

openhouse

a news update from st. stephen's human services SPRING 2010

SACRIFICE

Money's tight. The state is broke and another legislative session has begun with talk of more cuts.

When I hear older folks talk about times in the past when we have struggled as a community, their stories are often about shared sacrifice and the sense that people went through the hard times together.

Does it feel to you like we are all in this together?

I am still searching for a middle or upper income household in our state that can tell me they really felt they had to sacrifice a great deal because of the state budget cuts last year. The majority of spending cuts were aimed at the most destitute and disabled Minnesotans. Why do poor people end



Mikkel Beckmen, Executive Director

up sacrificing the most during hard times?

When I was younger I knew that some of the taxes I paid went to far-off places in the state. My taxed earnings were supporting folks on the iron range, farmers in southern Minnesota, and new roads and sewers to develop suburbs. In turn, I also knew that other Minnesotans were sending some of their hard-earned money to my neighborhood to

help pay for programs for kids and seniors and other things and that this arrangement worked well.

That era is over; we seem to want to wash our hands of each other.

Human beings care about things and people they know. Because we are so divided by income, race, and access to opportunity it is rare that the poorest people come into daily contact with the rest of us. One of St. Stephen's roles is to bring people together so that people can see the realities, the hows and whys of homelessness rather than the myths we all develop about it.

We will only end homelessness when the non-poor and non-homeless act in solidarity with the poor and homeless.

One positive example of this has been our shared efforts with homeless folks to try and save General Assistance Medical Care. Last week hundreds came together--housed and homeless,

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On Being Homeless A photo essay by William



William recently found himself out of work and homeless. He's looking for permanent work, but in the meantime takes temp jobs when he can get them. William is a writer and an artist. As a way of making sense of his situation he created this photo essay about homelessness.

The photo quality is not always good since he used his cell phone camera, but we think the images and his poetry speak volumes nevertheless.

Prayer

*Lord make me an instrument
of thy peace; Where there's
hatred, let me sow love;
where there's injury, pardon;
where there's doubt, Faith;
where there's darkness, light;
& where there's sadness, joy.
Amen.*



Sleeping between services at the Salvation Army chapel

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St. Stephen's Human Services

Our Programs

Alliance of the Streets

providing essential resources, including the *Handbook of the Streets*, for people experiencing homelessness

Emergency Shelter providing safe & sober harbor, advocacy, housing & employment support for adult men

Employment & Family

Services assisting parents transitioning from welfare to permanent employment

Free Store offering clothing and small household goods

Housing Services securing permanent housing for homeless families & adults

Human Rights Program

engaging people experiencing homelessness and their supporters in systemic change

Kateri Residence housing & supporting American Indian women recovering from chemical dependency

Programs to End Long-term

Homelessness working intensively with individuals or families who have been homeless long-term

Street Outreach securing housing and other services for individuals living outside

zAmya Theater Project

offering people the opportunity to share experiences of home and homelessness through theater

For questions about this newsletter or St. Stephen's Human Services, please contact:

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St. Stephen's never sells or shares the contact information of its supporters.



Reaching Out to You

At the end of January St. Stephen's Housing Services Director, Richard Amos, was invited by U.S. Representatives Keith Ellison and Maxine Waters to testify to congress on foreclosure and homelessness. This was a great opportunity to bring the issue of homelessness—and the people suffering it—home to the housed community.

Building bridges between people with homes and people without is a part of St. Stephen's Human Services' mission. Through organizing on the streets and in the legislature, educational programs for school and community groups, theater productions that entertain and enlighten the public, and outreach to those living outdoors and the folks who encounter them, St. Stephen's makes connections between real people in real time.

Another outreach effort is St. Stephen's **zAmya Theater Project**,



Formerly homeless educators speak at a middle school

which engages housed and homeless actors to perform plays about homelessness and poverty. Over 800 people attended workshops or performances last fall! In a post-show survey one viewer wrote, "I thought people who were homeless were minorities and men. I had no idea that there were children and women homeless as well." Watch this space for news of upcoming zAmya shows.



St. Stephen's zAmya Theater performance

St. Stephen's Human Rights Program offers many ways for non-homeless folks to learn about homelessness. The **A Day in the Life** opportunity brings interested people into community venues to meet with people experiencing homelessness and learn from them. Juve Meza, a participant with a group from Augsburg College blogged about his experience: "We saw where people sleep at a shelter. On the walls in this cold room are numbers on blue Scotch

tape signaling where mats go. Someone said, 'Every number is a body.'"

