

# On the Outside Looking In



For someone trying to survive an abusive relationship, escaping the constant physical danger and mental fear is all that matters. Unfortunately, breaking free from one nightmare can often lead to another. And that is how Amber and her children found themselves living between the street and a shelter. Through her own determination and the services offered by Hearth Connection, Amber has been able to secure a home, become employed and pursue her goal of one day opening a business.

**“It is simply unacceptable for individuals, children, families, and our nation’s Veterans to be faced with homelessness in this country.”**

—President Barack Obama  
to the United States  
Interagency Council on Homelessness  
June 18, 2009



As a result of a serious accident, Richard had significant health problems that limited his ability to work. His situation was made worse by past legal problems that resulted in him losing his job and, as a result, his disability benefits. After living on the streets for several years, Richard was referred to Hearth Connection. They were able to help Richard resolve his legal issues, reclaim his disability benefits, and find and live in his own apartment, something he had not had in years.

**Hearth Connection is a nonprofit that acts as an intermediary between government and local nonprofits to end homelessness in Minnesota.**

Due to privacy issues, the people in the photographs are not actual Hearth Connection participants.

**The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recently funded an extensive study of Hearth Connection’s approach. This Executive Summary highlights the success and results of the study. Hearth Connection was able to get families like Amber’s and adults like Richard off the streets and into permanent, long-term housing while shifting negative costs to more positive investments.**

Amber’s and Richard’s stories are all too familiar. Studies have shown time and time again that homelessness is not a choice, but a symptom of poverty, mental illness, financial disaster, medical emergencies, addiction and more.

# Home is Where the Hearth is



Established in 1999 in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, Hearth Connection takes a breakthrough approach to addressing homelessness through an integrated and effective supportive housing program. Rather than providing *temporary* services like shelters, detoxification services and emergency care, Hearth Connection finds *permanent* solutions via supportive housing that get people back into the security and stability of a home. Once housed, these citizens have the energy and space to address the real issues at the root of their cycle of instability.

Hearth Connection works with adults as well as families with children, in both *urban* and *rural settings*. This population is plagued by long histories of homelessness (average of five years), medical issues, mental illness, traumatic experiences and chemical dependency. Some parents are also struggling to provide and care for children with special needs.

## **“Ending homelessness permanently requires housing combined with additional services and resources.”**

Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services  
in an interview with the National Alliance to End Homelessness  
August 3, 2009



The intensive services model features *low caseloads* (fewer than 10 households per staff member) and a range of *in-house specialty service providers* that include housing specialists, nurses and child development workers. Critical to their success has been a primary focus on building trust and getting people housed, helping them set their own goals, and providing the support they need to achieve their goals.

New research indicates that Hearth Connection’s success with people who have highly complex factors contributing to their homelessness can be replicated and points the way toward success with people who have more recently become homeless, especially families.

# A Breakthrough Approach

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the *National Center on Family Homelessness* to conduct an extensive, five-year study of Hearth Connection’s approach. It is the most comprehensive study on supportive housing to date, and the findings validate the supportive housing services model.

The results show that after nine months, participants spent 80 percent of nights in their own home—and this figure held strong over an 18-month period—indicating a successful transition from homelessness to stable housing. Better yet, participants were able to address long-standing physical and mental health issues, began to repair family relationships, and experienced:

- fewer mental health symptoms,
- reduced use of alcohol and/or drugs,
- greater sense of safety,
- improved quality of life.

One of the most promising findings is the cost to achieve these results. Society spends significant amounts of money on homelessness as people cycle in and out of emergency rooms, detoxification centers, jails, prisons and shelters. The Pilot study documented public costs of \$6,290 per person (including children) for every year they remain homeless. This equates to more than \$4.7 million annually for just the 748 participants in the Pilot.

**This study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and conducted by the National Center on Family Homelessness, is the most comprehensive one to date and validates the supportive housing services model.**

Hearth Connection redirects spending on prison, emergency room care and detoxification facilities to more of the kinds of services that can help bring stability to families and address the underlying causes of homelessness in a meaningful way. These include outpatient services (medical and mental health), medicine and income support for food and rent. Over the long term, increased housing stability and access to health care will likely produce cost savings and net gains in public costs. Rather than continuing to fund long-term homelessness, supportive housing is an investment in ending it—one person or family at a time. For a visual breakdown of the cost differences between the Pilot and comparison groups, refer to pages 16 and 17 in the Evaluation Summary.

## ABOUT THE COST STUDY

Of the 748 people in the Pilot, researchers looked at data for 518 participants during the study period. The comparison group consisted of 20,000 other Minnesotans who had indicators of homelessness in their data, 518 of which looked like the Pilot participants in their demographics and use of services during the two years before Hearth Connection’s participants were referred to the Pilot.

# Supportive Housing Works

## **SUPPORTIVE HOUSING WORKS,**

is scalable,  
and provides a  
permanent solution  
to homelessness.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's study shows that Hearth Connection and the supportive housing model work because they are:

- Client-centered, intensive services that address health care, education, job training and more.
- Effective in reducing the negative costs associated with homelessness.
- Scalable and replicable. Hearth Connection has expanded from serving two counties to 26 counties and three tribal bands, and has crossed cultural and geographic boundaries.

While the concept of supportive housing has been around since the early 1990s and implemented throughout the country, this study unequivocally validates the model. The time has come for us to start investing funds in programs that get America's homeless off the streets and into permanent, stable housing.



**“I am committed to making sure that we at HUD do everything within our power to ‘close the front door to homelessness and open the back door to permanent housing.’ And it’s time we did.”**

Shaun Donovan, Secretary, Housing and Urban Development (HUD)  
at the National Alliance to End Homelessness Annual Conference  
July 30, 2009

Our nation spends billions of dollars each year on shelters, jails, prisons and emergency medical care for people experiencing homelessness. As this study and others conducted around the country show, shifting resources from negative costs that do nothing but continue a cycle of homelessness to positive investments holds the potential to end homelessness. We can break the negative cycle of homelessness, treat the symptoms, address the causes, and help families establish permanent homes and a healthy lifestyle.

To read the full contents of the report, *The Minnesota Supportive Housing and Managed Care Pilot: Evaluation Summary*, and to learn more about the stories of lives that have been changed through the efforts of Hearth Connection, go to [www.hearthconnection.org](http://www.hearthconnection.org).



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