

# openhouse

a news update from st. stephen's human services FALL 2011

## THRESHOLDS



Mikkel Beckmen, Executive Director

*What is required of us,  
Companions, is the recognition of  
the frontiers across this history,  
and to take heart: to cross over.*

—Archibald MacLeish

One year ago we launched our Chemical Health Housing Program, part of our effort to end long-term homelessness. This program focuses on folks whose homelessness is connected to long-term drug or alcohol use. We are seeing the amazing impact that supportive housing has on the community. Spending on local tax-supported services decreases. Chemical use decreases. Lives change. It all begins with our first task: helping people cross over the threshold from the streets into a home of their own.

There are many ways to think about thresholds. The threshold is a boundary marking the passage from one place into another, often very different, place. It is the marker

between home and outside and between belonging and not-belonging. We move across thresholds all day long, in and out of houses, offices, stores.

There are also spiritual thresholds, often considered sacred places of transition. These are never easy, but always important markers between what was and what is to come.

When people cross the threshold at St. Stephen's they enter a space that is defined by specific values.

- All people will be treated with dignity and respect.
- A belief that each person has the ability to realize his or her own success.

*continued on page 7*

## There's a Better Life

*Andramona is a participant in St. Stephen's Program to End Long-term Homelessness. She has been in her apartment for nine months.*

I've been an addict since I was nine years old. I managed to make it through high school, went to college, even, but then I quit because partying was more important to me. I got married, had two children, but there was always addiction. My family said, "What are you doing?" I needed

to run away. I wanted to keep them safe from me. My mother raised my girls. I got in trouble for drugs, went to prison. My family said, "At least we know you're safe."

I was homeless off and on, had jobs, lost jobs. I met a couple of ex-addicts who told me, "There's a better life for you." When you're in addiction you don't want to hear that, but even on the streets God puts good people in your way. I decided I would try.

*continued on page 7*



Andramona

## St. Stephen's Human Services

### Housing

Housing opportunities for individual adults and families, including Kateri Residence for Native American women, our Rapid Exit partnership helping families and singles move quickly out of shelters, supportive housing in our Long-Term Homeless program, and Homeless Prevention for people in danger of losing their housing.

### Employment

Employment support for single adults staying in south Minneapolis shelters as well as families leaving the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

### Community Education & Street Outreach

Educational opportunities for the housed community to promote a greater understanding of homelessness, including through our zAmya Theater Project and A Day in the Life Program. For people living without shelter, and the community members concerned for them, we provide on-the-spot outreach and resources, including The Handbook of the Streets.

### Shelter & Emergency Services

Shelter and advocacy for adult men in our Shelter. Additional emergency assistance is available to the community, such as clothing through our Free Store, help obtaining birth certificates, and representative payee service.

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

Margaret Miles  
Director of Development  
612-870-2276  
mmiles@ststephensmpls.org

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



## The Gift of Sustenance

The best volunteers are those who give of their time according to their talents and passions. We are lucky at St. Stephen's to have so many of those volunteers. Minneapolis Central Church of Christ and Ruth's Chris Steak House are two such

groups that provide meals for the men staying in our shelter.

Bettie Crowe is a leader for the Central Church of Christ volunteer group. She says the mission of St. Stephen's is near to her heart, as a relative of hers experienced homelessness. Not only is she passionate about ending homelessness, but, she says, "Our church's mission is to do what glorifies God and we feel we accomplish this by working with St. Stephen's."

The group from the Central Church of Christ is well-loved for cooking meals specifically requested by shelter guests—and then some. If the men ask for meatloaf, they get home-made meatloaf, a salad, mashed potatoes, fresh green beans and éclairs. Bettie says shelter guests express their gratitude by helping unload the food and supplies before and after meals.

Ruth's Chris Steak House has been serving meals for two years. General Manager Gena Cadman and employee Jake Barnett first learned about St. Stephen's at Project Homeless Connect. They felt that serving meals would be a great opportunity to achieve one of the



Central Church of Christ serving dinner in the Shelter.