Staff also conduct **Shelter Tours** to educate community members about the conditions that people who have lost their homes find themselves in.

St. Stephen's **Speakers Bureau** offers speakers with specialties in diverse areas of the issue to share

their knowledge and stories.

In the end, Juve Meza blogged that he took away from *A Day in the Life* something that we could all do well to remember, the idea that "every person we encounter is an educator, that we learn from them and that they might learn from us."

Stimulus Funding Prevents Homelessness

The recent stimulus bill has funded a timely partnership between St. Stephen's Human Services and Hennepin County Legal Aid to prevent renters from becoming homeless due to landlord foreclosure.

A myriad of issues face renters whose buildings or homes are being foreclosed. Some property owners alert tenants about impending foreclosure, but others have taken advantage of confused and vulnerable renters.

Mary and her husband and four children have had a rough several months. There has been significant family illness as well as job loss. Last fall with the help of County Emergency Assistance they moved into what they thought was stable housing and started to get back on their feet. But as the temperature dropped outside, it dropped inside their apartment as well.

Although the property owner continued to demand rent, the second floor unit was never heated. By mid-January, a whirlwind of inspectors and property condemnations led Mary to Legal Aid and St. Stephen's, but not until after she had paid rent and a late fee to the landlord who had never notified her that the property was in foreclosure. Legal Aid obtained a deadline extension from the bank to give St. Stephen's time to help the family find a new apartment and avoid homelessness.

Best of all, the heat was turned on! Mary gave the Housing Inspector a big hug and her young son ran over with play money from a board game to "help pay for the heat".



Mary's son wanted to help pay the heat bill

St. Stephen's is working on securing a new apartment for Mary's family in March.

This stimulus-inspired program has prevented homelessness for 59 individuals in rental foreclosure crisis so far. It is funded through 2011.

"Sacrifice" continued from page 1

poor and comfortable--to testify in an effort to save health care for the poorest and sickest Minnesotans.

I will leave you with the testimony of a young man who is sleeping under a bridge. He is a Iraq war veteran who knows a lot about sacrifice and whose words remind us of the sacrifices homeless people make in our collective life as Minnesotans.

"Good afternoon Mister Chair and Committee Members. This is not easy for me but it is important to me to tell you why it's critical that you pass this legislation to save General Assistance Medical Care. A lot of attention is paid to soldiers returning from Iraq. But after the returning home ceremonies, another battle can

begin. I joined the Minnesota National Guard at 18; I'm now 26. In my first tour in Iraq, I was in the Red Bull infantry division, 1st Brigade combat team. I ended up being there one year and 6 months after the tour was extended. I came home, my mother passed away, I was honorably discharged. A short time later, I enlisted in the regular Army. I was 39 Bravo, a military police officer. We deployed to Bagdad for another 12 months. The war was very difficult for me and everybody. I saw things people shouldn't see. I recently started using GAMC to help me with health problems that were a result of the war and trauma I've been through. Having it meant I had my three medicines a day. It's been hard for me to take help but easy access has

meant I did. When a person doesn't have housing, survival skills kick in. Sleeping outside is sometimes the last resort taken. I'm able to stay dry, but winter has been hard. For some, the Stone Arch is a bridge, for others, it's a roof. I was a good soldier. There are a lot of people who just kind of flunk out of it. It was difficult. I imagine this is difficult for you in a different way. We both know what it's like to serve our country and make decisions we may not agree with in order to protect Americans. Maybe you can overcome your despair about what to do by knowing that you are helping us overcome ours. Thank you for supporting this legislation."

KATERI RESIDENCE:

It is no secret that alcohol and addiction have ravaged Native American society. The history of addiction stretches back to early traders and the U.S. Infantry plying Native Americans with liquor to ensure compliance. Today Native Americans have an alcoholism rate six times the national average. One in ten Native American deaths is alcohol-related. As many as 40% of adult Native American women meet the criteria for alcohol dependency and liver disease/cirrhosis is their second leading cause of death.

Native Americans are also over-represented in the homeless population. They are about one percent of the population in Hennepin County, yet seven percent of the county's homeless population. 25% of Native Americans live below the poverty line in America.

