This document is made available electronically by the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library as part of an ongoing digital archiving project. http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/lrl.asp



# Safe Homes, Safe Communities

a focus group report on offender housing



HV 9305 .M6 534 2001

## Safe Homes, Safe Communities

a focus group report on offender housing



1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200 St. Paul, Minnesota 55108-5219 651/642-0200 TTY 651/643-3589 www.doc.state.mn.us March 2001

This document will be provided in alternative format upon request.

## Safe Homes, Safe Communities

a focus group report on offender housing

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary
Introduction
Focus Group Process
The Offender Profile
The State of Affairs
The Report
The Good News
Focus Group Findings
DOC Recommendations
Bibliography
Appendix — The Housing Continuum

Individuals too numerous to list contributed their time and knowledge to this project by participating in one or more of the focus group sessions. Some individuals attended all of the sessions and contributed additional valuable written material.

Special thanks to Steve Thomas and Mari Moen, Corporation for Supportive Housing, for their participation on the planning committee and the Chicago tours.

### **Executive Summary**

"The bottom line is that we need to cultivate relationships to help offenders get housing. This is labor-intensive work, but the results are tremendous in keeping offenders out of prison."

Housing for offenders? This is not a topic that immediately engenders broad-based empathy or a call to action. Housing shortages abound, particularly affordable housing units. Why should policymakers pay special attention to housing difficulties experienced by offenders? Simply put, the answer is public safety.

Offenders released from jails and prisons are increasingly finding that they cannot gain access to suitable housing. The result? They sleep in cars, find emergency housing along with more vulnerable populations, cohabitate with other felons in substandard housing, or live a vagrant lifestyle, from friend to friend until their welcome runs out. The label of "offender" is often synonymous with a "scarlet letter" as they are branded as a poor risk to accept on a rental lease. Instead of a welcome mat, they encounter barriers that deliver a message that they are shunned from gaining access to housing units. And case workers report that many offenders are subsequently being revoked and returned to incarceration. State or county residential care is much more expensive than community care or self-sufficiency, and these offenders will eventually be released again.

Approximately 3,800 inmates are released from Minnesota prisons each year and many more from county jails. As a society, we have two choices: 1) Allow offenders to be subject to inadequate or substandard housing conditions, insurmountable access at an increased public safety risk, or a revolving door in and out of jails and prisons at an increased cost to the taxpayer; or 2) create reasonable pathways for offenders to find suitable housing and corresponding support services so they can gain self-sufficiency and a restored sense of hope.

This report represents a beginning step toward finding solutions that work, both for the offender and his/her family as well as the public at large. The reader will not find a "breakthrough" strategy in the recommendations, but there are important first steps that will hopefully lead to solutions that bring long-term and meaningful change.

### Focus Groups

As a result of increasing concerns expressed by corrections professionals over the inability of offenders to acquire adequate housing, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) held four focus group sessions over the fall of 2000. Each session was attended by over 60 city, county, and state officials along with case managers, housing advocates, and service providers. Concerns spanned the entire state and encompassed urban, rural and suburban features. The summary below describes the group's findings and recommendations.

### Focus Group Findings

- The lack of access to appropriate housing for offenders results in diminished public safety.
- While public concern about housing for offenders is understandable, offenders evoke a level of concern among communities and property managers that makes access to housing almost insurmountable.
- Helping systems do not always coordinate or communicate with each other. Sometimes policies and practices by one agency cancel the efforts of another.
- Specialized offender housing is not geographically disbursed appropriately. There is excessively high concentration in some areas and unavailability in others.
- Given public sentiment often predisposed against housing offenders in their communities, creative solutions are necessary.
- The objectives of correctional halfway houses should be clarified and contract administration altered accordingly.
- The highest priorities around housing services for offenders are, in order of priority:
  - Guaranteed emergency bed access
  - Transitional housing
  - Supportive housing
  - Access to market rate and affordable housing
- Housing placements upon release from prison could be improved with changes at the correctional institution.

### **DOC Recommendations**

- Improve system coordination/communication and focus on offender housing needs by establishing an interagency work group to:
  - Review, coordinate, and recommend appropriate changes in policies and practices.
  - Assist and inform referral and direct-care professionals of existing housing.
  - Conduct a statewide summit with regional work teams.
- Increase public awareness of the issue of offender housing.
- Increase rental placements by building upon existing housing interventions proven to be effective. Do this by:
  - Developing how-to packets, offender-provided certification training programs, and a centralized listing of housing options for access by probation officers and housing case managers.
  - Increasing housing service contracts.
  - Issuing exploratory community-driven Requests for Proposals to encourage innovative housing options for offenders with the greatest needs.
  - Training probation officers.
  - Reducing probation officer caseloads.
- Explore short-term emergency sex offender housing options until a more permanent solution can be found.
- Assess the social and health needs of the offender population to develop a more thorough and complete understanding of their housing and service needs.
- Set aside corrections funding to create a supply of supportive housing units (new and existing) for offenders.
- Improve DOC transitional services for prison releasees by:
  - Beginning release planning earlier in the process. Release planning should begin at intake, with intense planning moved to six months before release instead of the current four-month mark.
  - Ensuring that each releasing facility has a special needs unit or other trained staff to assist inmates who are mentally ill or mentally delayed to develop appropriate release plans.
  - Conducting a discharge mental health assessment on every offender identified with a major mental

illness prior to release from the institution. Assessment results should be used to address the transition plan and the information transferred to the field agent.

- Ensuring that offenders requiring psychotropic medication are provided with an appropriate supply at release and that they have access to followup health care services. Set up a process for monitoring the taking of medication as part of the release plan.
- Ensuring that, whenever possible, the offender identifies a local case manager(s) to assist with transitional issues upon release.
- Extending the identification card pilot projects beyond the pilot sites.
- Examining DOC policies to determine how to encourage more long-term involvement between inmates and the community that will continue after release. Programs such as AMICUS and Prison Fellowship could be expanded.
- Reviewing DOC policies on halfway houses including clarification of roles and outcomes desired, funding options that better match service levels desired, and length of stay.
- Holding an annual planning session with prison case workers and probation officers to coordinate policy, identify problems and solutions, and improve transition from institution to field services and vice versa.

- Conducting a listening session with vendors who serve offenders of color to determine how to best provide transitional services that are comprehensive, supportive, and culturally-specific.
- Conducting "transition fairs" at each medium-custody facility to provide information on available housing, employment, and other community services.

Solutions lie largely at the community level. This is where the largest number of offenders are supervised by community agents; agencies that can lend support, planning and services are based; and volunteers needed to support local efforts live. That is not to say that state agencies shouldn't play an important role. State agencies can and should reexamine policies, coordinate statewide strategies, help seek funding, and provide technical assistance so that local planning efforts can succeed. It is the DOC's intent to put these recommendations in action by collaborating with other state agencies, county personnel, the private sector, and service providers.

### Introduction

eleeleeleele

"The box from which the offender can access housing services is increasingly getting smaller."

Addressing offender housing needs is not a new struggle for corrections professionals. Recently, however, at least two recurring themes have elevated this issue to the forefront:

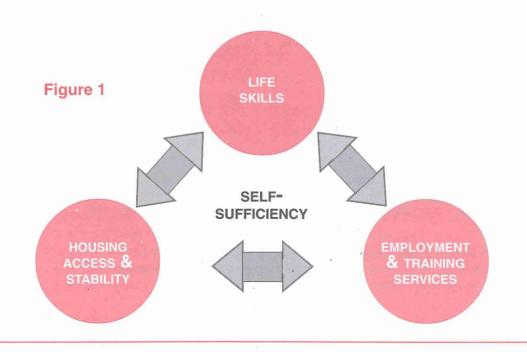
Increased frustration expressed by probation officers and private vendors over the inability of offenders to find suitable housing. In some cases, offenders faced supervision revocation because they did not have approved housing arrangements. In other cases, offenders resorted to living on the streets, in cars, at crisis shelters, or with other offenders in temporary arrangements.

With a rental housing vacancy rate of approximately 1.5 percent in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, this condition should not be surprising. The actual vacancy rate for affordable units is likely even lower. Offenders are increasingly among those viewed as "unhousable" due to their real or perceived risk and the opportunity for property managers to be "picky" in selecting renters.

Rejection of sex offenders by the community even when community-based housing is located. In many cases, especially when community notification was required, property managers and family members of sex offenders were pressured by the community to withdraw their support for the provision of housing. Since sex offenders have so few options to begin with, this public response left many of them without proper permanent housing. Probation staff are increasingly forced to devise emergency and sometimes desperate means of assisting the offender under extremely short timelines.

Why should the public be concerned about these events? Offenders without suitable housing tend to feel hopeless, isolated, unstable, and "out of sorts." It is not uncommon for housing to be taken for granted, especially when one is in possession of his/her own home or a long-term lease. When that sense of security is disrupted by an eviction or other means, one's sense of stability and self-confidence are under siege. Many offenders have a treatment plan, are seeking to be reunited with their family after incarceration, or need to be stabilized on medication. When core needs such as housing or employment are not met, offenders can be thrust into a survival mode resulting in a preoccupation with matters of coping instead of treatment or self-improvement. Figure 1 illustrates three key needs areas that lead to selfsufficiency. The breakdown of any of these areas threatens the ability to acquire stability and growth.

From a public safety perspective, corrections personnel are concerned over conditions that lead to an increased risk of re-offending. When conditions of stability deteriorate, other self-improvement considerations take a back seat, thereby increasing the likelihood of returning to an antisocial lifestyle.



## Focus Group Process

To facilitate discussion of and potential solutions for offender housing, the DOC formed a planning committee. It became evident that the project would need direct input from those closest to the issues. It was decided that the DOC should sponsor four focus groups on:

- Halfway houses
- Sex offenders and housing
- Special needs populations (i.e., chemically dependent, mentally ill, women, people of color, and juveniles)
- Supportive housing

Approximately 60 individuals attended each session. A wide assortment of interested parties was in attendance including correctional facility staff, housing advocates and case managers, probation officers, elected and appointed officials, representatives from housing agencies, county and state staff, and nonprofit service providers.

In addition, some members of the committee visited a number of programs and supportive housing projects including Alliance Apartments in Minneapolis; St. Andrew's Court in Chicago; and Chicago Christian Industrial League, The Studios.

## The Offender Profile

While all offenders are potentially subject to housing access difficulties, the released offender from a correctional institution faces greater odds of finding both suitable housing and that which is conducive to a crime-free lifestyle. Approximately 3,800 prisoners are released to live in local communities each year. These represent only those under state authority. Many more are eventually released from local jails.

Having a criminal record is a major stumbling block in gaining housing, particularly in a tight housing market. However, many offenders have other issues that exacerbate their challenge. For example, offenders with a prior unlawful detainer will face unique difficulties on that history alone.

Figure 2 profiles offenders released from state prison and provides a sampling of the kind of issues they and potential property managers face when making housing decisions. Of the 3,800 adult inmates and juvenile state commitments released from a state correctional facility in 2000, the following percent applies: ........