Jake Barnett and Gena Cadman of Ruth's Chris Steakhouse downtown Minneapolis.

company's core values of giving back to the local community.

Gena has found that the men are extremely kind and grateful for the meals they receive. "Being in the shelter is an important experience. Every single time [we serve meals] there is at least one great thing that happens. It will change your day, your week or how you look at things."

If you are interested in serving meals at the shelter, please contact Paul Seifert at 612-874-9292.

# Homelessness As a Natural Disaster

Homelessness typically happens as a series of occurrences, but a single disaster can bring it in the blink of an eye. That's what happened last May when a tornado hit Minneapolis' north side leaving hundreds of people scrambling to replace housing and belongings.

The city estimates that 1,800 rental homes were damaged. While a tornado would devastate any neighborhood, it was a double disaster for one of the city's poorest neighborhoods where renter's insurance was scarce. This type of disaster response isn't what we're used to, but St. Stephen's staff kicked into gear.

The city immediately set up a Project Tornado Relief based on the Project Homeless Connect model. At the request of the city, St. Stephen's Street Outreach helped organize and do intake. They purchased tarps, water, and flashlights for distribution. Because of their experience working with people in crisis, they helped keep everyone's anxiety and frustration levels at a minimum.

Following that event, resources were offered over several days at Farview Park. One day we were proud to hear from a park policeman that he would have expected "nothing less than for St. Stephen's to be there helping."

Shelter staff, which had coordinated a temporary winter shelter on the North side last winter, were enlisted as well. They provided mats and expertise to a church that opened its doors to women with children.

*We were proud to hear from a park policeman that he would have expected "nothing less than for St. Stephen's to be there helping."*



Monica Nilsson of Street Outreach speaks at a luncheon on behalf of client, Ed Smith (in the photo she holds). The tornado wiped out power to Ed's building; without an elevator, Ed could not leave the building to attend the luncheon.

electricity and lost all their perishable food. I purchased ice, coolers and non-perishable foods as well as loaner cell phones since the phone lines were also down. Happily, no one was injured."

Hennepin County sheltered one hundred families and estimates that between 200–400 additional families found other shelter or doubled up with others temporarily. Some of these families are now being served

Housing staff had clients in rental properties on the north side who they scrambled to help. Case manager Sparkle Cavanaugh, says, "Three of my families had no

by St. Stephen's Rapid Exit staff to secure housing.

Calls to our Homeless Prevention Program spiked with renters who were on the verge of homelessness due to property condemnation. Funding requires staffer Matt Holen to document the condemnation, but in many cases he was contacted before the city had officially condemned the property. Ever resourceful, Matt headed out with a camera to take photos of missing roofs and tree-crushed buildings in order to help people quickly.

The disaster temporarily side-lined some of St. Stephen's work. But like all of the people know who immediately headed north with chainsaws, food, and blankets: when your neighbor is in trouble, the right thing to do is to jump in and start helping.



# HOMELESS FAMILIES:

A family was evicted from their last apartment for having noisy, unsupervised children. The father has a criminal record and can only find occasional day labor. The mother speaks limited English, but has a full-time job at a fast food restaurant. While the father is struggling with an addiction, he and his wife say they really want to improve their lives. Do you know anyone who will rent them an apartment, give them a chance?

St. Stephen's does.

St. Stephen's helps families move from shelters to homes through Hennepin County's Rapid Exit effort. Rapid Exit is funded through the state's Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program launched in 1993 as an initiative to prevent homelessness when possible or end it quickly when it occurs.

The longer people languish in shelters, the deeper the damage. Relationships become strained under the stress, children suffer anxiety and their schoolwork falters, employed adults must find new ways to get to



Family Rapid Exit Case Managers: Risikat Adesaogun, Brittany Snyder, Sara Wenzel, Audrey Preston, Shari Staples, Margaret Garrett (not pictured: Sue Roedl)

and from work, everyone's mental health reaches its limit.