Enter Kateri Residence, St. Stephen's housing program for Native American women. Kateri was founded in 1973 as St. Stephen's earliest effort to address neighborhood concerns, in this case, the many homeless and addicted Native American women in the area.

Sober Transitional Housing

At an unassuming four-plex in south Minneapolis, lives change. Women come to Kateri Residence with few options. They leave with a new confidence, several months of sobriety, and a support network. Kateri Residence provides transitional housing for fourteen women at a time and their children.

Kateri works for many reasons: it recognizes the unique challenges of a culture that has known profound suffering; it responds to common issues faced by



A resident and her daughter

chemically-dependent women such as lack of self-esteem, domestic abuse, and loss of parental rights; while Kateri is not a formal treatment program, it provides an environment, resources, and support for women in recovery; and, as in all of St. Stephen's programs, our strong relationships with private-market landlords enable women to access housing when they're ready.

What makes Kateri stand out from other programs is its focus on Native American culture in addition to conventional recovery strategies. Cultural activities include sage burning, talking circles led by Native American elder women, and visits to sweat lodges or powwow's. "The cultural pieces," says Kateri's Director Kate Bendel, "give women who may be searching for meaning or grounding a sense of identity as well as connection to something larger."

Alumnae program

The Alumnae Program ensures that women leaving Kateri maintain their sobriety

and housing rather than relapse with the loss of Kateri's hands-on support. A coordinator assists alumnae in finding housing, offers one-on-one support, and facilitates alumnae-specific meetings, all to ensure that women feel they are still supported and have access to resources.

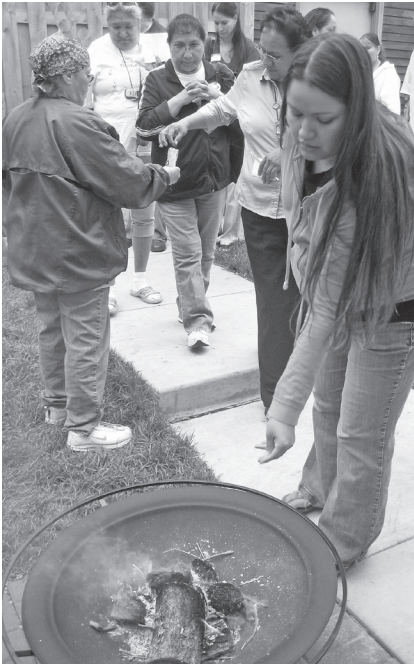
Housing First

Last fall Kateri launched a Housing First effort for Native Americans who have been long-term homeless. Housing First is a "harm reduction" strategy, meaning that for some individuals, asking them to immediately abstain from drinking or other unhealthy behaviors is unrealistic, so measures are taken to decrease the harm they are causing themselves, in this case by getting them in stable housing where they can then address their issues. Our goal for Native America families was to locate and house fourteen families within a year; as evidence of the huge need, fourteen families were housed within just the first three months. Kateri's Housing First for single Native American adults has already filled ten of its fifteen slots.



Potato sack race for kids of staff and residents

HOUSING THAT HEALS



Blessing Kateri with burning tobacco

All of these clients, families and singles, will receive ongoing housing subsidies and intensive case management to grow increasingly stable and healthy.

The Answer is Always Yes

“One of Kateri’s philosophies, Kate Bendel says, “is that we never tell people they will never succeed. Many, many women fail the first time, disappear for a month or a year, and then ask if they can try again. The answer is always yes. We try to convey our strong belief that this will be the time they make it.”

CASE NOTES

A sampling of staff case notes show the scope of challenges and successes for Kateri participants.

E. was living in a tent outside when St. Stephen’s Outreach referred her to Kateri. She was reluctant to access any program that would part her from her dog. We facilitated foster care for the dog while client was in transition and she and her dog are now happily housed together.

After ten prior unsuccessful discharges from treatment programs, G.M. successfully graduated treatment in December 2009!

K.T. was forced by the courts to transfer custody of her children to their physically abusive father, despite both Child Protection and Kateri advocating against this. The children continue to report abuse by their father and have marks on their bodies. Kateri continues to advocate for mother and children.

R.R. makes traditional beaded jewelry. She is very talented; we’re encouraging her to consider selling her jewelry at local venues.

