

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

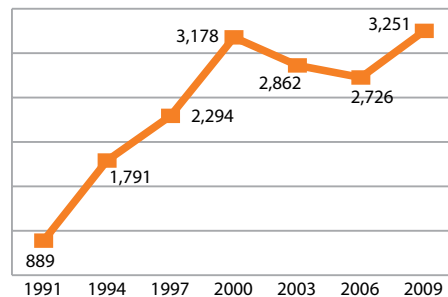
Minneapolis (3.3%) make this work even more challenging. After housing is secured...the real work begins.

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.