The Rapid Exit strategy works by quickly assessing the family's or individual's housing barriers to secure appropriate affordable housing with follow-up support. Last year St. Stephen's helped 671 families out of homelessness using this strategy, with 95% of families not returning to the county shelter system.

We would like to say it is through

pure talent that we have such success, but flexible property owners are a major partner. St. Stephen's reputation for intensive case management has created a pool of hundreds of property owners who trust us and the tenants we suggest. In exchange the landlord is guaranteed that rent will be paid and that we will mediate if the tenant is struggling.

High unemployment and a low vacancy rate for rental units in

## Homeless Families in Minnesota: Wilder Research Findings, 2009

### A 19% increase since 2006

Since Wilder's studies began in 1991, children and their parents have been the fastest-growing segment of the homeless. There are 3,900 homeless children with their parents on any given night, and over the course of a year more than 14,000 children experience homelessness in Minnesota.

### Causes of homelessness among families are primarily economic

The combination of high housing costs and low wages puts many families at risk. In 2009, fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Twin Cities area was \$873, but the median monthly total income of homeless parents was only \$532.

### A cycle of intergenerational homelessness

One-third of homeless parents were homeless themselves as children.

# A RAPID RESPONSE

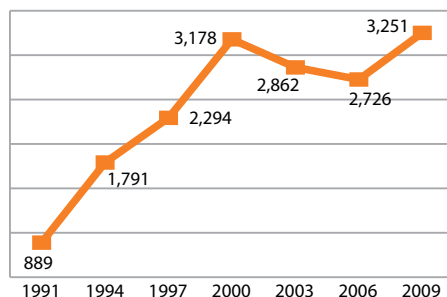
Minneapolis (3.3%) make this work even more challenging. After housing is secured...the real work begins.

St. Stephen's can subsidize part of the family's rent for up to six months, with three months being typical. This gives people a chance to get on their feet, ensure they have employment, and address all factors that lead them to the shelter.

Every family's circumstances are unique so case managers are adept at finding the right set of solutions. As an example of the wide-ranging issues that families bring to homelessness, here is a sampling of stories:

**Jane** fled with her 6 year old from an abusive relationship. She had debt and lacked solid job skills. She is now in school getting her Associate's Degree and working with staff to create a functional budget.

## Homeless Children in Minnesota, 1991–2009



**James and Tanya** became homeless after the May tornado that struck North Minneapolis. James is a felon, but his manufacturing skills secured him a well-paying job from an employer willing to give him a chance. Tanya cares for their two children at home.

**Gina** found herself pregnant and unwelcome in her family's home. She quickly got a cashiering job and

moved into a small apartment with the help of a three-month \$200 rental subsidy from St. Stephen's. Unfortunately Gina lost her baby, but she is now stably housed and enrolled in college for fall semester.

**Grace** is from Ghana and has been in the U.S. for twelve years. She has a limited education, but currently has a part-time job which she hopes to turn into a full-time job to support her three children when her \$250/month subsidy comes to an end.

There are obvious costs to providing this safety net of subsidies and support. Studies repeatedly document that moving people from homelessness to housing saves money. It also preserves family unity and well-being, and there isn't a price you can put on that.

## Terrell & Daughter: One Family's Story

I hate talking about it because I get teary-eyed, but the basic story is that when I had money I always tried to support my mom and sister and brother, but when me and my baby were homeless they didn't help us. I found myself walking the streets all night with my baby, sleeping wherever we could.

Finally I got some money together and I took a bus here from Mississippi to try and make a better life. I say that God led me here because He gave me another chance at life. There isn't anything I feel nostalgic about leaving home—nobody working, just sitting around barbecuing and drink-



ing, your spirit is always down. It was so negative.

The shelter was hard, but, again, I think God put me there to see if I was going to continue on with my journey or was I going to give up.