We helped G.B., a chronic user who is now in recovery, find an apartment. She is 45 years old and this is the first time she’s had an apartment of her own.

Concerned that program alum, J., is struggling with stress because she has no time for herself with busing back

and forth to support groups and school and caring for her children by herself. We facilitated a babysitting exchange between J and another alum mom and both moms and the kids are thriving under this arrangement.

S.L. came to us from prison. She has immersed herself in learning coping skills to deal with the stress and grief that leads to drinking and subsequent criminal behavior. She seems committed to change.

H. L. has maintained her sobriety for three years and obtained a job in the social service field helping others in similar circumstances change their lives. Sadly, her daughter is chemically-dependent, so H.L. is raising her two grandchildren to “break the cycle.”

M.M. is a young mother who came to Kateri Residence six months pregnant, homeless and having had no prenatal care. We started prenatal care immediately and her baby boy was born healthy.

After years of chemical and alcohol abuse and sleeping under a bridge near downtown, a family of nine has moved into housing and started family counseling for emotional, physical and mental abuse. Additionally, a traditional healing called the Medicine Wheel, which identifies certain qualities of growth corresponding to the four directions, has led to them remaining sober for six months so far.

CHEROKEE LEGEND

A Native American elder described her inner struggles: “Inside of me there are two wolves. One wolf is evil--he is anger, envy, greed, addiction, dishonesty, and ego. The other wolf is good--he is kindness, humility, generosity, truth, and compassion. The mean wolf fights the good wolf all the time.” When asked which wolf wins, she reflected for a moment and replied, “The one I feed.”

WINTER 2009...SOME WARMTH AMID THE COLD



Hennepin County Commissioner Gail Dorfman visited St. Stephen's "eternal waiting line", created in solidarity with HCMC to protest the cutting of General Assistance Medical Care.



On behalf of Our Lady of Grace Church D'Anne Briggs dropped off gifts of gloves, socks and more so guests in our shelter would have something to open on Christmas morning.



Will and his family, the owners of Hungry Jack Outfitters on the Gunflint Trail donated a dozen sleeping bags for homeless people sleeping outside and unready to access shelter or housing.



Alliance of the Streets welcomed several hundred folks to its Thanksgiving Meal drop-in.



St. Stephen's and our partners remembered people who died while homeless in 2009 with a silent march and memorial service.



A delegation from China visited St. Stephen's to learn how nonprofits work with government agencies on community concerns.

The Waiting Game

*A body in motion stays
in motion...*

*A body at rest stays
at rest...*

Explain complacency?



Homeless awaiting entrance to a shelter

Sleeping Beauties

*If I dream a little dream
I'd have my own private
Idaho, my 40 acres and a
mule, a little solidarity--*

*"Hey Mack, you sleeping
here?" "LIGHTS OUT
LADIES!!"*

*--Damn, what was I
dreaming about again?*



Bedtime at a downtown shelter

Hope

*The Air Beneath my feet is
like the air I breathe;
Slow, whimsical, & tired.*



Early morning on the shelter steps

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WISH LIST!

→ URGENT NEEDS: ←

STREET OUTREACH VAN

Our trusty van has finally given up the ghost. Donated to St. Stephen's in 1998, this van has been invaluable for moving people and their belongings into new housing and most recently for seeking out people living outside and helping them into warm shelter. Are there any angels out there with a van or SUV to donate to a good cause? Contact: Mikkel Beckmen 612-870-2278 if you can help.

UMBRELLA STROLLERS

The families we work with often find large strollers unwieldy to get on and off of public transportation. While we welcome any donated strollers, we would be thrilled to have lightweight umbrella strollers—new or used—to help out our young families. Please bring to 2211 Clinton Ave, front door
8:30 to 5:00 M-F

OTHER NEEDS

*Please bring to 2211 Clinton Ave, front door
8:30 to 5:00 M-F*

Towels, pillows, sheets, blankets
Diapers & baby wipes
Toddler potty seats
A picnic table or yard furniture
Alarm clocks
Dishes, silverware, pots & pans
Microwaves
Cleaning supplies
Bus tokens or passes

ending homelessness

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In solidarity with homeless and low-income people who will lose their healthcare coverage in Minnesota this spring, supporters rallied at the State Capitol holding their images from video testimonies taken by St. Stephen's. Please see ststephensmpls.org for more information.