### Figure 2 Profile of Offenders Released from a State Correctional Facility in 2000

	Juvenile Males		
Chemically abusive or dependent history		75%	85%
Child dependents	unknown	60%	72%
Sex offense as commitment offense			4%
Person of color			45%
On psychiatric medication	17-81%*		29%
Diagnosed with severe mental health issue			20%**
Less than high school graduation	N/A		34%

\*Range includes 81% who receive some type of psychiatric medication, mainly for attention deficit disorder; and 17% who receive medication for a major mental illness \*\*Combined male and female number

### The State of Affairs

Most inmates in Minnesota prisons will eventually be released. In 2000, 20 percent of those released were diagnosed with severe mental health issues. Forty-nine percent were people of color, and nine percent were female. Approximately 40 percent were incarcerated for person offenses, 30 percent for property offenses, and 31 percent for drug and other offenses. Many of these offenders will be homeless or living in unsuitable housing environments at some point during their community supervision.

According to the Wilder Survey on homelessness published in 1998, the St. Stephen's Human Services publication in April, 2000, and the Housing Minnesota publication entitled *Build the Foundation*:

- The number of homeless people and those at high risk of losing housing in Minnesota has doubled since 1991. Nearly 80,000 low-income renters in the Twin Cities metropolitan area are competing for just 39,000 affordable units.
- Women and children represent the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.
- The most common single reason for women to seek temporary shelter in Minnesota is to flee an abusive partner.
- More than 60 percent of Minnesota's homeless are people of color.
- Nearly one-third of those who are homeless today in Minnesota have significant mental health problems (an increase from the reported 25 percent in 1991).
- More than 40 percent of homeless men have significant substance abuse problems, and 15 percent reported having both a mental health and chemical dependency problem.
- The average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Minneapolis is \$750. For this to be affordable, a person must earn \$15.10 per hour. More than 40 percent of Minnesota renters do not make enough money to afford an average two-bedroom apartment.
- Temporary housing programs may have become a substitute for long-term housing for the very poor.

Many of the statistics reported above are people with a criminal or delinquent record. Although any offender faces overwhelming odds in finding suitable housing, those released from state correctional facilities are particularly handicapped. The following actual housing stories portray a portion of the total picture.

### Rat and poison-infested home

After serving his prison term, a sex offender returned to Marshall, Minnesota, as he could find no alternative housing and chose to return to his deceased parents' home. It was an old farm house which had been uninhabited for many years. Rats had moved into the dwelling, and the offender's brother attempted to rid the house of the rats by using a powder chemical poison. The instructions on the bag of poison specifically stated that human habitation of the premises should not be allowed following application of the poison. The house had no running water or heat and was filthy. The basement was full of standing water. Holes the size of automobiles had been chewed in nearly every wall. The offender was not willing to pursue any other housing options as he felt that he really had no choice.

#### Choosing crime to find a place to sleep

After sleeping on the city streets for 28 consecutive days, Ellene had had enough but she couldn't turn to homeless shelters for lodging because several had barred her for bad behavior. A psychiatric hospital where she was hearing voices released her after a week. With no havens available and the weather turning cold, she decided to get arrested and sent to the county jail, where at least she would sleep indoors. So she grabbed a female tourist by the neck and pushed her to the ground. She was arrested, pleaded guilty to battery, and was sentenced to a year behind bars - joining more than a quarter of a million mentally ill people incarcerated in the country's prisons and jails. For a while at least, jail was a relief. She had amenities she was unable to keep before because of her mental illness. "I had a clean uniform, a water fountain, a shower, a roof over my head," she said. "But then it started getting rough. The girls were fighting a lot, and I wanted to get out of there."

Jails are increasingly becoming the main psychiatric facilities for people with mental illness, according to mental health experts. In 1998, the latest year for which figures are available from the Justice Department, 283,000 mentally ill people were incarcerated across the country in federal and state prisons and local jails, and almost 550,000 others were on probation. About 16 percent of mentally ill people released from prison or jail are not ready to survive on their own, according to the Justice Department, and many of them are soon in jail or hospitalized again (*The Washington Post*, June 28, 2000).

### Offenders under bridges

In the Shakopee area, several public risk monitoring cases were "literally dumped in our lap" at the last minute with the expectation that suitable housing would be found. In several cases, that meant the offender would sleep under a bridge or in some other secluded public area. Most often the releasees would violate before housing could be found. Since releasees usually don't have a driver's license or their own transportation, their ability to look for work is compromised. With no phone access, probation agents need to go to these bridges or public parks to monitor releasees. There is a two to threeyear waiting list for emergency housing, and in many cases convicted felons are not eligible for some housing programs available through the county. When agents are given "emergency" supervised release cases at the last minute, they must drop everything they are doing to find a placement that will ensure public safety. It is an extremely time-consuming procedure and often fails to result in acceptable placements. Most often, the releasee is simply set up for failure.

### Dumped on the family

A supervised release was referred to Martin County where his biological family lived. His family, however, did not want him living with them as previous experiences were wrought with negative encounters around chronic alcohol and drug usage. Since no other residency options existed, they took him in by default and against their better judgment. Two days after the placement began, he became drunk and violent. He was revoked and returned to prison. The release was in need of a transitional home with experience in dealing with chronic alcoholics, and none was available.

### Criminals in hotels

Since 1993 approximately 40 inmates have been released in the Walker area who did not have adequate living arrangements and were subsequently placed in local motels. Of this total, 20 (50 percent) ended in failure resulting in revocation. Many of the "successful" 20 struggled with adjustment and their supervision was violated and conditions restructured.

### Placed among his victims

An offender released from prison after serving time for a second-degree assault had no viable residence and therefore had to be returned to his county of commitment, Clay County, where his victims also resided. His only residency choice was a homeless shelter in Moorhead. Within several days of release, the offender tested positive for illegal drugs and initiated contact with his victims. He was revoked and returned to prison.

### Sex offender bouncing from place to place

A convicted sex offender was released from prison without a verifiable residence in Becker County. He spent several nights in a local hotel until his gate money ran out. His only option was to rotate from church to church asking for vouchers for hotel stays. He eventually got emergency housing funds through social services. After this ran out, the offender persuaded an AA group to allow him to sleep in the AA building against AA policy. He eventually was revoked and returned to prison for failing to attend sex offender treatment.

### **Predictable revocation**

Daniel was released to his county of commitment. He is severely mentally ill and chemically dependent. He failed intensive community supervision on his first day because he reported to his agent in an inebriated state and was returned to prison. His revocation was predictable because he had no residence or support in place, putting himself and the public at undue risk.

### Law enforcement lobby as a KOA

Waseca County does not have housing available for offenders without ties to the community. When this offender was released from prison, he had no choice but to stay at the local motel until his gate money ran out. The only option the following night was to stay in the lobby of the law enforcement center. Another offender parked his van in the law enforcement parking lot and stayed there for a week. The law enforcement center is called the KOA for sex offenders. 

#### Not in my back yard

A level 3 sex offender was released to Otter Tail County since it was the last county of commitment. However, the offender did not have any housing and local property managers refused to rent to him. Hotels and motels rejected his request to stay as word spread that the probation officer was looking for a temporary home for a sex offender. Chemical dependency treatment programs also refused to serve him due to his level 3 status. His failure was only a matter of time as he had no stability, support, or residence.

