



Key Notes

A publication addressing long-term homelessness in Minnesota

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Inaugural Advisory Council Meeting

By Rochelle Rubin, Communications Director, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency

One year after the creation of Minnesota's business plan to end long-term homelessness, more than 75 people gathered for the inaugural meeting of the Advisory Council charged with providing guidance on implementation of that plan. On Monday, April 18th at Perspectives Family Center in St. Louis Park, Governor Pawlenty addressed Council members and others, focusing his remarks on the Administration's commitment to advancing the goal which he said is achievable using approaches shown to be successful -- such as supportive housing. The Governor also marked the progress achieved to date under the plan and celebrated the collaborative efforts of numerous organizations and individuals. By the end of 2004, 274 new housing opportunities throughout the state targeted to serve the long-term homeless were created under the plan, exceeding the plan's stated goal of 200 new



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Perspectives Supportive Housing Program

By Jeannie Seeley-Smith, Executive Director, Perspectives, Inc.

Perspectives, Inc. is a private, nonprofit, multi-program human service agency whose mission is: To improve the quality of life for homeless and at risk families and children. To that end, we provide a variety of programs that promote self-sufficiency through services that strengthen and nurture the family. These programs consist of: a comprehensive supportive housing program for homeless/recovering women and their children, an extended day learning program for homeless, at-risk and special needs children, in-home mentoring for at-risk Deaf parents, supervised visitation for non-custodial parents and an extensive summer program for our target population of children.

Perspectives Family Center is an attractive family-friendly, 22,000 square foot building that houses our children and parent education programs. Our center is complete with

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One Year Later

By Laura Kadwell, Director for Ending Long-Term Homelessness in Minnesota

It has been one year since the Working Group on Long-Term Homelessness finalized and presented to the Legislature its report Ending Long-Term Homelessness in Minnesota. The product of hundreds of hours of research, analysis, meetings and consultations by and among public, private and nonprofit partners, the report presents a detailed business and financing plan for ending long-term homelessness in our state. (For a copy of the report, go to www.mhfa.state.mn.us/multifamily/LTH.htm). One year later, where are we in implementing the recommendations of the Working Group?

- Our goal was to develop 200 additional housing opportunities in 2004. We exceeded this goal: 270 units are funded and are in process of development. Of these, 115 units are new construction or acquisition and rehabilitation. 136 units will receive rental assistance or operating

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Perspectives

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reception areas, offices, visitation rooms, classrooms, a multi-purpose room, group rooms, a large training room, Family Resource Room and a spectacular children's commercial/learning kitchen/classroom known as Kids Cafe. Just down the road from our Family Center is Louisiana Court, a St. Louis Park affordable housing neighborhood. It is here that Perspectives purchased two apartment buildings in 1992 for the purpose of launching our Supportive Housing Program. Since that beginning, we have acquired three additional buildings, and have housed over 2,500 homeless/recovering women and children. Today, Perspectives is the largest supportive housing program in Minnesota, offering both transitional and permanent housing to 52 mothers and over 100 children.



Needless to say, the road to Perspectives for our residents is paved with one failure after another. Most of the women are under 35 years of age. Yet, it is rare to find a woman entering our program who has not been through substance abuse treatment at least a couple of times -- the average is four -- with some having gone as many as ten. "This is my last chance to make it" are often the words we hear at the interview. But, those words are not spoken as a battle cry - they are weak and filled with hopelessness. Such is the tragic story of the women we serve in our supportive housing program. But even more tragic is the story of their children.

Because Perspectives' staff has extensive experience working with homeless and chemically dependent women and their children, we are able to build a bridge between hopelessness and a life that can be productive and contributing. With extensive case management, life skills training, a comprehensive children's program and a supportive, sober community, our residents begin to visualize a productive, healthy future -- a future which they can contribute to, a future they can help to create; but even more importantly, a future that holds promise for their children.

We are proud of their accomplishments and the program's goal, which is to assist the families in their reentry to social and economic mainstream. Over 65% of the families we serve do so within 2 years.

