

SUMMIT HOUSE*

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Genesis of the Program:

In the 1970's the Greensboro Commission on the Status of Women discussed the need for an alternative to prison for mothers and pregnant women. As a result of these discussions, the Commission created Another Way, Inc., a program designed to outline the need for the vision of an alternative to prison. In the 1980's, a steering committee was established to address the needs verified by Another Way, Inc. This group included superior and district court judges, public defenders, substance abuse professionals, community corrections professionals, and representatives of women's organizations. This group evolved into a Board of Directors, which created a program that included residential and day-reporting elements. In 1987 the program was incorporated as the "Guilford County Residential/Day Center". The residential program was designed to enroll women for at least 11 months, providing a structured context in which counseling services, life skills, training, and parenting classes, were offered. Both the residential and day-reporting programs opened in January 1988. True to its mission, the residential and day-reporting programs allowed the female residents to retain primary care of their children. Thus the vision was born and the philosophy was becoming reality. In January of 1989, The Guilford county Residential/Day Center changed its name to "Summit House". More importantly, three residents became the first graduates of the residential program, and state government provided funds for the program's operation.

Growing Pains:

Even with increased support, the program experienced growing pains. In 1988, the day center closed due to transportation difficulties. In 1990, the residential program closed for five months because of a financial shortfall. Nonetheless, a strong commitment to the vision remained. Clients were referred to other programs, or released and continued on

* This case study was compiled from a variety of sources, interviews and publications. It is not intended to be an endorsement by the authors of a particular program, method or approach. The case study is intended to provide an illustration and example of one type of approach to mother-child programs.

probation. When Summit House reopened, a behavior modification program was implemented to address the women's behavior while they lived in the residential setting. As program changes occurred, the program strengthened.

Summit House Mission and Goals:

Mission: The Summit House program strengthens the family by intervening in the lives of non-violent women offenders and their children. Comprehensive services are administered to the women and their children through the efforts of a public-private partnership in a highly structured and controlled environment. The program strives to break the cycle of crime. Summit House also advocates nationally for community based sentencing programs.

The goals of Summit House, as defined by staff and the Board, are:

- To identify and manage self-defeating behaviors;
- To practice self-supporting behaviors through developing long-term goals, life planning, education and training, financial management/budgeting, and employment;
- To develop a healthy sense of self, family, and competency in relationships with others;
- To improve parenting skills.

During the past twelve years, the mission and goals of Summit House have changed as have the women being served. The women being served have been convicted of multiple offenses – not first time offenders. The length of stay in the program has also increased to an average of eighteen months. The focus of the program continues to be strengthening the family for success in the future but the manner in which this is accomplished has changed. The program has initiated cognitive-behavioral approaches. These methods have been shown to be effective by research during the past ten years.

Summit House Program Components:

All three Summit House residential programs operate in a home-like setting. Dwellings with multiple bedrooms in residential communities provide women and children with housing that models a neighborhood setting. A sense of community and cooperation is fostered as the women and their children share meal preparation and dinner times, and take turns with chores and other day-to-day responsibilities. All of the Summit House programs met and conquered zoning difficulties, but not without many agonizing months of legal battles and expense. Programs beginning in the future who are interested in using this model may want to consider multiple apartments with a common apartment for staff, individual and family meetings. This would also enable the program to accept entire families, whereas Summit House limits the age of the children due to shared bedrooms.

Summit House provides a structured approach that blends a comprehensive selection of gender specific services. A behavior modification and empowerment model guides each woman's progress where behaviors are rewarded or discouraged relative to goals set by the woman and Summit House staff. The program utilizes many agencies, schools and

professionals to provide services. Elements of service for the women include therapeutic intervention, classes and workshops on major life issues such as positive parenting skills, good health practices and status for mother and child, addiction education and treatment, addiction-free living through 12 step programs such as Narcotics Anonymous, formal academic education, family relationships enhancement, self-management skills, job seeking and employment skills, and social skills training and practice. For the children services include developmental screenings, services based on developmental plan, community activities (camps, scouts, dance lessons, etc.), cultural events for the family, tutoring, substance abuse education and clubs, play therapy, family therapy, day care/public school.

The rehabilitation program at Summit House borrows from the most successful applications of learning and immediate reinforcement. Staff members serve as positive role models for appropriate behavior thereby giving clients the opportunity to observe and practice positive behaviors. Staff members establish a therapeutic relationship with clients wherein unconditional positive regard is balanced with a supportive environment, which encourages clients to take responsibility for the consequences of their behavior. The staff client relationship is built on the principles of empowerment where staff members support and facilitate self-sufficiency and success in clients at whatever level is needed.