### The Report

~~~~

"If we don't provide options and if we put people in a box, they will fight their way out, because survival is the name of the game."

This report is a compilation of focus group feedback, tour information, and housing reports conducted by other agencies in recent years. The reader should keep in mind that findings contained in this report were extrapolated primarily from testimony provided at focus group meetings. Some information was later verified, some was taken at face value. Some facts and quotes were taken from previous housing studies and published documents. This disclaimer should not detract from the report's veracity as the testimony was extremely helpful in understanding the perceived state of affairs for offender housing and potential solutions. However, in some cases further analysis is needed before action is taken.

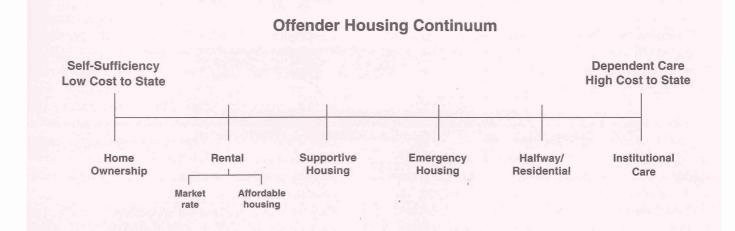
### The Good News

Concern about homelessness and affordable housing has been growing, resulting in an increased amount of funding, construction, and awareness. In the spring of 2000, the McKnight and Blandin Foundations announced record grants totaling \$32.5 million to help build 3,000 units of affordable housing in outstate Minnesota.

According to the Corporation for Supportive Housing, thousands of new supportive housing units are planned to come on line by 2004 — including more than 500 for homeless and at-risk families, about 100 for unaccompanied youth, and 1,500 for homeless and at-risk single men and women. These supportive housing units will serve a number of unique populations including single adults and families with chronic health conditions such as mental illness, chemical dependency, and HIV/ AIDS needs.

The literature on the effectiveness of halfway house programs is scant at best. Although it seems intuitively obvious that a transitional living environment for a longterm prison releasee would increase his/her chance of successfully integrating into the community, more information is needed. Fortunately, data on supportive housing is growing. One of the most comprehensive studies was conducted by the National Institute of Justice in 1996 entitled Work Release: Recidivism and Corrections Costs in Washington State. The study compared similar profiles of inmates, some who were randomly placed on work release four to six months prior to their prison release date. One year after institutional release (prison or work release), those who completed work release rearrested at a slightly lower rate than those who were not released to a work release facility (30% versus 22%). The work release program, however, did not significantly reduce correctional costs, partly due to revoke and return rates due to the intensity of supervision.

The Wilder study examined two demonstration projects. The supportive housing projects targeted residents with mental illness, chemical dependency, and/or HIV/AIDS conditions. The evaluation included 115 units and 168 adult residents over the course of 12 months. A total of 57 percent of the tenants had been diagnosed as mentally ill, 27 percent were chemically dependent, and 16 percent were both. At some point in their lives, 74 percent were hospitalized for psychiatric care, and 40 percent had been incarcerated. The report concluded that "Neither the program's results nor its operating principles suggest that supportive housing models developed un-



der this demonstration could be the sole or exclusive means of dealing with people who are homeless and who suffer from mental illness, chemical dependency, or other chronic disabilities. These models do, though, appear to offer significant promise as part of a mix of settings and types of service, including many of those currently supported with GRH funds, such as board-and-lodging accommodations."

With this in mind, the study found that supportive housing participation resulted in:

- an increase in the tenant's contact with neighbors, friends, or co-workers and attendance at support groups by twice or more;
- a reduction in the eviction rate by more than twothirds (from 21 to six percent);
- an increase in employment from 15 to 19 percent.

A subsequent report put out by the Corporation for Supportive Housing showed that the supportive housing service reduced inpatient hospitalization, emergency room visits, and incarcerations by 50 percent. In addition, 18 months after placement 90 percent of chemically dependent tenants living in supportive housing remained sober, and the average episodes of detoxification referrals dropped from 18 per year to 2.5.

A supportive housing program study of the Cedar Hill project in New Haven, Connecticut, found that "the cost of the combined housing and support staff at \$35.55 per day per tenant was significantly less than other taxpayerfunded alternatives. Inpatient psychiatric care costs \$660 per day, housing someone in a nursing home could cost \$207 per day, while residential substance abuse programs can cost \$100 daily per person." (In the News, *New Haven Register*)

Other national sites indicated that supportive housing contributed to a decrease in inpatient hospitalization by 49 percent (San Diego), lowered inpatient costs by 52 percent (Baltimore), increased rental retention at a rate of 80 percent (New York City), and decreases in emergency room visits and incarcerations.

Despite these positive results and the number of new units constructed in Minnesota, there will still be an estimated 2,500 units short of the outstate needs for affordable housing and an unknown amount in the metro area. It is estimated that Minnesota will build 4,900 fewer affordable housing units per year than are needed based on population projections (Minnesota Housing publication).

### Focus Group Findings

Finding 1: The lack of access to appropriate housing for offenders results in diminished public safety.

"This is just common sense. A sex offender living out of his car is a lot more dangerous than one who has a stable living environment."

The lack of available housing units creates challenges for any individual seeking affordable and suitable housing. For an offender, however, there are even greater obstacles. While finding a suitable housing unit is the first step, being selected is by far more difficult. The following represent some of these challenges for an offender:

— Property managers are increasingly using screening reports to conduct criminal record checks to eliminate from consideration potential tenants who have prior convictions. In many cases, the level of offense (misdemeanor versus felony), type of offense (welfare fraud versus assault), and date of offense (recent or 20 years ago) are not taken into account. Offenders are facing a form of "permanent branding." 

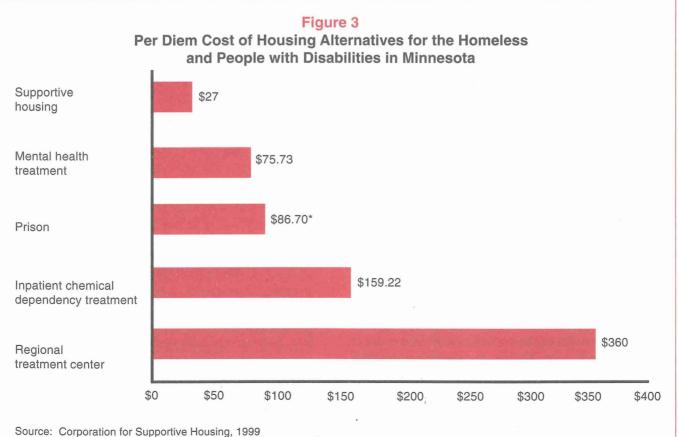
- Screening reports usually include an **application fee** between \$25 and \$100. Focus group members point out that in many cases property managers either have no intent of renting to the individual but take the fee, or as soon as the prior record is discovered the application is rejected. Asking the question up-front would be a more forthright way of screening out applicants before taking the screening report and fee. Paying application fees is a particular hardship on offenders who are recent releasees from incarceration and don't have funds to waste on applications ineligible for consideration by prior record alone.
- HUD Public Housing and Federal Rent Subsidy Program (i.e., the McKinney funds) rules create additional difficulties. For example, offenders leaving jail or prison are not considered homeless, thereby eliminating them from eligibility for certain housing services funded by HUD. Most public housing authorities screen out any potential renter who has a conviction history of drugs or violence, regardless of what has transpired since the offense. The Section 8 subsidy program eliminates certain offenders from consideration.
- City or county ordinances are passed in an effort to manage growth, risk, cost, and constituent concerns.

- Property managers are increasingly being held responsible by city housing agencies when they knowingly rent to a tenant who sells drugs when they had knowledge or should have had knowledge that such activity would take place. This trend is causing property managers to screen out any potential tenant with any related history. Courts and regulatory agencies are increasingly willing to hold property managers responsible for not being aggressive enough in proper screening and in evicting problematic tenants. Given the current operating environment, most housing managers are carefully weighing these risk factors before granting access to a housing unit.
- Crime-free housing ordinances or covenants banish offenders from many local housing projects due to a collaborative effort by public agencies and hous-

ing associations to prevent crime. This effort is successful in redirecting the offender away from the housing project even when family or associates are willing to assist.

These efforts to prevent offenders from rental access result in unintended consequences that increase public safety risks. Offenders are removed from accessing more respectable housing units and are forced to live:

- on the street, in a car, or as a transient, moving from acquaintance to acquaintance until his/her welcome runs out;
- in housing viewed as unsuitable, unsafe or unlicensed; in a high-crime neighborhood; motels; or with a group of similarly rejected offenders resulting in group living with other felons;
- in desperate situations where the prospect of returning to jail or prison is not viewed as a negative alternative;
- Unnamed on someone else's lease, thereby putting that lease at risk.



\*Figure modified to show actual 2000 cost

One focus group member pointed out that the housing situation for offenders in his city is like an "unwelcome mat" with the result being that offenders are repeatedly returning to the local emergency shelter where vulnerable residents are at risk. Any offender with a tendency to be opportunistic would be thrust into a predatory environment. Another focus group member described her client as living in an "illegal basement unit" which was described as unlicensed, structurally unsafe, and unhealthy. Her client lived there out of fear as she was pessimistic about her chances of finding more suitable housing.

With a current rental vacancy rate of only .7 percent, Massachusetts is facing a similar crisis in finding suitable housing for offenders. The Massachusetts Department of Corrections estimates that 15 percent of inmates who leave state facilities have nowhere appropriate to go.

A snapshot of inmates leaving Minnesota institutions shows even higher amounts. Out of 247 offenders released in a 37-day period, DOC staff noted that 67 (or 27%) did not have satisfactory residence for release purposes. Some of these were placed temporarily in halfway houses, others were released to the supervising agent with temporary housing (e.g., motel, shelter) arrangements made.

Offenders can be more dangerous when they do not have stable housing or employment. It is in the public's best interest to ensure that offenders are living in a prosocial environment with fewer stressors that trigger thoughts or hopelessness that lead to crime.

Focus group participants noted that when offenders are unable to find suitable housing they seek out anyone who will accept them. Gang members usually have available housing, and offenders find a more welcoming environment there.

Juvenile offenders, especially those under Extended Juvenile Jurisdiction status, are usually unable to access transitional programs which teach key skills to prepare them for independent living. Additionally, the number of available beds is too limited to meet the need. The alternative option for these youth is either a premature attempt at independent living or a return to their troubled homes and neighborhoods where the temptation to become reengaged in antisocial activity is strong. Finding 2: While public concern about housing for offenders is understandable, offenders evoke a level of concern among communities and property managers that makes access to housing almost insurmountable.

## "In our culture, it is usually better to be bad than mad."

As noted above, offenders are constantly facing barriers to suitable housing. As difficult as this can be for offenders and their families, it is significantly more troublesome for some offender groups. In essence, offenders face a heightened sense of desperation as they move down the following ladder of difficulty:

- Any offender, especially those convicted of a felony.
- Special offender groups who inherit housing obstacles due to their special needs or perceived risk to the property manager or nearby residents.
- Offenders convicted of sex offenses or arson who pose a real or perceived public safety risk.

#### Special need offenders:

The second group of offenders, those with special needs, includes:

- Women, especially those with children.
- People of color.
- Mentally ill.
- Chemically dependent.
- Juveniles living independently.

All of the above groups face economic challenges in addition to obstacles brought about by a stigma often associated with their respective characteristic. A woman with a criminal record can evoke a set of biases and assumptions about how "bad she must really be" to end up with a record. Prejudice and fear is common when contemplating renting to populations of a different race or culture. Those without knowledge of mental illness might make false assumptions about the relative risk an offender with mental health issues poses. A chemically dependent offender is often cast as a drug dealer and violent. And the public often fears juveniles because of perceptions that they are likely out of control, predatory, irresponsible, immature, and without fear of losing hardfought relationships and property.

*Female offenders* are believed to face additional unique housing challenges for at least two reasons: — *Children*. The female offender often is the primary caretaker even shortly following release from incarceration. In 1999, 74 percent of female offenders in Minnesota prisons had children as dependents. There is concern that their children can be hard on property. If a teenager is one of the dependents, additional concern is raised over the mother's ability to control the teen's behavior. Additional family members result in a need for larger living units and higher costs. Currently, a mother with one child receives \$437 and food stamps. The average one-bedroom apartment costs \$550 per month. For example, the Minnesota Family Investment Plan (MFIP) provides for less than \$600 per month for a woman with one child, and the average market rate for a two-bedroom apartment is \$750. In addition, if the children are younger, the woman will have child care duties and costs which limit both her ability to find a well-paying job and to afford the higher rent. This situation occurs during the time when the woman is dealing with the issues and stress associated with transitioning back into the community.

It was noted by a focus group participant that female federal inmate releasees are leaving federal institutions without sufficient support. The state does not provide funding or services as they are the responsibility of the federal government, yet the women are expected to find housing within 15 days after release.

