

Research Wins the Case: “Reason and Logic” in the Judicial System

By Lenny Jason

Here is an example of trying to effect change at the judicial level, which might be another area where our policy work might be considered. I was contacted by a lawyer who said he needed data on whether having more people in an Oxford House led to better outcomes. The reason for this was that the community was trying to close down the Oxford House, saying that they had too many unrelated people living in it. We had a data set and looked at it to examine how the number of residents in Oxford House affected residents’ individual outlooks for recovery. The Oxford House organization recommends that eight to twelve individuals reside in each House — that number helps reduce the cost per person and increases the frequency of support. So, we predicted that Oxford Houses with more people would show improved outcomes compared with less people. We found that a larger house size corresponded with less criminal and aggressive behavior. These results were used in five court cases, which successfully argued against closing Oxford Houses that had more than five or six non-related residents. After providing several lawyers material for their zoning case in North Carolina, I received this letter from Paul Molloy:

Lenny—Thanks for your timely input for Scott and Greg in their efforts to resolve the zoning case in Garner, NC. You gave them the key yesterday for getting the city to agree to a consent order. Thank you. As I understand the settlement we will be able to have eight residents in the house in question. [The dispute has been on going for six years!] The town will pay attorney’s fees, which are about \$105,000 and a fine to the Department of Justice. The key to their decision appears to be your research showing that larger houses had better outcomes [less crime, more income etc.] than the smaller ones. Thanks. Once again reason and logic prevailed and more folks are able to benefit.

Jason, L.A., Groh, D.R., Durocher, M., Alvarez, J., Aase, D.M., & Ferrari, J.R. (2008). Counteracting “Not in My Backyard”: The positive effects of greater occupancy within mutual-help recovery homes. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 36, 947-958.

In addition, as a result of our research with the Oxford House organization, this model was placed in SAMSHA’s National Registry of Evidence Based programs and practices <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=223>