



# How It Works: Recovering Citizens in Post-Welfare Philadelphia

*Robert P. Fairbanks*

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Of the some sixty thousand vacant properties in Philadelphia, half of them are abandoned row houses. Taken as a whole, these derelict homes symbolize the city's plight in the wake of industrial decline. But a closer look reveals a remarkable new phenomenon—street-level entrepreneurs repurposing hundreds of these empty houses as facilities for recovering addicts and alcoholics. *How It Works* is a compelling study of this recovery house movement and its place in the new urban order wrought by welfare reform.

To find out what life is like in these recovery houses, Robert P. Fairbanks II goes inside one particular home in the Kensington neighborhood. Operating without a license and unregulated by any government office, the recovery house provides food, shelter, company, and a bracing self-help philosophy to addicts in an area saturated with drugs and devastated by poverty. From this starkly vivid close-up, Fairbanks widens his lens to reveal the intricate relationships the recovery houses have forged with public welfare, the formal drug treatment sector, criminal justice institutions, and the local government.

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