The woman offender has fewer options for emergency housing alternatives. She is less likely to be able to "crash" on a friend's sofa for a night, let alone for a longer period of time, if she is bringing children with her.

— Male relationship. The female offender often gets involved in an unhealthy male relationship for a variety of reasons, including access to housing. Since the woman is more often the child caretaker, the male is more likely to have accumulated a credit rating, transportation, education credentials, as well as an employment and housing history. He can provide access to housing even if the relationship is damaging to her emotionally and to her goal of independence.

**People of color** who have been previously convicted of a crime face additional barriers. Some of these include:

 Language. Many culturally diverse offenders have language barriers. According to focus group members, difficulty in communicating harms them in two ways: their ability to convince a property manager that they are a good risk, and the impression that they are "ignorant" and easily dismissed.

- Bias. Focus group members pointed out that housing decisions are often made based on false perceptions and biases. Many report discrimination solely on race. Some focus group participants noted examples where property managers require three times the income before they will consider renting to a person of color. They may ask a person of color for the first and last month's rent plus a damage deposit, and ask only for the first month's rent from a Caucasian. The bias against certain cultures also plays out in rental decisions. A male African American is often reportedly viewed as likely on drugs, violent, and irresponsible. An American Indian is often perceived as being a transient with an alcohol problem. People of color from other states are more likely to be victims of racism due to assumptions that they must be moving to Minnesota because they are in trouble or getting better welfare benefits.
- Cultural history conflicts with societal preferences. People of color usually have strong cultural beliefs about their responsibility to take care of their own and seek cohesive family units. So when an offender moves into a rental property there are often other family members over multiple generations that gravitate to the same living space. Property managers need to control who lives in their units for legal, code, and site management reasons. Sometimes the only recourse is to evict the person who is violating the lease due to permitting others to live with him/her, especially if they are disruptive. People of color tend to be less likely to purchase their own home, so they must rely on rental rules that inadvertently cause the breakup of families.

Offenders struggling with chemical dependency or mental illness also experience extraordinary housing barriers. Some of the unique issues they face include:

— Prior history of unlawful detainers. Focus group members noted that chemically dependent offenders often have a usage history that resulted in irresponsible behavior resulting in evictions. Offenders seeking housing who have been convicted of a drug offense can be, and often are, rejected by property managers outright. Property managers can be held liable by city housing agencies for renting to a tenant who sells drugs when they had knowledge or should have had knowledge that such activity would be taking place. Naturally, offenders with a prior

12

narcotics conviction are often automatically rejected as a potential tenant for this reason alone.

Perceived property manager attitudes, biases, and previous experiences. Offenders are often reticent to discuss their mental health issues at the point of seeking housing due to anticipated societal stigma and related fear. As a result, when a housing placement is made and a mental health episode occurs, the property manager is surprised and fears an unpredictable set of behaviors, thus jeopardizing ongoing housing. Up-front information sharing, a plan of action, and subsequent reduction of anxiety would preserve many housing placements from crumbling. On the other hand, offenders describe a catch 22 situation given the number of times that an honest applicant shared information about his/her disabilities only to have that placement fall through. Finally, property managers may be reluctant to rent to those convicted of drug offenses due to past experiences, expressing fear that their property will soon be inundated with addicts, drug dealing, and theft. The fact that it takes many offenders multiple relapses and treatment stays before long-term abstinence sticks does not provide ample reassurance for the property manager.

*Juvenile offenders* have their own housing challenges that go beyond other offenders when they seek to live independently at age 17, 18, or 19. Some of these issues include:

- Stigma. Teenage offenders often inherit a severe societal stigma as being unreliable, dangerous, reckless, and narcissistic. Property managers are reluctant to consider renting to youthful applicants for age reasons alone, let alone for past behaviors. This situation is even worse for juvenile offenders of color.
- Lack of positive history. Juvenile offenders most often do not have references and credit histories due to their youthfulness. This fact puts them in a difficult position of trying to find someone who is willing to "take a risk" with them. In some cases, focus group members noted that families abuse the limited but clean juvenile credit history and social security number. By the time the juvenile reaches age of majority, he/she inherits a negative credit report.
- Lack of living skills. Juvenile offenders tend to have significant needs in the area of basic living skills. As a result, maintaining housing can be a challenge. More transitional housing programs would give them the opportunity to learn before they strike out on their own. In addition, housing is just one of many issues

the youth must contend with, including employment, schooling, driver's license, banking and credit, and relationships. For many, the multitude of issues calls for a structured living skills program that gives the youth an opportunity for structured learning to take place.

— Lack of family support. Due to the juvenile's age, he/she needs family support which comes in a number of forms such as co-signing leases and contracts, emotional support, assistance with housing funding and furnishing the apartment, coaching, etc. Unfortunately, many juvenile offenders do not have strong family support which puts them at greater risk of making poor choices or being unable to get the kind of assistance necessary to maintain housing.

Offenders convicted of sexual misconduct and arson. The third and most difficult group to find housing for are those convicted of sex offenses and arson. Their challenges are particularly severe, primarily due to the real or perceived dangers they pose to the public. While a conviction for a sex offense represents a modern day "scarlet letter" of disapproval and fear, being designated as a level 3 sex offender is the ultimate label. This designation does in fact identify an offender's high risk status to re-offend and, as such, heaps immense media and public attention. The subsequent community pressure is often applied to any property manager or family member who might indicate a willingness to rent to the individual. Many initial potentially suitable level 3 sex offender placements have been aborted by the property manager or family member after the community notification procedure is initiated and there is public outcry. Few individuals are willing to sustain this kind of community pressure and unwelcome exposure.

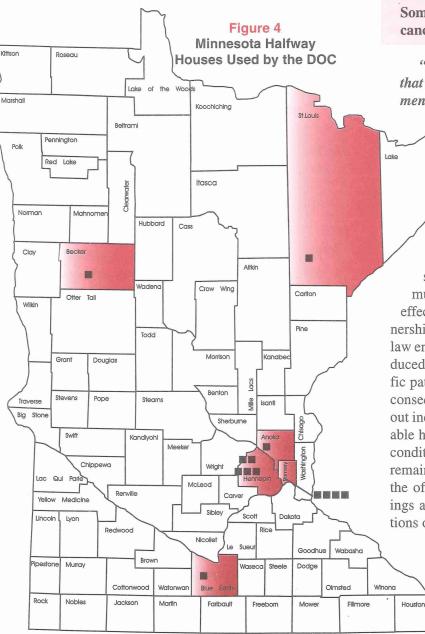
These factors are especially pronounced in rural areas where the infrequency of community notification results in a heightened sense of alarm. In urban areas, the public has had more exposure to the notification process, the type of individuals being released, and the level of supervision provided to the offender. Although some have speculated that the public has simply become more resigned to the placement, feeling a sense of powerlessness, the net effect is the same: less public outcry against those renting to level 3 sex offenders.

#### Public safety concerns:

While the public's concern is understandable, at least two issues arise:

 Not all offenders convicted of felony crimes are at high risk to re-offend. Many sex offenders, for example, may have been convicted of sexual contact with an underage girlfriend or for intrafamilial sexual behavior and have received treatment services. Some of these individuals have a low-risk profile to reoffend and their past behavior would not appear to put the general public at risk, particularly when placement enables enhanced supervision. However, there is a stigma that puts them in the same category as others who may truly be a public safety concern.

 The community's unwillingness to allow for suitable housing increases the stressors that ultimately lead to an increased set of risk conditions and encumber reliable supervision.



These concerns around public safety, loss of lease income, and effect on a community's quality of life are real and immediate. In fairness to property managers and communities, they often feel misinformed and illprepared to deal with the varied situations that arise when offenders are placed in their midst without adequate follow-up and services. Property managers get pressured to accept individuals and then never hear from the referral source again. It only takes a disaster or two before a property manager stops taking additional chances.

Finding 3: Helping systems do not always coordinate or communicate with each other. Sometimes policies and practices by one agency cancel the efforts of another.

"I am motivated to not go to prison. I know that if I go, I will never get housing again." Statement of offender admitted into a community sentencing circle

Cook State, federal, and local agencies have a role to play in setting policy and practice that can assist or hinder effective housing access. Often what makes sense to one agency to resolve a problem contradicts what another agency is seeking to accomplish. For example, crime-free multi-housing projects have been touted as highly effective at reducing crime in larger rental units. Partnerships between property managers, inspectors, and law enforcement have reduced undesirable tenants, reduced hot spots where crime might occur, altered traffic patterns, and increased quality of life. One of the consequences of this project has been that of screening out individuals with a prior record, yet stable and suitable housing in a prosocial environment is one of the conditions that improve the chance of an offender to remain law-abiding. Efforts by other agencies to teach the offender skills and seek more suitable surroundings are negatively affected by the well-intended actions of others.

> System coordination for these and other reasons is needed. An example of systems not coordinating can be found in how the mental and chemical health funding streams are managed separately from each other. The

often-reported result is that service recipients of co-occurring illness are sometimes required to get treatment for one condition before they get funding for the other. Optimally, they should be treated at the same time. In addition, neither system "owns the issue," and service recipients end up falling through the cracks.

Differing chemical health assessment tools and policies can also complicate matters. Assessment tools must meet certain criteria as defined through the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM). However, there is diversity in which tools are used. Some are differential tools which provide a diagnostic assessment according to the DSM IV. This kind of tool is time-consuming, and some jurisdictions use versions that are less laborintensive but which do not provide a differential diagnostic assignment. In some outstate areas, Rule 25 assessors won't conduct the assessments if the individual is in jail. This results in missed opportunities as many offenders do not seek treatment once released and the urgency of their situation appears diminished. Also, not all chemical health programs are designed to meet Department of Public Safety requirements in order to gain reinstatement of one's driver's license.

Chemically dependent offenders can be eligible for medical assistance (MA), general assistance medical care (GAMC), or MinnesotaCare while in treatment. However, once they leave treatment, MA is terminated. Many treatment programs are not long enough for an offender with a long, chemically abusive background to gain the necessary skills.

As a result of federal HUD definitions of homelessness, offenders exiting jail or prison do not qualify for assistance. Advocates report incidents of offenders having to "play games" by living on the streets for a night before being eligible for services. Another example can be found in emergency assistance criteria where an eviction notice must be served before a client can qualify for assistance. Some report that "artificially induced notices" are constructed to gain needed services.

The effects of "criminalizing" mental health amplifies the need for systems to coordinate. Many individuals who used to be treated in the mental health system are ending up in jails and prisons. Some mentally ill offenders have access to SSI income, but because of their criminal record they cannot use these funds to pay for their share of public housing costs.

The difficulty surrounding housing for sex offenders is stressful for all involved. This precarious and emotion-packed environment can strain existing relationships, even between agencies with similar objectives and positive histories working together. Some focus group participants reported that interagency (such as police, corrections, sheriff, prosecutor, or victim advocates) conflict arises over the appropriateness of a sex offender placement. For example, law enforcement has responsibility for community notification and public protection, and corrections has responsibility for offender placement and supervision within the context of public protection. Occasionally one agency might sabotage what another agency would deem as an appropriate placement. The conflict usually centers around disagreement over the jurisdiction's perceived responsibility to allow the placement to occur. In some cases, the sex offender referral and subsequent local discussions cause a deterioration in the agencies' relationships, leading to contradictory efforts rather than work that is in concert.

Finding 4: Specialized offender housing is not geographically disbursed appropriately. There is excessively high concentration in some areas and unavailability in others.

"Every place we go in the state...tells us affordable housing is one of the two or three critical issues. The need is as great as ever...or maybe greater." Paul Olson, Blandin Foundation (Minneapolis Tribune, May 15, 2000)

Housing obstacles for offenders tend to be dominated by three factors: market conditions (supply, demand, economics), public opinion, and personal and criminal histories. These three factors play a large role in the availability and disbursement of housing for offenders.

