



# FROM SHELTER TO SANCTUARY

## WHAT ALUMNI PROS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ETHICAL SOBER LIVING

**Sober living can be a life-changing bridge between treatment and long-term recovery but not all sober homes are created equal.** For alumni professionals, being asked to recommend sober living has become a common and sometimes daunting responsibility. Families and alumni rely on your guidance to navigate a landscape filled with both safe sanctuaries and risky operations.

This is why alumni professionals today are more than just connectors, they're information gatherers for recovery support services. Knowing how to identify ethical, high-quality sober living environments is now an essential part of the job.

In a recent conversation with Terin DeVoto Noonan, Founder and Executive Director of Purpose House Sober Living in Northern Colorado, we explored what separates a shelter from a true sanctuary in sober living and how alumni coordinators can confidently guide their communities toward the right fit.

### Why Purpose Matters

Terin's decision to open Purpose House wasn't driven by profit, it was born from personal experience. "I had some bad experiences and some great ones in sober living," Terin shared. "The relationships I built in sober living were a huge part of getting and staying sober."

That experience taught him the power of community, accountability, and purpose—principles that became the foundation of Purpose House. His philosophy is simple but profound: "Do the right thing, and everything else will fall into place"

Purpose House grew from a single site location to 3 in 7 years focusing on gender-specific housing for men. He credits his dad and industry leaders in helping him launch a successful and ethical business. Relying on his peers and finding ways to collaborate helped him learn and grow a recovery community that has made a difference not just in his life but the life of others he serves.



**Terin DeVoto Noonan**  
Founder/Executive Director  
Purpose House Sober Living



## Key Tips for Alumni Professionals When Vetting Sober Living

Terin provided a few recommendations for alumni professionals when vetting sober living programs for their alumni. The following tips are suggestions for alumni professionals navigating the sometimes-complicated world of transitional living.

### 1. Structure Is Everything

*“People go to sober living for two things: community and accountability,”* Terin emphasizes. Look for homes that clearly communicate expectations—things like curfews, drug testing, participation in recovery meetings, and structured support. A well-run home should help residents establish daily routines that support forward momentum.

### 2. Get to Know the Operators

Terin advises: *“Ask the leadership why they’re doing this work. Are they passionate about recovery, or is it just a business?”* The motivation behind the program is critical. Ethical operators prioritize resident well-being, not occupancy numbers.

### 3. Reputation Matters—Do Your Homework

Talk to treatment professionals, clinicians, and most importantly, alumni who have lived in the house. *“The best feedback comes from people who’ve been there,”* Terin says. Lean into your existing professional network and community to gather honest input.

### 4. Check Credentials... But Don’t Stop There

Organizations like the National Alliance for Recovery Residences ([NARR](#)) and state credentialing bodies are great starting points. *“They’ll tell you if something is really wrong, but the real picture comes from going beyond that,”* Terin advises. Walk the property. Meet the residents. Get a feel for the culture.

### 5. Ask About Transition Planning

A key sign of a high-quality sober living home is how it prepares residents for life after they leave. *“We don’t want repeat customers,”* Terin shares. At Purpose House, they develop transition plans that include commitments to meetings, sponsor check-ins, and a solid community network to prevent relapse

## Guiding Alumni with Integrity

Terin's most important advice? "Get out into the field as much as humanly possible." It's not enough to rely on websites or word-of-mouth. Touring homes, talking with house managers, checking in with current residents, and connecting with alumni who've been through the program offer the clearest picture of whether a sober living home is safe, ethical, and effective."

"There's a saying in recovery: 'We are but trusted servants—we do not govern.' That's how we approach it at Purpose House. We support our residents, hold them accountable, and stay consistent. If everyone knows the expectations and feels supported, recovery is possible," Terin shares.

Alumni professionals are not just referral sources, they are stewards of recovery capital. The work you do in vetting sober living programs is essential to ensuring that alumni have the safest possible transition into independent recovery.

## Creating a Network of Safe Options

When you're recommending sober living, remember: You're not just finding someone a bed. You're helping them find a community, a structure, and a purpose. From shelter to sanctuary, that's the shift ethical sober living should represent.

If you'd like to learn more about Purpose House or Terin's consulting services for sober living operators, visit [purposehousesoberliving.com](https://purposehousesoberliving.com).

## About TPAS

Treatment Professionals in Alumni Services (TPAS) is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to advancing the field of alumni engagement in behavioral health. TPAS supports programs and professionals in building strong, sustainable alumni communities that foster long-term recovery and connection. Through education, collaboration, and resources, TPAS empowers members to develop impactful alumni services that extend care beyond treatment. Learn more at [www.tpas.org](https://www.tpas.org).