that an integrative approach, combining a clinical and therapeutic process and the twelve step model could be fashioned into the best possible prescription for recovery with lasting outcomes. His stay at the Florida House saw the birth of his vision and after completing the program he invested in the Florida House and soon became its CEO. He realized the need to give back the gift he had been given and his vision evolved.

Sherief invested both time and money in upgrading and expanding what was the Florida House, the halfway house. He began improvements and renovations which included blacktop, tropical landscaping and building extensions to the existing property. With a vision in mind his mission continued to expand and over time he acquired surrounding properties incorporating them into the lush sober living campus. Now the Florida House Experience consists of a beautiful 3 acre campus complete with fully equipped apartment style housing for 200 residents, a community meeting hall called The Room and newly built JoJo's Café, a beautifully terraced full service café and restaurant providing meals to residents at all levels of care.

Sherief took a long hard look at what has become known as "the Florida model of treatment." He found it to be lacking in consistency and long term care that most professionals recognize is pivotal in fostering lasting sobriety. He also found that traditional 28-day treatment approaches lacked the camaraderie of a sober living community. The "Florida model" currently consists of providing treatment in a facility such as an office park or store front and housing residents in nearby rental communities or condos. Residents are typically shuttled back and forth to meetings in the all too familiar "white vans" and programs are traditionally 28 days and extremely costly. Just as residents begin to become comfort-

able in their surroundings they are moved to another different locale for sober living. Many elite centers claim to provide a "continuum of care" however, unfortunately few are able to substantiate this and addicts and alcoholics newly in recovery increasingly experience chronic relapses following this model.

Sherief's vision for the Florida House Experience was to combine the best possible clinical treatment with the traditional twelve step philosophy all on a sober living campus where residents would have the opportunity to engage and interact in a community



from intensive treatment to independent sober living; a campus that would become a "nest" of safety as they learn the life skills and tools necessary to maintain lasting sobriety.

"The Florida House Experience" is much more than a treatment facility, it consists of several unique elements that set it apart from other facilities. It features The Room, a 12 Step meeting hall on campus that allows residents to attend AA/NA meetings and providing a sense of community to all members of the Florida House community. Guest speakers are invited to participate and chair meetings and this creates an opportunity for residents to begin to build relationships with recovering individuals in the local South Florida community. Another addition, JoJo's Café, provides an atmosphere for clients to socialize in a healthy and positive environment. With outstanding food and service it has quickly become a gathering place not only for the sober community but the general public at large. These two features allow the Florida House to be a welcome neighbor and maintain a positive relationship within the surrounding community.

With a better understanding of what the Florida House Experience is, how does it relate to client care? Just as the physical location and campus style sober living takes care of residents' physical needs the Florida House Experience provides a series of innovative treatment modalities that accommodate all the psychological, clinical and medical needs of clients as they begin their journey into recovery. The multi phase gender specific programs guides clients from admission all the way to independent living.

Sherief believes that "discharge planning begins at admission" and the treatment program begins with a comprehensive intake, assessment and evaluation of new clients with an eye toward fashioning the best possible customized program for each new resident. Dr Aldo Morales, psychiatrist and addictionologist is on site and available for all residents' psychological and pharmacological needs. For individuals who require detoxification services the Florida House Experience works closely with leading reputable facilities that offer safe, medically monitored detox. Consistent quality of care is maintained to assure a smooth transition from detox facilities to the Florida House Experience Sunlight program.

Residents begin the Sunlight Recovery program which provides quality intensive residential treatment incorporating a clinical, behavioral, spiritual and 12 step model approach. This treatment combined ensures residents will form a strong foundation for successful, long term sobriety. The Florida House Experience employs a staff that is experienced, licensed and credentialed in addiction treatment, trauma and other dual diagnoses. An important component of Sunlight Recovery is the Family Workshop which is a 2 day program where families and loved ones are invited to participate in intensive group therapy sessions and explore family dynamics that maintain the addictive processes. Family of origin issues are addressed in an effort to further the understanding of addiction and help struggling loved ones form and maintain healthy, positive relationships.

Following the Sunlight Recovery program residents are gradually transitioned into Innovations which is an intensive outpatient program that includes a highly structured 30 day integration to sober living that provides groups, workshops and individual therapy. Residents have the opportunity to meet with the psychiatrist, nurse practitioner and individual therapist as needed to address any medical, clinical or pharmacological issues. They are also required to seek and maintain employment, pursue academic endeavors or volunteer in the local communities.

Upon successful completion of the Innovations program residents' transition into The Florida House, a safe and supervised, gender specific sober living community on the campus. They are encouraged to get a job, develop a community support system and work a twelve step program. Counseling is still available as are on-campus meetings. Here, the Florida House Experience offers residents an opportunity (at an affordable cost) to learn to become productive members of society and enjoy the joy and satisfaction of a sober life style.

A wonderful and unique final phase allows clients to live off campus with other recovering individuals in the Graduate Housing. While the campus is close at hand and always welcoming and supportive, clients are encouraged to gradually attain their independence and follow their dreams by utilizing the newly acquired skills as they look towards a clean and sober future.

With a strong belief in guided recovery, a spiritual 12-step foundation and a sense of community, Sherief and his staff have fashioned a truly unique and innovative approach to recovery from addiction. Sherief says, "Having the good fortune to be in the position to develop this program has been nothing short of a blessing from God. My sincere hope is to provide the best possible environment and services for our residents for them to receive the same blessings that I have." This sums up the feelings of the staff and residents. The phoenix has truly risen at this oasis of recovery that is the Florida House Experience.

Grab a bite at JoJo's Café and stop in at the office for a full campus tour. The campus is located at 505 S. Federal Highway, Deerfield Beach, FL. Alternatively you can call 24/7 for any additional information or inquiries at 888-342-1460. Check out the web site: www.floridahouseexperience.com