In more rural areas, housing for special needs offenders (e.g., sex offenders, women with children, mentally ill) is an immense challenge. Either the population is not large enough to financially sustain a program or public opinion is so adamant against a housing program that takes in offenders that it cannot get started. As a result, rural areas are often without either emergency, transitional, or long-term housing options for offenders. Attempts to plan for rural needs are wrought with challenges. For example, consolidating the needs through a larger geographic area might provide enough referrals for a cost-effective program to be developed. However, the distance from housing to jobs and family members may still be too great for this solution to work.

This same scenario occurs for special needs offenders in the metro area. For example, women offenders with children seeking housing are smaller in number and

services are largely not available even in the metro area. Figure 4 shows where current supervised release and halfway house facilities are located. While some facilities exist throughout the rural area, the vast majority are in metropolitan counties.

Focus group members stated that many offenders gravitate to metropolitan areas not only because employment opportunities exist but also because it may represent the only decent chance at finding suitable housing. Corrections and elected officials expressed deep concern over the number of offenders who take up residence in the metro area after their prison term expires as well as the concentration level within neighborhoods.

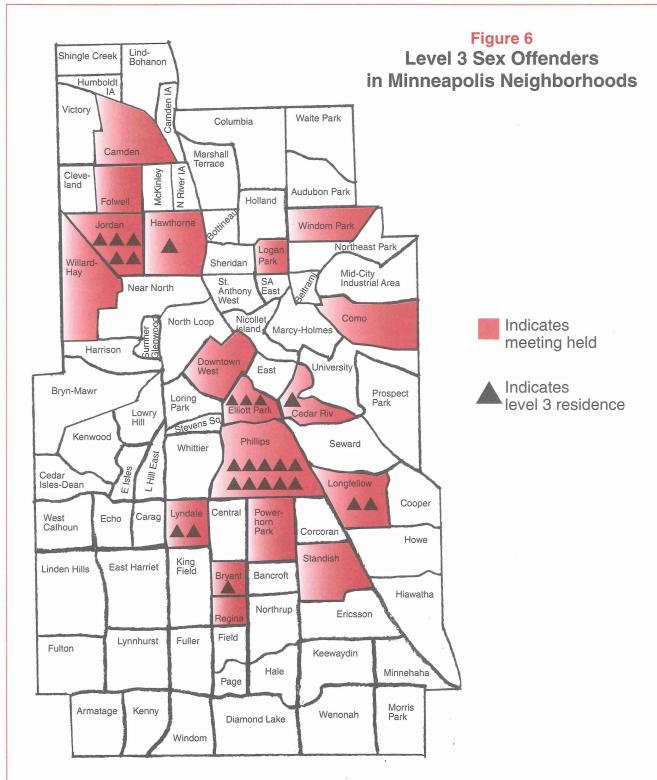
These offenders, should they remain in the metropolitan area, become an additional burden to the taxpayer if they do not become self-sufficient. On the other hand, offenders from the rural area who are forced to return to their home communities can be at higher risk to fail if they cannot find suitable employment, housing, and support services, particularly sex offenders. Minneapolis and St. Paul officials expressed concern over the perceived disproportionate number of sex offenders in their cities. Figure 5 shows the number of sex offenders who are initially placed in metropolitan area counties as compared to the county of commitment. These do not include temporary, transitional, or emergency housing placements. However, many offenders later transfer to counties where employment and access to housing are better.

### Figure 5

### Sex Offenders Initially Placed in Permanent Housing Within Metropolitan Area Counties Compared to County of Commitment

|                  | Risk Level 1 | Risk Level 2 | Risk Level 3 | Totals |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| Anoka County     |              |              |              |        |
| Number committed | 42           | 11           | 6            | 59     |
| Number released  | 29           | 5            | 0            | 34     |
| Net gain or loss | -13          | -6           | -6           | -25    |
| Dakota County    |              |              |              |        |
| Number committed | 36           | 13           | 6            | 55     |
| Number released  | 25           | 6            | 0            | 31     |
| Net gain or loss | -11          | -7           | -6           | -24    |
| Hennepin County  |              |              |              |        |
| Number committed | 183          | 89           | 75           | 347    |
| Number released  | 190          | 94           | 59           | 343    |
| Net gain or loss | +7           | +5           | -16          | -4     |
| Olmsted County   |              |              |              |        |
| Number committed | 36           | 11           | 8            | 55     |
| Number released  | 22           | 11           | 4            | 37     |
| Net gain or loss | -14          | 0            | -4           | -18    |
| Ramsey County    |              |              |              |        |
| Number committed | 117          | 41           | 20           | 178    |
| Number released  | 138          | 47           | 16           | 201    |
| Net gain or loss | +21          | +6           | -4           | +23    |
| St. Louis County |              |              |              |        |
| Number committed | 40           | 10           | 14           | 64     |
| Number released  | 44           | 13           | 12           | 69     |
| Net gain or loss | +4           | +3           | -2           | +5     |
|                  |              | 1            |              |        |

Assessment based on all offenders to whom community notification applied, released January 1, 1997, through January 1, 2000. (Source: Minnesota Department of Corrections Research/Evaluation and Sex Offender/Chemical Dependency Services Units)

City and county officials reported occasions when sex offenders resided in a single living unit or apartment complex due to sympathetic property managers (some of whom were ex-sex offenders) or residential programs. Some officials have since put limitations on the number of sex offenders who can live in a single dwelling. Figure 6 shows an example of how a Minneapolis area receives a cluster of sex offenders living in a small geographical area. 

Source: Hennepin County Bureau of Community Corrections, February 2000

Finding 5: Given public sentiment often predisposed against housing for offenders in their communities, creative solutions are necessary.

"If not in your back yard, it will be in your face."

Concern expressed by citizens over offenders residing in their communities is not new. This concern ranges from fear of diminished public safety to decreased property values. While some of this fear might be dismissed as an emotional reaction of NIMBY (not in my back yard) or from long-standing prejudice and bias, much of it may be based on prior negative experiences around certain public housing projects. These public reactions cannot be ignored whether they are built on perceptions or facts. Fortunately, a great deal has been learned about how to address potential negative consequences of correctional programs placed in neighborhoods and how to gain community support.

According to the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, the following are key steps in gaining local community and government approval of housing accessible to offenders:

Work with local advocates. Meet with them early to research, assess and plan.

- Prepare a political strategy that coordinates all the work toward gaining approval.
- Prepare a strategy to build active community support for the proposal.
- Prepare a strategy to work through concerns of community members.
- Prepare a strategy to protect and use legal rights.
- Prepare a public relations and media strategy to send the message to decision-makers and the public.

Finding 6: The objectives of correctional halfway houses should be clarified and contract administration altered accordingly.

### "Halfway houses are ports in the storm. When a crisis arises, we rely on them."

Halfway houses have existed for decades to assist offenders in their quest to live a law-abiding lifestyle. However, over the years the service has evolved to encompass a number of possible purposes including:

- Providing programming to reduce risk of recidivism
  Improving public safety through accountability and
- monitoring
- Reducing the likelihood of returning to old patterns of behavior and social structures by easing the offender into a prosocial living environment
- Providing an emergency placement (especially for level 2 or 3 sex offenders)
- Improving the quality of life by assisting the offender in gaining access to better employment, recreation, social, and housing services.

A correctional halfway house placement may now occur for any or a combination of the above reasons. Focus group representatives from referral sources and halfway house vendors could not agree on a common definition, placement purpose, or expected services and outcomes. Most answered, "It depends." Yet expected services and outcomes of each placement are not usually made clear and the per diem charged for that placement does not vary. It appears that early uses of halfway houses were to address offender needs, whereas most current placements are made for risk management reasons. In light of this evolved purpose(s), a more general modern-day definition of a halfway house might be:

A structured living environment which emphasizes transitional services leading to independent living and which is marked by services that promote stable employment, housing, sobriety, and public safety. Common characteristics tend to be:

- Court-ordered or required through supervised release conditions;
- Thirty to ninety days in length;
- Focus on accountability and assistance as opposed to treatment;
- Highly structured.

This lack of clarity around the purpose of placement has resulted in vendors of halfway houses providing a diverse set of services. While this diversity allows for flexibility, it results in more of a "shotgun approach" to meet the needs of the referral source. Referral sources expressed deep appreciation, especially for the availability of emergency placements for at-risk offenders. Given the difficulty of siting correctional facilities and the critical value of having a residential option for emergency placements to address public safety concerns, focus group members expressed a strong opinion that this precious resource be preserved. One offender who commits a highly visible crime can bring about massive public outcry and threaten the existence of what has been a crucial service for public safety.

Vendors are not typically asked to provide a specific set of services to address client-specific needs when a placement is made. No outcome is articulated other than the generic reasons for placement (such as accountability and provision of related support services). For example, offenders with chemical dependency issues might need a halfway house placement that emphasizes treatment and aftercare services. A level 3 sex offender may need highly structured accountability along with specific sex offender programming. Another offender may need minimal programming but sufficient support to gain meaningful employment. Another offender may have been incarcerated for an extended period of time and may need basic skills such as finance management, apartment-seeking, etc.

Halfway house vendors have used their limited funding sources to maximize the services offered. However, until contract managers are more clear about what is expected for each referral, which vendor is better suited to provide it, and how payments to vendors reflect the level, intensity, length, and type of service needed, halfway house placements remain a "hit and miss" proposition. Under this scenario, some offenders get what they need, others get only part of what they need.

Some service providers expressed frustration with the manner in which the DOC made funding decisions around halfway house and support service contracts. They indicated that certain vendors tend to win a disproportionate number of bids and smaller agencies, especially those that serve primarily non-Caucasian offenders, find it difficult to get a favorable bid response. This is not to say that current contracted providers are failing in their effort to provide culturally-sensitive programming or that outcomes are falling short of expectations. However, if the DOC was more clear on what they were seeking as an outcome with which clientele, these agencies might be pursued more vigorously and seen as a viable service-specific partner.

Finally, it was noted that the contracted length of stay can be problematic given the needs of the offenders. Some offenders need longer stays to gain the kind of life skills necessary. Since most placements are treated as standard, time-limited placements, the length of stay does not necessarily match the need. If offender needs were more closely linked with the services and outcome sought, the length of stay would need to be adjusted accordingly.

Finding 7: The highest priorities around housing services for offenders are, in order of priority:

- guaranteed emergency bed access
- transitional housing
- supportive housing
- access to market rate & affordable housing

## "There is a cultural dynamic that says, 'I'd rather be in jail than under the bridge.""

While emergency and transitional housing was listed as the most immediate need, funders are moving away from their support of this form of housing. It is short term and does not address the systemic issues that create the need for crisis-oriented housing.

Focus group participants recognized that the list of needs related to housing was long, potentially timeconsuming, and expensive to address. Some solutions would take considerable political will and a long period of time to see them to fruition. Therefore, a more practical, shorter-term listing of priorities was identified. Participants expressed a desire to see some of the longer term solutions set in motion while working on the more immediate and less expensive recommendations. For example, one of the most promising solutions to many offender housing issues is that of supportive housing; that is, permanent, affordable rental housing with ongoing, flexible support services. For supportive housing to succeed, however, a multi-agency partnership is needed. This partnership needs to work closely with the community, and financing should come from multiple sources. It can take three or more years for a new housing project to be completed from beginning to end. There appears to be no disagreement as to the need for more supportive housing units. However, the number of units needed statewide is undetermined. Supportive housing that contains emergency or transitional housing onsite provides the most ideal scenario as offenders can move from less to more permanent living arrangements as his/ her needs evolve.

19

Some of the most successful programs worthy of expansion and replication are also the least expensive and can be implemented more quickly. They include:

- Establishing trusting relationships with rental agencies/property managers. When quick and effective responses to violations of rental agreements and financial loss is guaranteed to be covered, property managers are more likely to accept an offender. The primary interest of the housing manager is in having an aggressive case management and service package for the tenant. The case manager should be proactive and not wait for a violation of the lease to occur. Quick responses to problems are important, but preventing problems is even better. With the toughest families, housing managers expect aggressive services.
- Financial incentives. Property managers need to benefit from taking risks in a tight market. Benefits might include tax breaks, assurances of damage recovery, speedy eviction, etc. Some advocates have provided vacancy protection should their client be removed.
- Housing advocacy. Housing advocacy agencies that work closely with property managers report high levels of placement success with some offenders. They specialize in the service and better understand what each property manager needs in order to make the arrangement work for them. It should be noted that some agencies have reportedly advocated without sufficient regard for property manager interests. Blind advocacy which is concerned only with the short-term benefit of gaining housing for a single referral diminishes the credibility of others that follow. Burnt bridges make it much more difficult for other tenants and advocacy agencies that seek to find solutions that benefit both property manager and tenant.