Summit House is considered an intermediate sanction within North Carolina's structured sentencing. An intermediate level probation officer is assigned to the woman's case when she enters the program. The probation officer is considered a member of the treatment team and is invited to all team meetings.

The program and management staff at Summit House is dedicated to individualized treatment where service and rehabilitation are tailored to the specific needs of each mother and her children. This provides an element of empowerment to the woman entering Summit House, encouraging her to participate in setting goals relevant to her needs and the needs of her family. Since each client and her children have a unique set of goals, no absolute length of stay is set for women residing at Summit House. Depending on each woman's rate of progress, it takes between one and two years to achieve the requisite skills for graduation.

Summit House encourages celebrations along the journey. With each goal a family achieves the staff and residents celebrate the victory. This may be as simple as telling them they have done a great job to inviting friends and family to celebrate a full year of drug-free living.

Alongside her own individual goals for achievement, each client must attain a standard set of expectations held by Summit House for her. During their involvement in the Summit House program, clients must:

- Obtain a GED (if they do not already have a high school diploma);
- Attend college or vocational school;

- Participate in substance abuse counseling/treatment and counseling on victimization;
- Learn parenting, financial management, relationship, mediation and coping skills;
- Play an active part in the daily operations of the home and eventually share in the management of the day-to-day operations of the home including Family Conference (the Summit House “self-government” system);
- Obtain employment with earnings above the present minimum wage in order to be self supporting;
- Obtain appropriate housing for themselves and their children preferably outside of public housing and not with family members whenever relationships tend to be dysfunctional;
- Begin paying restitution;
- Perform community service.

Financial Resources and Support Needed for the Program:

Summit House has been funded by a public-private partnership during the past ten years. This includes approximately 75% of the funding from the North Carolina General Assembly via the Department of Correction – Community Corrections Division. Summit House reports directly to the General Assembly and not the Department of Correction based on the original legislation. This allows the program a level of autonomy that may not be experienced when funding is provided by a state or federal agency. The balance of the funding comes from private foundations, United Ways, churches, corporations and individuals.

The average cost per day for a mother and her child at Summit House is \$141. This compares in North Carolina to \$116 per day for foster care and \$79 per day for incarceration of a woman. Summit House is able to maintain cost effective programming due to the partnerships it has created in the communities it serves. The majority of the education and training services are offered at no charge, the substance abuse services are offered at no charge, Medicaid pays for some medical services, physicians have donated their services, contractual relationships limit the cost of mental health counseling, and churches often assist with food and its preparation.

The majority of the costs associated with Summit House, which is true with all residential programs, are staffing. Operating a seven-day a week, 24 hours a day program is not inexpensive. That is one of many reasons why the population being served needs to be high risk that will benefit more from the services. It is also important to hire the best possible staff that resembles the women they are serving.

During the changes in sentencing guidelines within the state of North Carolina, Summit House took an active role in addressing the Sentencing Commission. As the new Structured Sentencing legislation was passed residential treatment was included as an option of an intermediate sanctioned offender.

How Does Summit House Measure Success?

Summit House has been actively involved in evaluation since it closed in 1990. In order to receive additional funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, a strong supporter of the program at that time, their board requested an evaluation of the program. Dr. Paul Gendreau conducted that initial evaluation and a follow up three years later. Both of these evaluations assisted the program in refining the program design. In the later part of the 1990's the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory was completed on two of the three Summit Houses. This would have been a helpful tool when the program was in its inception instead of ten years later.

Summit House maintains quarterly statistics on many different areas of interest including: demographic data, completed program requirements (GED, substance abuse treatment, etc.), successful completions and types of terminations, and occupancy rates.

Historically, as is true with many community corrections programs the ultimate measure has been recidivism rates. This has also been an interest of the Summit House funders, including the General Assembly. As of fiscal year 1998-99, 40% of women incarcerated in North Carolina are reconvicted within three years. Using the same parameters Summit House has measured recidivism for the past five years. In fiscal year 1998-99 79.3% of the women were not reconvicted and 20.7% were reconvicted.

Summit House has always wanted to conduct a longitudinal study to determine the outcomes of the children. To date this has not yet been accomplished due to the significant costs involved in this design.

What Issues Remain a Challenge to Summit House

Welfare to Work has dramatic effects on Summit House. Given the five-year service window many women are approaching the end of the time period. Summit House has asked women to pay room and board and this has often come from their AFDC check. Medical services may also become a higher portion of the budget if Medicaid benefits are also cut.