Our residents can speak to the program far better than we can. In closing, we share one of their "good-bye" letters:

Dear Perspectives,

When I got my keys to my apartment, I was very afraid. I wasn't sure if I could do this! I put my keys in the door and walked in and looked around. I asked myself, "Is this for real!" As I looked further, I noticed every thing I needed to get started in an apartment was there - even toilet paper. I sat down and cried.

Perspectives gave me hope and a key to a new life if I chose to use it, which I have to this very day. I am now in permanent housing. Through the time living at Perspectives, I've learned how to be a good parent to my children and I've learned to be good to myself. I've learned to appreciate life and all it has and offers me.

Anna S.

Key Notes is published by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency. Its purpose is to communicate news of interest to the housing community and to provide a resource to those interested in long-term homelessness. If you have any comments/suggestions, please call Rochelle Rubin at 651-297-3566. This publication is also posted on the MHFA website at www.mhfa.state.mn.us

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Long-Term Homelessness: The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency Perspective

By Tim Marx, Commissioner, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency

Minnesota has the highest homeownership rate in the nation at nearly 77 percent, and the second lowest percentage of households of any state (8 percent) which confront "critical" housing needs by paying 50 percent or more for housing. This has been accomplished by a strong and vibrant private sector, and by a long-term "grand alliance" of federal, state and local government, philanthropy and faith communities. In spite of this record, homelessness persists in Minnesota, and is particularly persistent for those who are frequently homeless or experience it for long periods of time-our long-term homeless citizens.

The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) is the state's affordable housing bank. We invest, from a variety of sources, about \$1 billion each biennium in affordable housing throughout the state. We seek a financial return, albeit below market, on most of our housing investments to sustain our ability to invest in future affordable housing. Over the last several years, we and other partners have increased our investments in supportive housing for the homeless. Investments in housing for the homeless, however, do not provide a financial return to the MHFA. We know, though, that our investments do generate a return. There is a financial return to other units of government because those in supportive housing use fewer expensive "crisis" services-shelters, hospitals, jails-and can

become productive, taxpaying citizens. There are also significant social returns-people can regain hope, rejoin families and contribute to their communities.

We have also learned that housing the long-term homeless requires much more than housing in order for the housing to be successful long-term. Supportive services are required to address the issues which have prevented housing stability in the past. To be successfully implemented, the business plan to end long-term homelessness requires the appropriate housing and service "mix". This is why it is so important that we "housers" continue to build strong collaborative partnerships with government units, agencies and other organizations with human service, corrections, and similar expertise and resources.

The MHFA welcomes the opportunity to be a major investor in and supporter of the state's business plan to end long-term homelessness. It is time to build on our past efforts, bring them to scale and solve this complex social problem in a business like way. We know it will take persistence, and there will be many obstacles and adjustments required along the way. There is no doubt, however, that this is the right goal to pursue and now is the time to pursue it to demonstrate Minnesota's commitment to common sense and compassion.

Minnesota Department of Human Services Update: Breaking Down the Silos-One Brick at a Time

By Janel Bush, Community Living Supports Division Director, Minnesota Department of Human Services

There is little doubt that Department of Human Services (DHS) participation in the Working Group to End Long-term Homelessness and the development of the Business Plan has changed how many at DHS perceive this important issue. The whole process has been a catalyst for staff to review existing service programs to see what can be done to better serve the long-term homeless. The result has been the development of DHS-sponsored legislation in a variety of program areas to increase the flexibility of service resources to serve individuals and families experiencing long-term homelessness. Many different areas of DHS have been involved. They include Community Living Supports, Mental Health, Chemical Health, Medicaid, and the Office of Economic Opportunity.

We look forward to working with the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) to identify ongoing opportunities for collaboration and to create new policy, program, and funding strategies to meet our shared goals. The focus on the neediest of the homeless has created momentum that carries over into the broader issue of supportive housing for the people DHS serves. Next steps will include identifying other resources that can be coordinated with housing development, best practices, and the review of consumer protections for recipients of supportive housing and services.

Kadwell

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subsidies. The remaining 19 are units in mixed income developments. This is quite an accomplishment for our first year of implementation!