— *Home ownership*. In some cases, the only real solution is for the offender to own his/her home due to the stigma and immense set of barriers. This is especially true of level 3 sex offenders.

Finding 8: Housing placements upon release from prison could be improved with changes at the correctional institution.

"When an offender finally finds housing, he can't get selected. He is at the bottom of the barrel, the lowest link in the food chain." Focus group members identified a number of housing-related services or practices that could be offered at the correctional institution level which would be beneficial in preparing the offender for successful community integration. For example, offender focus groups held in Massachusetts shelters indicated that longtime prison inmates found that they were not prepared for life outside of bars. Simple functions such as accessing cash from ATM machines were foreign to them and they struggled to cope with a world that had changed since they were incarcerated. Some of these types of suggestions are being piloted at a couple of prison sites. Service improvements include:

- Begin the housing search earlier than the typical four months before release from prison.
- Ensure that the offender leaves with sufficient stateissued identification.
- Provide an appropriate supply of psychotropic medication before release for those offenders with a prescription, ensure access to follow-up health care services, and put in place a proper medication monitoring system upon release.
- Provide more intensive case management. Many offenders express significant apprehension and confusion about the proper steps to take upon release. Probation/supervised release officers and institution case managers usually have caseloads too high to give the kind of intensive, individual attention necessary during this critical point of reintegration.
- Increase information about housing options. Institutional case managers could benefit from knowing more about where housing might be available as well as advocacy services.
- Review existing DOC policies that sometimes create barriers to community support. For example, for security reasons a DOC policy restricts prison volunteers from working with offenders for two years after their release from prison.

The DOC has existing contracts with agencies to assist with transitional services. For example, the EXCEL Program operated by Wilder provides a number of housing-related services in six correctional facilities including classroom work and community-based support. Some of these are culturally-specific services, career development planning, job-seeking skills, housing information packets, rental location services, and follow-up contact with housing managers. While these are comprehensive, more intensive services are needed.

## **DOC Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: Improve system coordination/communication and focus on offender housing needs by establishing an interagency work group to:

- Review, coordinate, and recommend appropriate changes in policies and practices.
- Assist and inform referral and direct-care professionals of existing housing.
- Conduct a statewide summit with regional work teams.

"When you return home from prison you are not emotionally or psychologically ready to walk the streets."

### Review, coordinate, and recommend appropriate changes in policies and practices.

An interagency work group should be established to identify policy and practice issues that inhibit the ability of the offender to gain access to suitable housing and programs that might increase the chance for offenders to retain their rental unit (such as crisis care services). If an existing interagency group could expand its focus to include correctional issues, creating an additional work group can be avoided. The work group should adopt a "One Door, No Wrong Door" approach to its work. The goal should be to reduce finger-pointing, ease bureaucratic rules, streamline processes, and align funding streams to ensure that offenders can access suitable and appropriate housing. It should also consider any possible legislative action that might provide incentives or remove disincentives for property manager liability to rent to an offender. The work group should examine legislative and policy barriers initially put in place for the public interest that have created secondary and harmful consequences to successful mainstreaming and determine if some of these should be altered or removed. Finally, it should develop a model of continuum of housing services and an action plan to accomplish the goal of meeting offender housing needs.

At a minimum, agencies that make up the work group should consist of federal, state, county, and local officials and include representatives from corrections, human services, mental health, chemical dependency, private vendors, housing, law enforcement, veterans, and victims. It should be noted that a number of interagency efforts have been put in place in recent years with limited success. This recommendation should be implemented only after an analysis of those efforts is completed and a determination made on how to ensure that this effort succeeds. Among other topics noted above, this group should explore the concept of tying service funds to capital projects.

## Assist and inform referral and direct-care professionals of existing housing.

It was clear through focus group discussions that few service sectors had a comprehensive knowledge of the housing subject. Many were missing information that would be valuable in their effort to serve those in need. For example, many of those in attendance were unaware of the following opportunities to assist with housing:

- SMERT (State Medical Review Team) funds. The Department of Human Services has a budget called SMERT that can be accessed for disability services. Local agencies should learn more about this program and seek reimbursement to assist with mental health or other disability-related services.
- Shelter Plus Care certificates. These housing certificates are available for individuals with severe and persistent mental health needs and who are homeless. They are similar to Section 8 certificates but require a service funding match.

- Medical assistance (MA) and general assistance medical care (GAMC) funds. For example, a program called Rehab Options is available through MA. These funds could be accessed to expand services, but Minnesota is not currently accessing them.
- Mental health initiatives. Local case workers can enhance the linking of their client needs, including housing, with these mental health initiatives (pilot projects now underway) as a means of gaining intensive mental health services.

In addition, following are examples of some of the housing programs addressing homelessness:

- Emergency Shelter Grant Program
- Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program
- Federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program
- Supportive Housing Program
- Transitional Housing Program
- Emergency Services Program
- Affordable Rental Investment Fund
- Foreclosure Prevention Program
- Housing Trust Fund
- Education for Homeless Children and Youth
- Battered Women's Program
- Homeless Youth Program

21

- PATH (Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness)
- Statewide Plan for Housing Persons with HIV/AIDS
- Bridges

-----

- Crisis Housing Assistance Fund

It is recommended that the work group develop informational materials to better inform case managers and correctional administrators of funding and service options available to assist with housing.

## Conduct a statewide summit with regional work teams.

It is recommended that the work group sponsor a housing summit for correctional staff and stakeholders. The summit would be designed to encourage the development of local needs analysis and action plans to improve access to suitable housing for offenders. To accomplish this, it is recommended that each invited jurisdiction bring a diverse team of policymakers to the summit. A separate DOC team made up of prison case managers should be invited as well. Field visits to housing projects including supportive housing should be part of the summit. Selected offices in the work group should be made available to provide follow-up technical assistance to local teams.

## **Recommendation 2: Increase public awareness** of the issue of offender housing.

"The availability of housing that most people can afford has been steadily declining, but within the past two years, it's reached crisis proportions." Kit Hadley, Minnesota Housing Finance Commissioner, The Minnesota Housing Crunch

Public support for policies or funding necessary for offenders to access suitable housing is perceived to be weak. This may be due to an assumption that access would be costly to taxpayers and that it would increase the risk to their safety. It is possible that some of the public attitude may be that poor housing options are a natural consequence of criminal acts and such access barriers should not be removed.

However, there is a great deal of information that would be instructional to the public. For example, offenders without suitable housing are believed to be more likely to reoffend. And the costs associated with housing assistance are considerably lower than those that result from consequences of living in unsuitable environments. Until public opinion supports housing assistance for offenders, it is doubtful that there will be sufficient political will to make these services a priority.

It is recommended that the DOC work closely with other agencies such as the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the Corporation for Supportive Housing to inform the public about offender housing issues. This information should include data that indicates how to best use public funds to prevent more substantial longterm costs.

The public awareness project should be preventive in nature. For example, given the need to preserve the limited but valuable service of halfway houses, stronger public support would provide some immunity from the "one bad case" that could threaten public support for all halfway houses. According to the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, Massachusetts saw a drop of pre-release beds from 688 in 1992 to 206 in 1999, and halfway house beds dropped from 240 in 1989 to a mere 30 in 2000. The reason? Willie Horton. The massive negative publicity and political fallout that came from the murder and conviction resulted in a decrease of these transitional beds.

Recommendation 3: Increase rental placements by building upon existing housing interventions proven to be effective. Do this by:

- —Developing how-to packets, offender-provided certification training programs, and a centralized listing of housing options for access by probation officers and housing case managers.
- Increasing housing service contracts.
- Issuing exploratory community-driven Requests for Proposals to encourage innovative housing options for offenders with the greatest needs.
- Training probation officers.
- Reducing probation officer caseloads.

"When you push people out of a decent housing arrangement, they end up where you don't want them." 22

Case managers, probation officers, and offenders could benefit from easy-to-use packets of information and a listing of viable rental options to decrease the likelihood of housing rejection and forfeiture of application fees. The packets should contain practical do's and don't's. Centralized listings of accessible rental properties can reduce the frustration in finding housing and increase the opportunity for an ongoing relationship with referral sources.

Effective housing advocates use various techniques to increase the chance that their clients will gain access to rental units. These tips could be highly useful to probation officers and case managers who deal with housing issues on a regular basis. In addition, the Attorney General's office produces a brochure entitled *Landlords and Tenants: Rights and Responsibilities*. This informational brochure helps tenants and landlords understand the laws and responsibilities that come with renting.

Hard-to-house applicants could benefit from attending a series of classes on how to find and retain rental property. These classes provide them with a certification that they present to the property manager which gives the manager some assurance that the tenant understands their responsibilities as a renter. For example, the Family Housing Fund has provided certification training for tenants, and a Tenant Training and Certification Program has been developed by RHAM (Rental Housing Alliance of Minnesota). In addition, the Minnesota Public Housing Authority has a renter's education program initiated by Holman Decree which is used in conjunction with the Section 8 program and teaches skills used to search for housing. The RHAM training certification program outline includes topics such as:

- Housing search preparation
- Application process and fees
- Interviews and first impressions
- Telephone etiquette
- Security deposit
- Budgeting and spending styles
- Landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities
- Lifestyles, guests, and pets
- Housekeeping
- Giving proper written notice

It is recommended that the work group produce examples of these suggestions for summit team participants. Local teams could develop their own version of the information and techniques for use in their area.

### - Increasing housing service contracts.

Some of the best success stories came from housing advocates who provide services for hard-to-house individuals. Two distinct program examples include the ROOF programs operated by Wilder and St. Steven's Housing Services. They understand property manager concerns and seek to address them through information and guarantees of quick responses or financial reimbursement if damages occur.

It is recommended that local and state agencies consider entering into or expanding existing housing advocacy contracts for the hard-to-place offender. Whether this solution is appropriate should be assessed at a local level. The summit will provide additional information and awareness to assist local policymakers in determining the full extent of the need and whether funding can be acquired.

### Issuing exploratory community-driven Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to encourage innovative housing options for offenders with the greatest needs.

Focus group participants expressed some optimism toward newer, more unique community-driven efforts that might be considered unproved but promising in promoting stable housing and other support services for offenders. In particular, restorative justice projects such as Circles of Support (operated out of Toronto and more recently in Olmsted County) engage the community in supporting and holding the offender accountable. A network of community members offers assistance in helping the offender in a variety of areas including housing.

