



Serene Scene

Transitional Sober Living Magazine

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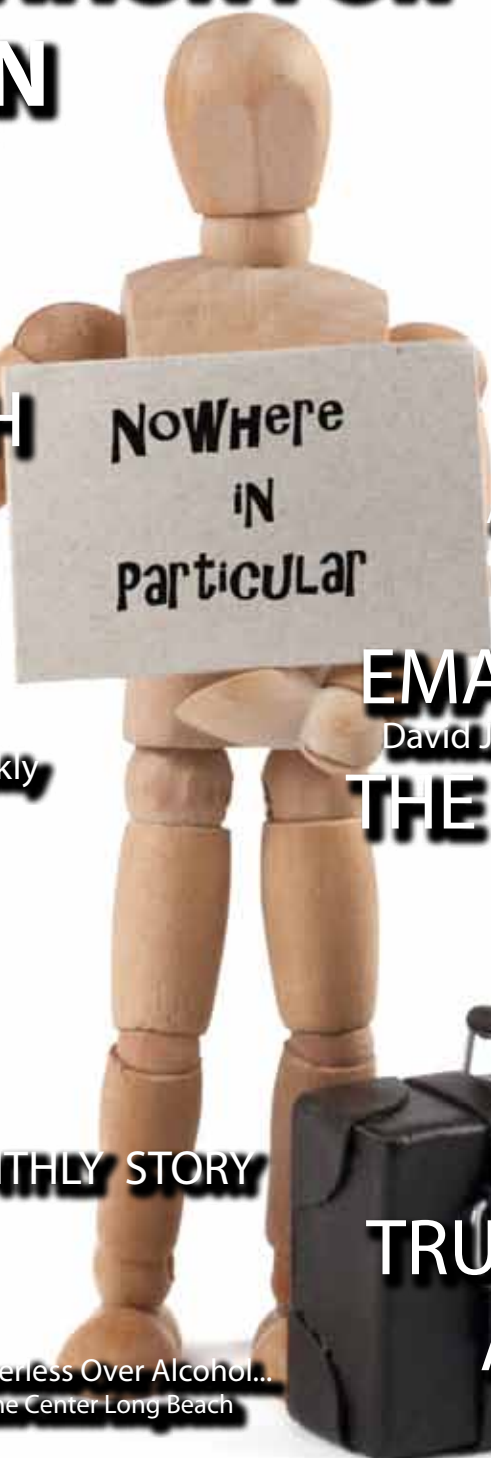
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Andrew Martin, MBA, CADCC II, SAP

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TRUE FREEDOM IS

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12 STEP TREK

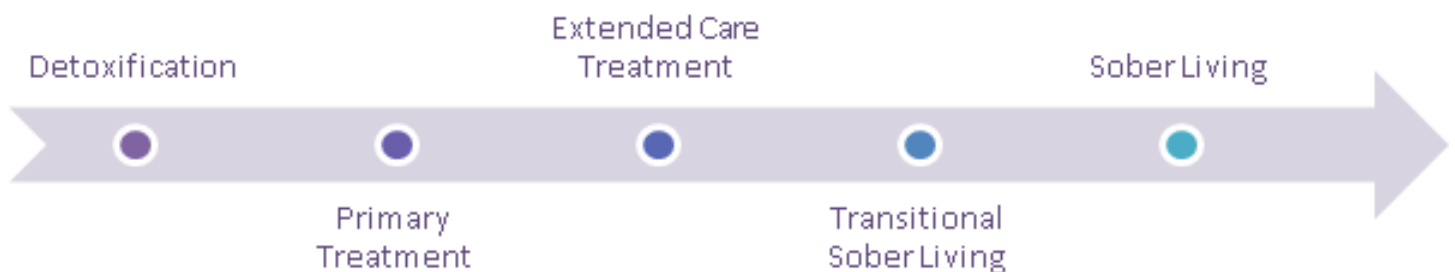
step #1: We Admitted We Were Powerless Over Alcohol...
12 Step Worksheet Series Courtesy of Serene Center Long Beach

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The continuum of care begins with a primary treatment environment and eventually leads to transitioning into an independent life without formal support. The actions of the recovering person while following the continuum of care makes all the difference in the success that person will have in long-term recovery. This article will focus on the final phase of the continuum of care: leaving sober living and beginning an independent life.