- We have reached a number of secondary goals: e.g., hiring a director, capitalizing an Innovations Fund through which private donors can support the business plan, setting aside 25% of the state's tax credits to develop housing for households experiencing homelessness.

- The Governor's budget for 2006-07 includes funding for capital, operating and service costs needed to develop supportive housing for the population we serve. On April 11, the Governor signed the bonding bill, securing \$12 million for capital costs. \$4 million for the Housing Trust Fund (primarily for rental assistance) and \$10 million for services are still moving through the Legislature.

Students are visiting shelters; writers are educating the public. Folks of all kinds -- providers, clergy, builders -- are asking what they can do to help. The word is out that we -- all of us working together -- are about the business of ending this scourge in our community; and the word has resonated with the people.

Our goals for 2005 are even more challenging:

- We need to refine the plan to another level of detail on what kinds of housing are needed in various communities around the state. This will require more attention to long-term homelessness at the local and regional levels - and it will require the cooperation of local agencies.
- We need to learn more about the population we are serving so we can design the most appropriate housing and services. Fortunately, many formerly homeless people and service providers are engaged in this initiative and can help in this effort.
- We need to develop a more coordinated process of funding housing and services - one that stays focused on the people we serve while maximizing the contributions - financial and otherwise - of partner agencies.
- We must ensure that we maintain sufficient shelter space to keep people safe while they await permanent supportive housing.
- And we must develop 400 new housing opportunities despite cutbacks in the Section 8 program.

Our goals are daunting; they are not impossible. The housing community is full of smart, energetic, caring, generous people ready to contribute to the effort. We will work together to harness these gifts and use them to reach the goal we share: ending homelessness in Minnesota.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

Minnesota Department of Corrections Update

By Joan Fabian, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Corrections

The Department of Corrections has a large stake in the effort to end long-term homelessness. Each year, thousands of offenders leave prison and return to our communities. As they begin rebuilding their lives and attempt to secure housing, offenders often encounter significant barriers. The reality is, having a place to live is often times the critical difference between offenders who successfully re-enter society and ones who commit another crime and end up back in prison. Offender housing is an essential public safety issue that affects every Minnesotan.

When offenders have a stable, verifiable residence, law enforcement and corrections agents can effectively supervise and monitor their activities. This increases public safety, while at the same time decreases the likelihood offenders will commit additional crimes. The offenders are also able to find and maintain jobs, pay taxes, complete treatment plans, and develop positive support systems.

In contrast, offenders who cannot gain access to housing often sleep in cars or under bridges, use emergency housing along with more vulnerable populations, cohabitate with other felons in substandard housing or live a vagrant lifestyle. The path to a continued criminal lifestyle is highly likely.

As a state, we have two choices: Allow offenders to be homeless or subject to substandard housing conditions, which results in increased public safety risk and increased costs to taxpayers as these men and women go in and out of jails and prisons; or create reasonable pathways for offenders to find suitable housing and corresponding support services so they can gain employment, stability and self-sufficiency.

The importance of this issue calls for continued collaboration between the Department of Corrections and a variety of stakeholders. We look forward to working with our partners in both the private and public sectors to create innovative solutions to end long-term homelessness.

Spotlight: Richard Amos, St. Stephen's Housing Services Manager

By Rochelle Rubin, Communications Director, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency

Richard Amos does not strike you as a man who has had personal experience with homelessness. Nor does he immediately strike you as someone who has faced and overcome numerous challenges in life. But, at 50 years old, Richard Amos is serious, thoughtful and generous of heart. Most importantly, he is wise beyond his years.

Through his eleven years with St. Stephen's Housing Services, Richard has battled a variety of daily challenges with his clients. As Manager of Housing Services, his goal is to provide a stable environment through supportive housing to meet those challenges - some minor problems, some major catastrophes, but each putting at risk the newfound stability of his clients. Defining Richard's roles and activities as a case manager is nearly impossible; even his daily transactions defy description. He is at the same time a counselor, mentor, coach, teacher, disciplinarian and friend, helping those who face seemingly insurmountable barriers to navigate the system. He believes that "people are worth saving," and attempts to help his clientele let go of the thoughts that sabotage their lives. He helps them discover the freedom to believe new thoughts that allow them to succeed. He seeks to "constantly present opportunities to succeed or to learn through the experience."

