

Alana Bickford
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Hello. My name is Alana Bickford.

I'm a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor and a Certified Clinical Supervisor. I'm currently employed as one of the lead addiction therapists at the Center for Addictive Problems (CAP) in Westbrook, and I also operate my own private addiction counseling practice. Over the last 14 years, I've worked professionally with hundreds, maybe thousands, of men and women in early recovery from substance use disorder, many of whom were living at recovery houses.

In my experience, recovery residences often vary widely from one to the next. Some are religious. Some are secular. Some require residents to work twelve step programs. Others provide more professional social work or counseling services like the ones I offer. Some programs are great. Others are so poorly run and dangerous that they often pose significant risks to the people who live there. Given all that, I think we need actual clinical standards governing how Maine's recovery residences should operate.

Yet, in my experience, there are a lot of recovery houses in Maine that don't seem to have anybody working there, or even advising the house, who has any clinical training whatsoever.

To be clear, I love seeing residents step up as leaders. I love seeing local people in recovery come to the house to sponsor residents one-on-one. In my experience, residents often benefit from working with lots of different sorts of people. But, at the same time, the State of Maine would never pay for a residential program for people with developmental delay if there wasn't anybody working there who had clinical training in how best to support people with mental retardation. The State would never pay for a program for people with Schizophrenia if nobody working there had actual mental health training. So I'm not sure why they'd pay for an addiction recovery residence that didn't have anybody with formal behavioral health training either working there directly or closely advising the project?

When I look at the members of the MARR Board, of its nine members, there isn't a single one who's a licensed behavioral health professional in active clinical practice. Only two have any experience at all with programs where residents are even allowed to receive psychiatric care to stabilize the brain injuries that they've sustained over their years using street drugs. Determining which recovery residences in Maine are being run well, and which aren't, is a difficult and complex undertaking. We need at least some people at the wheel here who have enough clinical training to assess whether or not these programs are actually meeting the needs of the wide variety of people who reside there.

As such, it's my professional opinion that the State of Maine would be making a serious mistake if they were to delegate the responsibility of overseeing Maine's addiction recovery residences to this particular private association. Put simply, they just aren't qualified to do the work.