
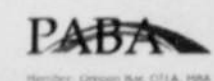


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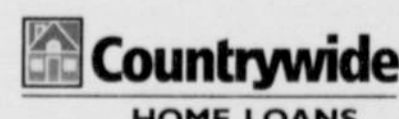
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northwest

Step Inside Our House

A closer look into the residential care facility
by Malka Geffen

The gay community is familiar with the efforts of Our House of Portland to provide residential health care to people with HIV/AIDS. A charity event rarely occurs that does not list Our House as a beneficiary. Our House gets the biggest cheers at Basic Rights Oregon fund-raisers and during the Pride parade. The community at large came out last summer to support the unveiling of the new and improved Our House facility. This is the side of Our House we know and support.

"Especially in the gay community," says marketing and communications manager John Oules, "someone knows someone who has received care here." The nonprofit organization, which holds compassion, collaboration and respect among its core values, has touched many people and owes a large portion of its volunteers to the gay community. Understanding how Our House operates, away from the fund-raisers and the public eye, helps the community relate to the organization, its residents and staff even better.

Riley, Our House assesses for medical acuity, active addiction and psychiatric issues. According to Oules, the system that is in place works, and people who move into Our House can meet the state's requirements. "We wouldn't put a person in a situation if it's beyond their means or ability," he says. In the case of a person who gets sick quickly,



Social interaction between staff and residents is part of a balanced lifestyle at Our House.

According to Allen Brady, director of administrative services, Our House receives 52 percent of its yearly operating budget of \$2.3 million from state funding, holds a few major fund-raising events, applies for grants and accepts donations to make up the rest. "Half of Our House is just like any other residential care facility, and then there's half of us that has private fund raising that is the part the community sees and is so loved and understood in more tangible ways," says Kristin Riley, director of social services. "The state funding side is a complicated system."

What most people don't know is that Our House charges for room and board. Executive director Wayne Miya says that this is one of the strings of regulations and required compliance attached to the state funding. "All funding regulations [from the Portland Development Commission, state and federal government] require that residents pay a portion of their income toward room and board here. If we don't comply, we're at risk of losing our funding," explains Miya. "The state figures out what residents need to pay us based on their income, and then the state deducts that from what [the state allots] us."

According to Brady, residents are allowed to keep \$141 a month of their income for personal incidental funds, based on state regulation. Regardless of whether residents have a direct deposit of their Social Security funds into their account and write Our House a check or have the funds sent to the facility where they sign over the amount less \$141 in cash, Riley says room and board payment is typical of residential care facilities that have contracts with the Department of Human Services.

When a person is considered for residency at Our House, many factors are at play. According to

Riley says Our House commits to helping this person who needs care and can't wait around for his Social Security application to go through. "Sometimes there's a gap when we cannot collect room and board—not many facilities will do that," she says.

According to Miya, Our House has had several involuntary move-outs. "A common one is due to endangering oneself and others; another is where a person's acuity is too high and we can't take care of them adequately; another is the money issue," he explains. "There have been cases of nonpayment of rent where we've worked with the person for months and nonpayment has been totaling up into the thousands and we have to ask how fair is that to everyone."

If a client does have to leave, otherwise endangering the organization with losing state funding, Our House staff says they will do everything they can to make for an easy transition. "Until that point we've spent time and effort working with them so they can stay, but when you've crossed that line, another process comes into play so they can go somewhere to continue to get care," says Brady. "They're not out on their own." Riley explains that once a notice is issued, there's heavy emphasis on a good and ethical discharge. "We have to balance upholding the state system and still recognize that leaving here is not easy," she said.

Miya added: "As we carry out the state regulations, we operate under a philosophy of care that has respect for the resident, the community and the staff. Rules may be conflicting, but we need to look at the overall issue and see what's in the best interest for all of us." 10