St. Stephen's Housing Services is one of six programs that comprise St. Stephen's Human Services, an organization whose mission it is to end homelessness through effective programs, partnerships and advocacy. In addition to housing, St. Stephen's has an emergency shelter, welfare-to-work program, Free Store, the Alliance of the Streets and Kateri Residence for American Indian women in recovery.

The housing program that Richard manages assists families and individuals who are homeless and residing in a Hennepin County funded shelter, including those with histories of eviction, incarceration or domestic abuse, or recovering from substance abuse. They work to rapidly rehouse those with "impediments" to finding or maintaining housing and ensure that supports are in place to help people at risk sustain their housing and achieve stability. St. Stephen's places about 200 families and 180 adults without children into housing each year. The agency manages five transitional and permanent homes for ex-offenders and arrange apartment rentals in privately owned houses to high-risk people.

The outcomes of St. Stephen's housing first strategies speak for themselves: 75% of those placed in housing remain stably housed after six months, and 70% remain stably

housed after eight months; ninety percent are employed. Using funds from the state Housing Finance Agency's Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, foundation grants and private donors, St. Stephen's Housing Services program offers assistance and landlord relations in a variety of ways, including:



- providing case management for six months to a year linking families to needed community services;
- facilitating landlord-tenant relationships to help resolve crises that threaten housing stability;
- offering guarantees for security deposits and last month's rent;
- absorbing some costs of unsuccessful housing placement and expenses not covered by funders' contracts such as bus passes, birth certificates, work shoes and gas; and
- making regular home visits to tenants' apartments.

With his daughter as his inspiration, Richard was determined to go down the right track after leaving prison -- first finding housing and employment and, later, going to college. He notes that when you listen to clients, they listen to you. He understands through experience that when you have little, each accomplishment and possession becomes valuable, providing incentive to strive for more. His drive and motivation to see his clients succeed is fed by his love of working with this clientele and seeing the children's faces when they see their rooms in their new apartments.

I accompanied Richard on a recent client home visit where he questioned his client firmly yet caringly about his reason for being at home instead of work. Richard recounts the story of a young client who was so surprised that anyone cared enough to bring him soup while he was under the weather, that the following weeks brought a remarkable change in attitude and positive behavior. Sometimes, Richard explains, it's as simple as showing his clients that someone is there for them.

According to Richard, we are all "practicing living," and he is happy to serve as a role model -- as others did for him -- teaching others how to "build muscles on the inside" to help them face and overcome life's challenges rather than giving up. He strives to persevere toward the goals he sets for himself, and asks clients who live in survival mode to start planning their lives and successful futures.

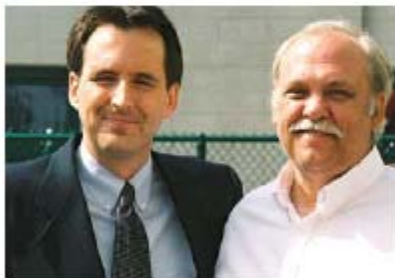
Inaugural

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housing opportunities. The Governor characterized the long-term homeless problem as a symptom of an underlying series of pathologies. He reiterated his Administration's determination to meet and exceed our goals. Advisory Council members represent leaders in the business, housing, social services and nonprofit/philanthropic sectors, as well as high level elected officials including Minneapolis Mayor Rybak, St. Paul Mayor Kelly and Duluth Mayor Bergson.

Speaker Charles Jensen recounted his personal journey through more than 12 years of "striking out" - experiencing homelessness and suffering from misdiagnosed mental

illness -- to a clean, stable "life worth living." He recited statistics about the high percentage of the long-term homeless population experience chemical dependency and mental illness, stating "I am that statistic," and describing how his life changed course after finding housing with support services he so desperately needed. Advisory Council co-chairs Human Services Commissioner Kevin Goodno, Corrections Commissioner Fabian and Housing Finance Commissioner Marx, and Director of Ending Long-Term Homelessness Laura Kadwell led discussion of the Council's work in the coming months to further advance the goal.



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