I got up every morning, did everything I was supposed to do, and then

Brittany [of St. Stephen's] came into my life. She helped me start looking for a job and housing. By the next month I was in my home and had two jobs. She subsidized my rent for eight months. It was supposed to end after six, but she continued it because I was doing well, but then my work hours were cut. I found a second job that I start tomorrow.

This is a good place to be, but I know this is not my last stop. God's got something further up the road for me. I just keep praying and working hard and I try to share my blessings when I can because everyone has it hard sometimes.

# THIS SUMMER AT ST. STEPHEN'S...



Staff and participants in St. Stephen's Chemical Health Long-term Homelessness Program had a celebratory recreation day at the park. All wore shirts reading "Courage to Change."



Members of the zAmya Theater troupe presented at the Pedagogy & Theater of the Oppressed conference in Chicago.



State Senator Chuck Wieger met with Hill Murray students, whose district he represents, as they participated in an in-depth educational project about homelessness with the Human Rights Program.



Senator Al Franken viewed St. Stephen's exhibit "Homeless Is My Address, Not My Name" in the Russell Senate rotunda in Washington, D.C..

Staff, residents, and supporters of Kateri Residence celebrated Kateri's annual Open House with a cleansing sage-burning ritual.



- We will work with people beginning wherever they are on their journey.

Some have suggested that our society is on a cultural threshold, leaving the modern era to cross into a not-yet-defined post-modern world. It certainly feels as though many things are unsettled these days. As the folks we work with know, crossing the threshold into courageous change can feel uncomfortable, as though entering a new world that is not yet completely made.

I don't know what the future holds for any of us or how long these unsettling times will go on. I do know that St. Stephen's will be here to meet the future, doors open and values intact. Thank you, companions, for accompanying us on this journey.

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The day I went to treatment I was staying in a motel. I always used to hate to hear the maid knock and say, "Check out!" But this time I said, "It sure is! I am checking out! I'm not doing this anymore."

I got clean. I saw a psychiatrist and found out I was bipolar. I always knew something was wrong with me: depression, couldn't sit still, from zero to a hundred in a heartbeat. I got on medication, but I'd been in a shelter without a home for six months when Elsa [from St. Stephen's] contacted me. Elsa found me a place, and she helps me stay on track. Just to have someone to call when I need advice is new for me. She has helped me get structure and to know I can do this.

When I was homeless I was very, very ashamed and I would look at people and say, "Why can't that be me going to work in the morning, having a home, being normal?" But addiction just took me away from all that over and over again.

*Andramona secured housing through the Currie Avenue Partnership, an initiative to help people who become "stuck" in the downtown Minneapolis shelters on Currie Avenue. The initiative is funded by the Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness, the Minneapolis Downtown Council, and private individuals.*

## EMAIL NEWSLETTER OPTION!

St. Stephen's now offers the option of emailing newsletters instead of sending them through the U.S. mail.

If you would prefer this option, please cut out this notice and return it in the envelope enclosed OR email [mmiles@ststephensmpls.org](mailto:mmiles@ststephensmpls.org).

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your street address \_\_\_\_\_ (so we can find you on our list)

Your email \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I would like to receive St. Stephen's quarterly newsletters by email only.

☐ I would like to receive St. Stephen's quarterly newsletters by both email and U.S. mail.

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ending homelessness

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Last winter Plymouth Congregational Church phoned St. Stephen's with concerns that someone had been sleeping in this hidden snow cave near the church.

## Preparing for Cold Weather

St. Stephen's and our partners are anticipating a difficult winter ahead for people living on the edge economically. When you pull out your winter wear this season, or shop for new warm clothing, please consider donating some to people without.

We need women's, mens and children's, all sizes, new or used:

- Warm hats, gloves and scarves
- Winter socks
- Long underwear
- Hand and feet warmer packets
- Very warm casual coats and boots
- Blankets, sleeping bags

If you plan to do a drive or collect large amounts, please contact us first at 612-879-7627.

Drop off donations at our main office, at 2211 Clinton Ave South between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Thank you.