

GUIDE's Barrington Road Therapeutic Group Home, "Like a Phoenix Rising"

By Sarah Smee and Scott Birdsong

Every program plans for emergencies, hoping against hope that the plans will be superfluous. Carefully made contingency plans ensure that in an emergency damage to property and, more importantly, personal injuries can be minimized. Most of the time, these plans remain on paper, practiced routinely and occasionally, but rarely having to be implemented. However, GUIDE's emergency procedures were put to the test on the evening of April 4, 2004 at the Barrington Road Therapeutic Group Home in Baltimore City.

The group home, which opened in 2002, provides round-the-clock supervision, therapy and guidance for teens with personal, family, and psychiatric problems. While at the home, youths receive individual, group, and family counseling and learn how to better manage emotions and behaviors. The goal of the program is to provide a supportive home-like environment for these young men during a period when they are unable to live in their own homes. Up to six youth live at the home at any time, and they all participate in chores and community service projects while attending school.

Early in April a fire broke out in one of home's upstairs sitting areas. After assuring the evacuation of everyone in the home and notifying the Baltimore City Fire Service, two staff members briefly attempted to put out the fire, but by then what had been quite small in origin, had spread. Since the house is located within several blocks of the fire station, firefighters arrived at the scene within minutes, and the fire was extinguished quickly. No residents or staff were harmed, but the house itself was not so lucky. Although fire damage *per se* was limited to the sitting room, the entire second floor received smoke and water damage. The firefighters did a thorough job, making sure

the fire had not spread to other parts of the house. Unfortunately, in this process the doors, windows, ceilings, walls and carpets were damaged throughout the house.

The fire was out, but the home was uninhabitable. The boys and staff spent the night in a nearby motel while management personnel devised alternative arrangements. Other GUIDE facilities in the region offered assistance. Two residents were transferred to GUIDE's group home in Fort Washington, and several staff members began working from that site to ease the boys' transition. GUIDE's Catonsville program also stepped up, providing office space and other support the evening of the fire.



The clean-up and repair/renovation process began immediately and was moved along swiftly being facilitated by agency business partners who worked "yeoman-like" to ensure that the home would not have to be closed for

a sustained period. All salvageable household items were cleaned and stored and reconstruction occurred that included replacing flooring and repairing ceiling and wall damage. Many household items like towels, shower curtains, and other linens had to be replaced. Despite insurance coverage, the reconstruction and loss of revenue for the program exceeded \$50,000. GUIDE is pulling together to try to mitigate this unforeseen expense.

On June 4, exactly two months after the fire, the group home was good as new, perhaps even improved in some respects. With fresh paint and new carpet, the house looked beautiful. With some policy changes in place to help prevent and manage similar incidents in the future, the staff returned to the house. Two of the former residents moved back into the group home. Both felt pleased to be “home” and were ready to settle back in. Within two months, the home was back to full capacity.

On July 8, 2004 the group home program celebrated its return to service with a very successful open house that was attended by representatives of the Departments of Juvenile and Social Services, the Family League of Baltimore City, the Honorable State Senator, Lisa Gladden, and others. The program received praise for its “warm, home-like environment” with one attendee indicating that she was “sweet on GUIDE!” Nonetheless, it has been a long road for the group home’s staff and residents, but they weathered the challenge superbly. With the



reopening of the program came a renewed energy and commitment to serving children in need. Says Jennifer Carberry, Program Director

of the group home, “the experience united staff and residents to make this an even stronger program, a nurturing home and a fun

work environment.” As the home reopened for service, Scott Birdsong, GUIDE’s Executive Director, indicated, “rebounding from this incident has certainly created a major challenge for both the program and the agency. We are all very thankful that the damages incurred were only to property and that the program is so very blessed by exceptionally resilient, talented, and caring personnel like Jen Carberry and her staff. They are certainly the wind under the wings of the ‘phoenix rising.’”

BARRINGTON AFTER REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS

