

## **Bridges Housing**

### **What is Bridges?**

Bridges provides housing subsidies to people living with serious and persistent mental illnesses while they are on the waiting list for federal Section 8 housing assistance. As with Section 8, people on Bridges rent an apartment at the regular market-rate and pay 30% of their income for rent. The program provides vouchers to cover the balance. The program's goal is to offer people with serious mental illnesses a safe and affordable place to live. People leave Bridges as soon as they receive Section 8.

### **How is the Bridges funded?**

Bridges is funded through the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency. Bridges received \$2.638 million in state funding for the 2009-2010 fiscal year.

### **Who uses Bridges?**

Applicants for Bridges must have a serious and persistent mental illness and have a household income under 50% of the median income for their area. Bridges primarily serves people who are homeless, in a residential treatment or transitional facility, living in substandard conditions or who pay more than 50% of their income in rent. Bridges is available in over 50 counties across Minnesota and about 48% of people using Bridges live in greater Minnesota. In 2009, 32% of Bridges recipients were families with children. Bridges served 726 households in 2009.

### **Why is Bridges Important?**

Over the past 16 years, the number of homeless Minnesotans with serious mental illnesses has been steadily rising, up over 20% since 1994. A recent Wilder Foundation study found that 59% of homeless adults and 46% of homeless youth in Minnesota live with a serious mental illness. Bridges helps keep people from becoming homeless in the first place. Without access to affordable housing, people living with serious mental illnesses often wind up, unnecessarily, in our hospitals and jails. The state pays an average of only \$5,000 each year for a Bridges certificate -- far less than the state spends for residential treatment.

In recent years, the waitlist for Section 8 has ballooned, with the wait lists as long as seven years. This lack of access to affordable housing can have a devastating impact on the lives of people with serious mental illnesses. With Section 8 at a standstill the number of people enrolled in Bridges has increased dramatically. As the program struggles to meet the demand, there is now a long waiting list for Bridges itself. In Hennepin County, only about five people are able to access the program each year. Bridges needs continued support to keep up with the increased need. Bridges is an essential part of Minnesota's efforts to help people with serious mental illness afford a safe and stable place to live, allowing them to focus on their recovery and move forward with their lives.

### **Crisis Housing Fund**

In addition to Bridges, the Crisis Housing Fund also works to meet the housing needs of people with serious mental illnesses. The Crisis Housing Fund is a state funded program available to adults with a serious mental illness who are in an in-patient setting for up to 90 days and who have no other source of income. This program has reduced the length of time people spend in the hospital, saving the state money. In 2009, the Crisis Housing Fund received \$600,000 in funding and served 298 adults.