Some of these RFPs could address specific offender populations that are facing unique problems such as female offenders (including those leaving federal institutions), juveniles seeking independent living, and sex offenders.

It is recommended that the DOC work with other state agencies to find a way to fund an exploratory RFP process to learn how new, innovative, community-driven support systems can assist offenders with housing needs and reduce their risk of reoffending. An evaluation process should be included as part of the RFP.

### - Training probation officers.

Successful efforts by probation officers and housing case managers are marked by the establishment of trusting relationships with rental agency staff and property managers. The probation officer is in the best position to inform the property manager of the applicant's profile and circumstances (with a data privacy release) and to intervene quickly if a problem arises. The probation officer can ensure the offender will abide by agreed conditions and monitor and enforce them. Some examples of these agreements include:

- No drinking or drug use;
- Curfew;

- No loud parties;
- Payment of rent on time;
- Immediate removal should the agreement be violated.

The relationship between the offender, supervising agent, and property manager provides some immediate benefits to the manager. Some of these include the manager not incurring the expense of ongoing advertisement if the supervising agent can keep the unit full and not needing to intercede with eviction.

In addition, the timing of the housing request can be important. For example, sex offenders who are in treatment or aftercare at the time they are searching for housing stand a better chance of "getting a break." Attendance at treatment means that the property manager has another set of intercessors should the offender not cooperate. It also provides more assurance that the offender is seeking help, thereby reducing their at-risk profile.

#### - Reducing probation officer caseloads.

In order for the probation officer to act as an effective liaison with the property manager, officers must have caseloads that are of reasonable size. Ongoing attempts are being made through legislative funding (case/ workload reduction) to bring caseloads closer to a standard size; however, funding to-date (i.e., \$17 million from 1994 to 2000) has only reduced caseloads from an average of 111 for adult agents in 1994 to 108 in 2000 due to the increased number of probationers.

Lower caseload sizes allow the probation officer to assist the offender in finding and retaining housing and

establishing relationships with housing managers. Many offenders face relapse with chemical dependency or mental illness. When these illnesses cycle up, communitybased support can assist the offender in gaining stability and retaining housing. Even simple tasks such as filling out forms and responding to mail can be taxing to one in the throes of an illness. The related energies required to cope can render an offender incapable of focusing his/ her attention. Overworked probation officers do not have time to garner community support necessary to assist these individuals at the time of greatest need.

It is recommended that the DOC continue seeking funding to bring probation caseloads within minimum standards for effective supervision.

**Recommendation 4: Explore short-term emergency sex offender housing options until a more permanent solution can be found.** 

"By labeling sex offenders, we have created pariahs who are banished from nearly all communities. This has made placement, reintegration, and supervision impossible and has consequently impaired public safety."

Although small in number compared to other crime categories, sex offenders in need of emergency housing consume a significant amount of attention and conflict. Given community notification procedures, offenders are often on the verge of being released from prison only to have their residential placement fall through. Sex offenders have responded by sleeping in their cars, correctional offices, motels, and other creative but unsuitable living arrangements due to these last-minute changes in plans.

Potential long-term solutions to the issue of housing for sex offenders will take years to put in place. In the meantime, it is recommended that the DOC develop an emergency backup plan. One idea considered was that of placing trailers on prison grounds. Community sentiment, removing pressure on the county of responsibility, potentially causing a "stacking up" of trailer beds, and creating a high concentration of sex offenders creates concern with this solution. The concerns expressed over this and similar solutions demonstrate the level of difficulty in resolving this problem.

Another potential short-term solution suggested was to reconstruct how halfway house placements are made. For example, a "continued jurisdiction" arrangement could be established whereby an offender can be pulled back into the residential placement for a period of time (e.g., 90 days) if the community living arrangement falls apart. If set up properly, this extended jurisdiction could be acted on without a formal revocation or restructure.

A combination of solutions will likely be necessary. Some of them could include set-aside halfway house beds, creating more incentives by providing higher compensation rates, and purchasing time-limited emergency beds with selected property managers. Focus group members clearly advised against the creation of housing dedicated only to level 3 sex offenders due to real and perceived safety and public support concerns. However, some members expressed support for the waiving of community notification requirements when the offender is in a highly structured living environment. If successful in their supervision and treatment plans over a two to four-year period, their ability to get their risk level dropped and mainstream back to the community would be enhanced.

Recommendation 5: Assess the social and health needs of the offender population to develop a more thorough and complete understanding of their housing and service needs.

### "When you put an ex-shark in with sharks, he/she will revert to a shark."

While offender housing needs are pronounced, data is missing on the number of housing units needed, for which targeted populations, and the location. Some of the most promising solutions to effective transition and stable housing are expansion of supportive housing and halfway residential care. These solutions are more meaningful if they can be distributed throughout the state to handle rural and urban needs and not burden disproportionately any one community. Supportive and halfway houses offer a flexible range of options for the populations they could serve ranging from prison releasees to probationers to special needs offenders no longer on supervision in the key housing areas (emergency, transitional, short and long-term). A common theme that emerged from all focus group conversations was that a significant portion of offenders is dealing with a complex range of social, health and behavioral health issues. Women whose children are in foster care during their imprisonment, inmates with long histories of alcohol and drug abuse, and people afflicted with chronic mental illness are some of the more prominent conditions that must be addressed upon an inmate's release. For an offender with special needs, appropriate housing alone will not usually result in a successful reintegration into the community. Instead, these offenders require a flexible array of support services along with access to adequate housing to ensure a crime-free and productive life in the community.

A lesson learned from the focus groups was that the DOC can and should play an important role in helping to shape an appropriate housing and service infrastructure for offenders in the community. To do this, however, the DOC needs to have a more precise understanding of the needs and characteristics of its inmate population. More complete knowledge about the offender's work and medical history, family situation, and ties with treatment or service providers would help the DOC shape its strategy for engaging the housing and service sectors.

For instance, with better information the DOC could align the current portfolio of halfway house beds to serve groups of offenders who would benefit most from a shortterm, highly structured residential setting. Moreover, with more sophisticated information the DOC would be in a better position to determine whether additional halfway house beds are needed and where these beds should be located. Another advantage with having a more complete understanding of an offender's experiences and circumstances before prison and upon release is that the DOC could help shape the type of housing and service settings that are expected to improve an offender's chances for success in the community. For instance, there is growing evidence that supportive housing can facilitate an offender's re-engagement with society. And there are some significant efforts underway to increase the number and type of supportive housing units in Minnesota. The DOC would be in a stronger place to help advance this work and negotiate set-asides of new units if it had a more detailed understanding of the size and characteristics of the inmates who are being released to the community. These housing options, however, take significant effort, finances, and collaboration to initiate. Agencies need to work closely with local communities to build support and to find funding both for construction as well as ongoing, onsite support services.

A number of factors must be considered to determine whether additional halfway house beds are needed and how many. For example, in at least one state a judge found that the state was liable for not providing sufficient housing. The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services was found in contempt by a judge for not providing a halfway house for sex offenders and was fined \$1,000 per day. In this case, the offender was being detained unconstitutionally because the department had not been able to find the housing he needed for his release.

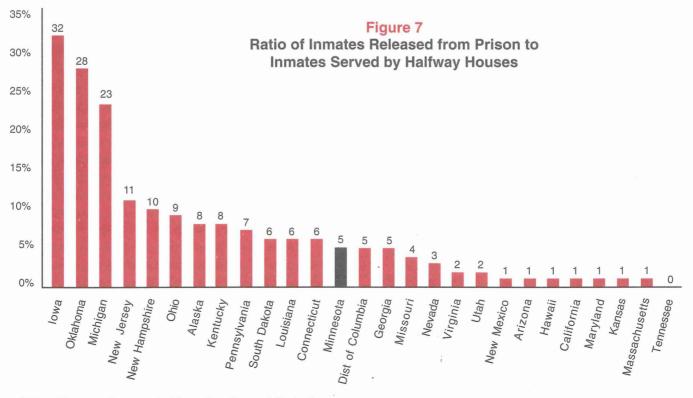
\*\*\*\*\*

Focus group participants favored a distributive model that would place correctional housing in each region of the state. At the very least, this model would help address the overwhelming need to find emergency housing, particularly for sex offenders required to undergo a community notification process. It could also provide housing designed to provide specific supportive services for special needs populations. Some city officials urged a solution that would take local government officials out of the public hearing and siting process when the state determines that a particular housing project to serve offenders is in the public's best interests.

Recommendation 6: Set aside corrections funding to create a supply of supportive housing units (new and existing) for offenders.

"Supportive housing seems to me to be such an ingeniously sensible idea and to be so skillfully carried out by the Corporation for Supportive Housing that I look forward to the day when not only will the program be replicated in cities all around the country, but that the very thinking behind it will have spread as well." Alan Alda, actor/writer/director, former Rockefeller Foundation board member

At the focus group meetings, corrections professionals reported being very satisfied with their supportive housing experiences. They note the following benefits of supportive housing:



Source: Minnesota Department of Corrections Research/Evaluation and Sex Offender/Chemical Dependency Services Units

- Highly structured and "structure breeds success" with the kind of offenders in need of this kind of housing.
   Affordable.
- Creates a positive community experience for the offender.
- Increases accountability due to the case management and structure and reduces opportunities for the offender to find cracks to slip through and excuses for lack of follow-through.
- Allows an offender to establish a positive rental and employment history which affords the opportunity to eventually move to market rate housing.
- Provides immediate access to supportive staff when there is an urgent need or can prevent a minor issue from becoming a crisis.
- Fosters independence, self-sufficiency, and confidence.
- Increases the opportunity for employment since it decreases distractions, provides a phone number and address, and allows for job networking among other residents and staff.
- Reduces hopelessness.
- Provides linkages between the offender and the community.
- Increases community understanding of the offender and decreases stereotypes. Some of this occurs through the process of gaining community support for supportive housing, personal contact with the offender, and care given to the property by the offender.

For supportive housing to be accepted and effective, it requires a strong, healthy community as a partner. Communities that do not acknowledge a role in helping others find supportive housing will be a hindrance to the effort.

Although supportive housing can work for all offenders, its existing models tend to work better with offenders who have matured and are willing to make the program work. Typically this includes offenders who are in their upper 20s or older and who are more aware and sensitive to others' privacy needs.

Access to supportive housing is a problem, primarily due to the limited number of available units. Current units are more available to the single adult than to youth or those with families. There are also long waiting lists (usually ranging from three to six months, with some up to a year). In rural areas, the access problem is exacerbated by not having the economy of scale to create and operate supportive housing units. Many rural-based offenders are placed in supportive housing in the metro area. Funders are also reluctant to accept hard-to-serve populations (e.g., sex offenders, those with mental illness, etc.). The following obstacles create additional barriers to securing housing placement:

- Income level.
- Teenager(s) in the family.
- Family size (more than two kids, and in need of three or more bedrooms).
- Two-parent household or male-led household.
- Those with previous unlawful detainers (or eviction actions) which stay on one's record forever, even if lost rent or damages were paid.

Most supportive housing programs will consider all offenders for placement on a case-by-case basis with the exception of two populations: level 3 sex offenders (due to the community notification requirement) and arsonists.

As described earlier, emerging evidence and the focus group summaries highlight the value of and need for an increased supply of supportive housing in Minnesota. Although more information about the DOC's inmate population (particularly those with special needs) must be compiled, most people in the field agree that the postrelease success rates for a significant portion of offenders would improve if more affordable housing with a flexible array of support services was made available. One way for the DOC to help spur development in this area is to establish a supportive housing incentive fund that would be used to gain access to existing units and fund the creation of new units of supportive housing. This fund would be used to supplement the operating and service costs associated with providing supportive housing to offenders, especially those who appear to be at greatest risk of failing in the community because of their history with mental illness and/or substance abuse.