Most professionals in the addiction treatment industry agree a twelve-month investment into the continuum of care will result in the best possibility of long-term recovery. This one year commitment recommendation may seem like a long time for someone to invest into their recovery, but consider the alternative. Left untreated, or partially treated, the disease of addiction will progress and quality of life will suffer for the addict as well as the family and support system around him/her. This type of suffering is unnecessary if the addict makes a commitment not to give up on their care until there has been sufficient time to truly build a rock-solid recovery program. Time is needed to reconstruct the skills necessary to live a life without the need for alcohol and drugs. After all, in the grand picture, one year is insignificant if the result is a remaining lifetime of joyful sobriety.

It is understandable that the recovering person has a great desire to get back to life, to work, to play, to love... And to complicate matters further, there are often family members and friends coaxing the addict away from continuing care. Codependency and sabotage can undermine all the progress the patient has ac-

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completed in the moment the addict may make an unhealthy decision to discontinue care before they are ready.

This begs the recovering addict's question, "When am I ready to move on?" The question is best answered in concert between the recovering person and the recovering person's support system. Informed parties are the best resources and council to address issues surrounding staying engaged in the continuum of care. Moreover, once all of the concerns, benefits, and possible solutions are clarified amongst all healthy parties in the support system, the best choices will be made.

In an effort to help find clarity when the recovering person is ready to move on from a sober living environment into an independent apartment or back home, the remainder of this article will focus on factors that may assist the recovering person and their support system in making informed observations and recommendations.

Considerations Before Leaving Sober Living

Perhaps the most fundamental of concerns regarding moving on from a sober living environment relates to the self-reliance of the recovering individual. Self-reliance refers to the individual's propensity to rely on one's self for decision making, emotional support, judgment, fulfillment, happiness, activity, occupation, life-balance, and various other aspects of living a lifestyle of recovery. Because the disease of addiction is so often associated with narcissism and a belief that one can only rely on one's self, it is crucial that the recovering individual seeking to move on has modified his/her behavior to routinely include other people in their lives as important influences. It is not enough to simply have a support group around the recovering person: that support group must also serve as trusted confidant and guidance counsel.

One of the most critical factors when considering moving on has to do with interpersonal relationships with loved ones: both family and love relationships. The stress of interpersonal relationships is one of the most common stimuli for relapse. The recovering person must be comfortable in a mutually supporting interpersonal relationship, or must be comfortable in lovingly detaching from a toxic interpersonal relationship. This can be complicated in the case of marriage, or separation and divorce where children are involved; or with love relationships with someone who is also in recovery or remains actively using drugs and/or drinking. The recovering person must have a well-grounded recovery program that encompasses codependent behaviors as well as substance abuse in order to effectively cope with the challenges of these complicated interpersonal relationships. It is an excellent idea to remain in a sober living environment until the recovering person's family support system is stabilized for several months.

Another factor with great influence on the success of the recovering person moving on pertains to working a regular job. Reporting to work on a daily basis and interacting with supervisors, coworkers and customers places a significant amount of stress on the recovering person. It is highly advised that the recovering person be living in a structured sober living environment for several months while working a regular job so the support of the other residents and the structure of routine life remains constant throughout a few of the

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stressful periods in the workplace.

It is often the circumstance that addicts and alcoholics accumulate debt while active in their addiction. Debt accumulation can be the result of not managing funds well and not paying back money that has been borrowed in the terms promised. Developing realistic repayment plans, and then keeping to those repayment plans, is an ideal use of the type of support offered in a sober living environment. The recovering person should remain inside a structured living situation until comfortable with the added pressures of budgeting and paying bills responsibly.

