

# Housing Happenings

## Affordable Housing

"One of the biggest challenges is affordable housing – something the HIV+ communities cannot solve on their own, but which has a major impact on people who are HIV+."

A recent needs assessment conducted by the HIV Services Planning Council highlighted this fact. Adequate, safe housing is important for everyone. However, for people who are HIV+, affordable housing is not only a shelter issue, it's a health issue as well. Without a stable living situation it's very difficult to maintain your health and self care. Having a stable place to live is necessary, maintain insurance, make and keep medical appointments, manage pill regimes, and eat regularly. The two housing needs most often mentioned in the Needs Assessment were assistance finding housing and identifying affordable housing.

Affordable housing for people with HIV. What exactly does that mean? There is no single answer. The housing needs for individuals and families living with HIV are as diverse as the population affected by HIV and AIDS. The solutions are also multi-faceted. Housing needs vary across a wide spectrum, intertwined with family composition and health needs as well as other issues. We know that adequate housing or lack of it affects an individual's health.

Some housing is available specifically for those who are HIV+. This includes apartments such as Ford House, Dupont Residence and Maynidoowahdak Odena. Most people, however, prefer to live integrated within the community, where they do not have to identify their HIV status. There is a need for a broad range of housing opportunities, including both transitional and permanent housing. Transitional programs provide a chance for participants to get assistance while learning or re-learning what it takes to maintain an apartment. Long-term affordable housing opportunities might come through programs like Section 8 and Shelter Plus Care, but the need is much greater than the number of vouchers available.

On the other end of the continuum is assisted living. Foster Care homes provide 24-hour on-site care for those who need more intensive care. These include Agape Home, Damiano House and Grace House One and Two in Minneapolis, Clare House in St. Paul, and Hope House in Stillwater.

The HIV Community cannot address these issues alone. We must work with the larger community and educate others of the importance of housing for those living with HIV disease. We have a responsibility to let our voices be heard by talking to government leaders, and letting the public know about this critical issue. We must also be active and work in collaboration with others to increase housing funds and opportunities. We must be included at the table, be part of the discussion, and work to find solutions to this need.