The DOC could use these funds to ensure access to units, thereby reducing the challenge of finding appropriate housing for and connecting offenders with necessary support services. In addition, the DOC could tie its funding to a set of conditions that would help ensure that the funds are maximized and that other key sectors are involved with supporting the offender in the community. For example, the DOC could:

Require supportive housing sponsors who receive financial assistance from the DOC to meet a set of key

outcomes. Namely, the DOC would expect every offender to be housed in a stable and safe setting, that appropriate services are offered, and that the offender is reengaged in the community in a positive way.

- Require project sponsors to leverage other funds (at least a two-to-one match; \$2 from other sources for every DOC dollar) for the housing and services that are to be delivered to the offender.
- Require that the sponsors maintain data and information about the offenders being served so that a formal and thorough evaluation of the value and effectiveness of supportive housing for offenders can be completed.

The proposal would start with an initial level of funding for the incentive fund and increase the amount of funds as additional revenue sources are identified and as the effectiveness and value of this approach are verified through an evaluation.

### **Recommendation 7: Improve DOC transition** services for prison releasees.

1

"The state has really stepped up to the plate and taken an unbelievable amount of leadership. Governor Ventura has proposed to spend \$82.5 million on affordable housing initiatives. I think that has to pass. But this is not a problem that can be solved by the state alone." Kit Hadley, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency Commissioner, The Minnesota Housing Crunch

- Beginning release planning earlier in the process. Release planning should begin at intake, with intense planning moved to six months before release instead of the current four-month mark.
- Ensuring that each releasing facility has a special needs unit or other trained staff to assist inmates who are mentally ill or mentally delayed to develop appropriate release plans.
- Conducting a discharge mental health assessment on every offender identified with a major mental illness prior to release from the institution. Assessment results should be used

### to address the transition plan with the information transferred to the field agent.

Part of the assessment should screen for mental health supportive living eligibility. Inmates with a serious mental illness (such as schizophrenia, bipolar, major depressive disorder) may qualify for services under Rule 79 if they've been hospitalized within the past year or if they've been housed in a special needs unit. If eligible, the county is responsible for providing a social services caseworker who will assist the inmate with housing, medication, food, etc. Funding is to cover all related costs, including housing.

— Ensuring that offenders requiring psychotropic medication are provided with an appropriate supply at release and that they have access to follow-up health care services. Set up a process for monitoring the taking of medication as part of the release plan.

Providing an appropriate supply of medication is dependent on many factors. Currently, DOC policy only calls for a seven-day supply, the rationale being that an offender might use a larger supply to overdose or use in another inappropriate manner. While a more ample supply appears warranted, it would be more judicious to make decisions on a case-by-case basis, making sure that some case manager is aware of the related issues and ensures proper filling and monitoring of medication.

- Ensuring that, whenever possible, the offender identifies a local case manager(s) to assist with transitional issues upon release.
- Extending the identification card pilot projects beyond the pilot sites.
- Examining DOC policies to determine how to encourage more long-term involvement between inmates and the community that would continue after release. Programs such as AM-ICUS and Prison Fellowship could be expanded.
- Reviewing DOC policies on halfway houses including clarification of roles and outcomes desired, funding options that better match service levels desired, and length of stay.

- Holding an annual planning session with prison case workers and probation officers to coordinate policy, identify problems and solutions, and improve transition from institution to field services and vice versa.
- Conducting a listening session with vendors who serve offenders of color to determine how to best provide transitional services that are comprehensive, supportive, and culturallyspecific.
- Conducting "transition fairs" at each medium-custody facility to provide information on available housing, employment, and other community services.

The recommendations in this section were identified by focus group participants as key factors in the offender's success at community reintegration. Because most of the participants were community-based advocates, service providers, and referral sources, they were able to identify what actions taken by institutional staff were the most helpful as inmates leave correctional facilities and enter communities.

### **Progress Made on Recommendations**

The DOC has a transition committee in place and many of the recommendations have been or are in the process of being implemented or expanded. Some of the changes include:

- The state identification card pilot project at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Faribault has been implemented. There is discussion underway with the Department of Public Safety to expand this project to other correctional facilities. In addition, initial discussion is occurring on the possibility of incorporating the driver's license examination process as part of the project.
- DOC policy states that offenders are to be given a minimum of seven days medication and a 30-day prescription for refills. Offenders who are currently taking psychotropic mediation are referred by Health Services to the psychiatrist for a prescription. While psy-

chiatrists routinely encourage offenders to make arrangements with a psychiatrist in the community for follow-up care, additional monitoring is warranted to ensure the prescription is filled and medication taken, when deemed necessary. Additional followup services would be helpful to address the cost of filling the prescription and monitoring medication.

- Transitional opportunities for offenders include workforce centers, INVEST programming (such as work skills, interviewing techniques, interpersonal skills, community resource options, educational and employment opportunities, and financial aid), housing referrals, and child support consultation. Offenders are also given information to help them understand the release process. While these services are helpful, ongoing intensive case management upon release is crucial to help the offender apply these skills.
- Current DOC policy under "interpersonal associations and sexual misconduct between staff and offender" stipulates that "employees, volunteers and independent contractors will not maintain any interpersonal association with current offenders, their family members or with former offenders of any jurisdiction or their family members unless specifically approved." The department is working towards changing the language of the policy to enhance community support resources.

- The facility health services administrator and mental health services directors are developing a "transfer health care summary" form to be used at all institutions. Offenders' specific health concerns will be identified. Case managers will assist the offenders in enrolling into MA, GAMC, or MinnesotaCare before release so they will be better financially prepared to pay for medications and health care.
- Prison Fellowship is developing a mentor program for offenders. It will be available in all institutions.

The DOC should continue its work in improving the areas noted under this recommendation section.

### **Bibliography**

"Research on Corrections," Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, Boston, Massachusetts, 2000.

"Minnesota Statewide Survey of Persons Without Permanent Shelter, Volume I: Adults and their Children," Wilder Research Center, Wilder Foundation, June 1998.

"No Vacancy: Homelessness in Minnesota, Fact Sheet, April 2000," St. Stephen's Human Services.

"Build the Foundation," Housing Minnesota, funded by The Minneapolis Foundation, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and the Family Housing Fund.

"Minnesota Supportive Housing Program One Year Evaluation Report," Wilder Research Center, Wilder Foundation, June 1998.

"The Minnesota Housing Crunch," *The Rights Stuff*, published quarterly by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, May-July, 2000.

"For Jailed Mentally Ill, a Way Out," *The Washington Post*, June 28, 2000.

"Supportive Place for Homeless a Success" *New Haven Register*, CSH In The News, Gregory B. Hladky, November 18, 1999.

"Why Supportive Housing?", Corporation for Supportive Housing, 1999.

"Chronic Offenders in Hennepin County: A Management Framework," Hennepin County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, September 2000.

"Work Release: Recidivism and Corrections Costs in Washington State," by Susan Turner, Ph.D., and Joan Petersilia, Ph.D., National Institute of Justice *Research in Brief*, NIJ Award 90-DD-CX-0056, December, 1996.



## Appendix — The Housing Continuum

For purposes of clarity, the terms below are defined within the context of housing for offenders. Consideration of the various housing options might be viewed along a continuum, ranging from those that are least costly to local/state government to those most costly, and those that reflect a highly independent living arrangement to dependent care.

*Home Ownership.* When an offender owns his/her home, the local/state cost is minimal and the offender is most self-sufficient. For many offenders, this housing option is out-of-reach due to the need for both assets and a solid credit history. For others, it represents one of the only options due to community sentiment (e.g., a level 3 sex offender). Home ownership includes any arrangement whereby the offender is legally the sole or joint owner, whether that be by full purchase, bank loan, or contract for deed.

**Rental:** Market Rates. Most offenders released from prison do not have the assets or credit history to own their home. For them, renting is the most common housing option. This category includes lease payment for a living unit or house under competitive market rates including month-to-month, six-month, and one-year leases.

**Rental:** Affordable Housing. Due to their economic situation, offenders often do not have sufficient reserve funds or ongoing income to pay market rates. These offenders must find housing that is subsidized by local, state, or federal assistance. Some programs are available to bring the cost down to a level whereby those with low income can afford a unit (usually set at 30 percent of income). These programs usually have tight eligibility criteria and long waiting lists.

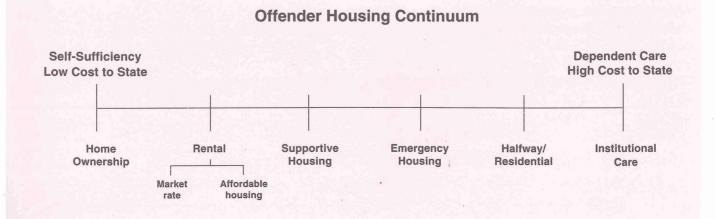
\*\*\*\*\*

*Supportive Housing*. Supportive housing is permanent, affordable housing linked to a range of support services that enable residents to live independently and work toward realizing their full potential. It is an alternative to more expensive and less effective institutional settings. Tenants have their own apartments, hold their own leases, and are responsible for meeting the terms of those leases.

31

This kind of housing is designed for people with psychiatric disabilities, people with histories of addiction, seniors, families, young people aging out of foster care, homeless people, and people living with HIV/AIDS to live independently with dignity in the community. Support services are usually provided onsite, the type depending on the needs of the residents. Often people served in supportive housing have a criminal history, are under correctional supervision, or are at risk of future involvement with the criminal justice system. Services can include medical and mental health care, vocational and employment services, substance abuse treatment, child care, and independent living skills training.

While the cost of supportive housing varies according to the tenant, number of services provided, and location, supportive housing generally costs between \$7,000 and \$15,000 per tenant, per year. It is financed by a combination of residential rents; conventional bank loans; federal, state, and local government loans and grants; and contributions from private foundations and organizations. Corporations invest in supportive housing in exchange for tax benefits. Most supportive housing projects are developed by nonprofit housing developers in partnership with nonprofit service providers.



There is a wide continuum of supportive housing models available, ranging from scattered housing to intentional communities. It is believed by focus group participants that almost any offender with a housing need could be served appropriately in one of these models if the need and housing program could be properly matched.

*Emergency and Transitional Housing.* This form of housing is designed as short-term living to bridge a gap between homelessness and entering into permanent housing. Emergency housing may take the form of a shelter or use of a voucher to pay for a motel/hotel for a day or more. It can also include a short stay in a detoxification center. Transitional housing is also short-term but can be extended for up to a year in most cases. It is available to an offender for a limited amount of time so he/she can find employment, gain stability, and find permanent housing without too much urgency.

*Halfway Houses.* For purposes of this report, a halfway house is a residential program placement designed solely for offenders and ordered by the court or a corrections department. It is shorter term (usually one to three months in length) and highly structured. The offender is expected to be accountable at all times and to cooperate with any designated programming identified by the referral source. Failure to abide by expectations usually results in a return to jail or prison. The purpose of a halfway house is to give the offender an opportunity to ease back into the community by gaining employment, accumulating some financial savings, developing a reintegration plan, and establishing a series of support services in preparation for independent living.

**Institutional Care.** On the other end of the continuum of housing options are those that are very costly to government and which limit the freedom and control of the resident. Institutional care for offenders can include a range of possibilities such as jail, prison, inpatient chemical dependency programs, and psychiatric hospitals. The common feature is that the offender is most often a resident not by choice and cannot simply leave the institution. Release is contingent on either time served (jail and prison) or successful participation in some form of treatment.