

Recalling the growth of OHL over the past 20 years is remarkable in itself, but when you consider that two decades ago OHL was not just a smaller organization poised for growth, but a single-program nonprofit in a city recently devastated by the largest disaster in its history, the perseverance and scale of OHL's expansion seem almost against all odds.

As New Orleans marks 20 years post-Katrina, we'd like to share with you how OHL weathered the storm and ultimately grew in the face of adversity.

Pre-Hurricane Katrina, OHL had been operating quietly on Esplanade Ridge in New Orleans since 1973, running a long-term residential substance use disorder treatment facility for men and women 18 or older with about 20 full time employees. The year before Katrina, OHL expanded its services to include women with children, but these were the only two services OHL offered, with a total of 60 beds. With its small footprint, OHL was largely unknown across the city, but in January 2005 now CEO Edward Carlson was hired, and Ed was determined to expand OHL's services and increase community awareness. In August, Ed got a little more than he bargained for with Hurricane Katrina.

A COMMUNITY CRIES OUT

Having evacuated its 58 clients in advance of the storm, OHL staff returned to find the agency's 150-year-old building severely damaged by wind, water, and vandalism. Almost immediately, OHL got to work, clearing downed trees from the roof, repairing broken windows, and removing piles of debris from around the facility. OHL drew upon its own resources and staff but was blessed to have 50 volunteers from other treatment facilities around the country, including CenterPoint and West Care both in California, travel to New Orleans to roll up their sleeves and take on manual labor in the southern heat. Thanks to these volunteers, the staff reopened OHL to clients just 10 weeks after Katrina.





Very quickly, individuals started showing up on OHL's doorstep; however, not all were seeking the substance use treatment the facility offered. Instead, residents of the mainly lower-income neighborhood surrounding OHL were ringing the doorbell asking for food, water, and medical assistance. A neighbor admitted to breaking into the facility in the days after the storm to sustain herself with OHL's food supply.

Ed recalls an elderly neighborhood resident that had no family, no transportation, and no money, yet had surgery right before the storm and was desperate need of medical attention to address circumstances pertaining to her surgery. OHL staff found the appropriate medical resources and transported her to her appointments.

Ed and the rest of the OHL staff knew something had to be done for these people whose homes had been largely devastated. It was time for OHL to expand its mission, although no one had any idea what an undertaking this would become.

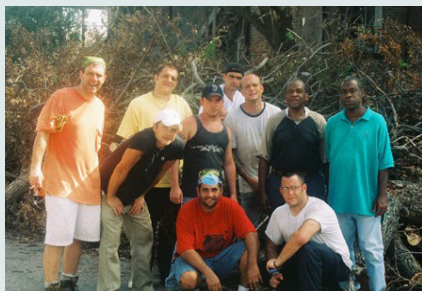
EXPANDING MISSION

The closure of the Charity Hospital system was a major issue to the residents surrounding OHL's facility. Frequently, neighbors would come to OHL bleeding from wounds they suffered while trying to repair their damaged homes. Medical resources were more than scarce for these individuals; they were non-existent. One of OHL's first expansion programs was to open a free community medical clinic. Opening January 2006, a mere two months after the facility re-opened from Katrina, OHL began hosting a medical clinic for the New Orleans community in collaboration with LSU and assistance from Common Ground volunteers and LSU medical professionals.

Also in January, OHL became the only New Orleans -based agency without a national affiliation to be a



member of the Katrina Aid Today consortium, a \$66 million initiative funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Through Katrina Aid Today, OHL helped Hurricane Katrina survivors identify sources of support, develop personal recovery plans, acquire access to services and take appropriate actions to become self-sufficient once again. By the time it ended, OHL's Katrina Aid Today program completed well past its target goal, and aided over 6,100 families in rebuilding their lives.



OHL's once small nonprofit stature was quickly starting to grow. OHL began to look for new programs to help the community and the city of New Orleans. OHL applied for and received a grant through the President's Prisoner Re-entry Initiative, one of only 30 such grants issued nationwide. OHL's Community Prisoner Re-entry Initiative was designed to assist non-violent ex-offenders returning to their local communities through an employment-based program that incorporated housing, mentoring, job training, and other services.

While OHL expanded its historical mission to include the new programs, it did not stray from its dedication to the substance use disorder treatment field. OHL grew in that capacity as well, doubling from 60 available treatment beds to 126. OHL also began provided detox services as it grew post-storm.

While the devastation of Katrina certainly cannot be underscored, its aftermath saw an infusion of opportunity and funding that laid the groundwork for OHL's significant expansion.

MOVING FORWARD

Now, 20 years after Katrina, the major hope for New Orleans was to rebuild "bigger and better than ever before." OHL is proof that this hope was not unfounded, as this agency has grown into a continuum of care that would have been almost unimaginable in 2005.

Everyone who lived in New Orleans 20 years ago has a Katrina story and OHL is no different. Our Katrina story is about an organization dedicated to rebuilding its city and dedicated to those whom, too often, society has forgotten; our story shows our efforts to support a stronger common good and foster social understanding. Odyssey House staff and clients represent the resilience, fortitude and hope of New Orleanians in the face of the catastrophic effects of Katrina. The work and the people of OHL illustrate the spirit and determination of New Orleans residents to rebuild not only their own lives, but the community as a whole.