Sometimes the recovering person has legal challenges caused by addict behavior. Depending on the severity, the legal challenges can be intensely stressful. Being a participant in a sober living environment can help to alleviate the stress through open sharing in a community of support. It is advisable to stay in a sober living environment until legal proceedings are concluded and the recovering person has experienced a few months of practice in accommodating any sentencing or judgment requirements.

Getting Ready to Move On

In preparation for moving on from a sober living environment the following partial list of questions has been developed to assist as discussion points for the recovering person and their support system. It is imperative that these topics and others are discussed in detail in order to insure the best possible outcomes when the recovering person moves on.

- **Planning**
 - Is moving on a part of a pre-determined plan?
 - How long have you been seriously thinking about moving on?
 - Is there a particular event or situation that is causing you to consider moving on?
 - Who was involved in creating your plan to move on?
- **Communication**
 - Have you discussed moving on with your counselor, therapist, sponsor, family, etc.?
 - Are you open to hearing feedback from your support system?
 - Is the feedback you are receiving generally supportive, or not supportive?
 - What are the concerns that your support system has?
- **Reality Check**
 - Are you being completely honest with yourself and with those around you?
 - How will moving on change your life?
 - What concerns do you have about moving on?
 - What excites you about moving on?
 - What scares you about moving on?

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- o What saddens you about moving on?
- o What makes you happy about moving on?
- **Relationships and Support**
 - o Who have you made strong emotional bonds with at sober living?
 - o Will you be able to continue to interact with them?
 - o How will you interact with them?
 - o Will you be able to continue with your regular self-help groups?
 - o Do you have a sponsor or sober-coach?
 - o Will you be able to keep your interaction with your sponsor or sober-coach?
- **Spirit**
 - o Do you have an understanding of your spiritual self?
 - o How will you continue to work your spiritual practices?
- **Environment**
 - o What are the things you like best about sober living?
 - o What are the things you don't like about sober living?
 - o How will you replace the good things about sober living once you move on?
- **Using and Acting Out**
 - o When were the times you wanted to drink/use/act-out and did not?
 - o What and who helped you through that difficult time?
 - o Will those same tools and people be in place after you move on?
- **Staying Sober**
 - o What are the things in sober living that help you stay sober?
 - o Is it possible to replace those things after moving on?
 - o What is your plan to replace those things?
- **Finance**
 - o How will you pay for housing, utilities and food after moving on?
 - o How will you pay for transportation after moving on?
 - o How will you pay for entertainment after moving on?
 - o How will you pay your debts after moving on?

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- o Do you have experience with making these payments?
- o Do you have a savings account funded?
- **Work**
 - o Have you been working a regular job for some time?
 - o Are you planning on changing jobs in the near future?
 - o How do you feel about going to work every day?
 - o Are you secure in your job?
 - o What is your plan if you lose your job?
- **Relapse Intervention**
 - o How will you go about intervening on a relapse process after you move on?
 - o Do you have a support group around you that will tell me if you are in a relapse process?
 - o Have you given those in your support group permission to speak up?
 - o Do you have a firm understanding of your relapse process behaviors?
- **Intervention**
 - o If you drink, use or begin acting out, what is your plan?
 - o How will your support group react if you drink, use or act out?
 - o How will your support group best support you if you relapse?
- **Stress**
 - o What stressors have you not dealt with before moving on?
 - o What is your plan to deal with those stressors after moving on?
 - o What is your plan to deal with excessive emotions?
- **Life**
 - o What are the things you enjoy most about life?
 - o What is your plan to continue to include those things in your life?

There is much to consider before moving on from a structured and supportive living environment. Being prepared to make healthy choices will tremendously influence the recovering person's success at leading a long-term fulfilling lifestyle of recovery. **SS**