Providing services to entire families continues to be a challenge for the program. Although older children are involved in treatment when possible they do not live with their mother and siblings. This often places them at-risk in dysfunctional family settings, often with relatives.

The Summit House program in Greensboro has begun to address the difficulties experienced in housing and aftercare upon leaving the program. This site has developed a graduated scale of rental assistance for program graduates if they remain active in the aftercare program for up to one year.

Changes in the national political climate in regards to substance abusing mothers continuing in that role have affected Summit House, although the strong sentiment of a few years ago seems to have calmed. Summit House has addressed this by stating the program is interested in the best interest of the child in regard to placement.

Community Support

Although Summit House was not welcomed into any of the three neighborhoods in which they provide services in the beginning, they are now seen as exemplary neighbors. In Greensboro the neighborhood association donates the proceeds from their neighborhood picnics to Summit House. In Charlotte the neighborhood has often pitched in to help with minor repairs and mentoring with the women.

Historically, in all three sites, churches have been enthusiastic supporters. They often provide financial, in-kind donations and volunteers. Women's organizations have also assisted with donations and volunteers.

Elected officials have always been strong advocates for the program – both democrats and republicans. City councils, county commissions and the state legislature have all funded Summit House. Governor Hunt provided a quote for the most recent annual report which states: "Today our children face a very difficult, challenging and competitive future, and the children who come from broken homes face an even tougher challenge. That is why I am proud to know that Summit House is there to help the children and families of North Carolina succeed. By helping these women in trouble become loving parents and successful contributors to their community shows that Summit House is working to give our young people and struggling families a better chance at the future they deserve." A high ranking Senator and Co-Chair of the State Appropriations Committee is also quoted as saying: "I'm convinced Summit House is one of the best programs in the nation to help young women with children rehabilitate themselves. Families are able to stay together. Women who have made dreadful mistakes learn to live productive lives and a cycle of despair is broken. We are fortunate to have such a fine program in our state. The dollars we allocate for Summit House are an investment that will pay large dividends."

The Summit House structure involves the entire community in the decision making process. Each Summit House site has an advisory board of 20-25 members and there is a statewide governing board of 20 members. Therefore there are over 80 community volunteers involved in the management of Summit House statewide. Summit House has also been recognized nationally by the President's Service Award in 1996 and in 1998 with the Improvement of Justice Award. Summit House was also chosen a "Best Practices" Program by the American Correctional Association.

Hindsight is Always the Best

Professionals and volunteers interested in beginning residential programs for mothers and children within the community must be persevering, dedicated and committed. There are now several successful programs across the country that can be used as models for your community program. Many years ago this was not the case.

Begin evaluation of the program immediately. Becoming a "pet project" of a local university may help with on-going evaluation and potentially a longitudinal study. This enhances the professionalism and success of the program for the clients, the staff and funders.

Consider using contiguous apartments to allow the entire family to be involved in the program. This will also decrease zoning battles.

Review all licensing provisions within your community and state. When Summit House began it did not fit into any licensing parameters of the state. With increased pressure from the public, the state finally decided they must license facilities like Summit House. Although Summit House has been actively involved in the process it has still been a difficult process that has caused structural changes and many hours of staff commitment.

Focus as much emphasis on the children as is focused on the women. Summit House began because of the children, but the majority of the services were provided to the woman. Build a strong children's program from the start.

Finally, don't become defeated. There are many professionals willing to assist you across the country. Contact the National Institute of Corrections for a technical assistance grant and/or telephone numbers of people who are willing to assist.

Final Thoughts

The women who attend the Summit House are a unique group of individuals. While they come with a lifetime of factors that have put them on a trajectory of crime and self-denigration, and come with history of significant, nonviolent offenses, they are truly a testament of the human desire to rise above adversity. They come primarily for the sakes of their children who have paid the highest price for their mothers' addictions and criminal behavior. These women come willing to live in the highly structured environment, and under great demands placed on them for self-enhancement and successful living. They come seeking better lives for, and better relationships with, their children. Often they feel tempted to leave Summit House, but love for their children anchors their stay.

The Summit House message is simple and strong – preserve the family, rehabilitate not merely habitate, and look towards the future for these children by decreasing their likelihood toward criminal behavior. Summit House strives daily to accomplish these goals as it reaches out to preserve the outcomes of its clients – the women and their children. The significant investment in the people that Summit House serves brings the greater return of self-sufficiency and empowerment for a promising, productive future.

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