MINNESOTA
WOMEN'S PRESS

Solving the Housing Crisis

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Children's Mental Health

Leading Beyond Racial Trauma

By Brandon Jones, MA, CPPM, executive director at Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health via The Leadership Dynamic, a transformative newsletter dedicated to empowering leaders and aspiring individuals in their pursuit of success.

Our youth are the leaders of tomorrow. To encourage them to step into their potential, we need our adult leaders to be whole, healthy, and informed. During Black History Month and every month, the Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health is celebrating and promoting optimal Black mental health.

The trauma of racism has permeated the lives of Black individuals and communities for centuries. From the horrors of slavery to the ongoing struggle against systemic racism, the burden of this trauma is deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness. However, Black leadership must rise above the trauma and forge a path toward progress to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

I must admit, I had to rewrite this article several times. Not because I am afraid to speak about what I believe but because I wanted to make sure that the reader understands the context of my message without bringing historical hurts into play.

Acknowledging the Trauma

Before progress can be made, it is essential to acknowledge the trauma caused by racism. Historical events like slavery, segregation, and discrimination have inflicted deep wounds on the Black community. Black leaders, who often have firsthand experiences with racial injustice, play a crucial role in recognizing and validating this trauma. By giving voice to these experiences, leaders create a space for healing and empower others to confront the lasting effects of racism.

Embracing Empowerment

Black leaders must inspire a sense of empowerment within their communities. They should emphasize Black individuals' strength, resilience, and achievements throughout history. Stories of triumph over adversity instill a sense of encouragement, self-worth, and determination. Empowerment catalyzes change, enabling individuals to confront and overcome the barriers imposed by racism.

Promoting Education and Awareness

Education is a powerful tool for dismantling systemic racism. Black leaders are responsible for promoting educational initiatives that challenge stereotypes, promote accurate historical narratives, and foster cultural understanding, which means finding information that does not just confirm our pains but also provides an objective perspective. Also, relying on education systems as primary educators might be a mistake. This education should come from the community and homes first. Black leaders can organize workshops, seminars, and community discussions to raise awareness about racial issues and encourage dialogue that fosters understanding.

Building Coalitions and Alliances

Addressing the trauma of racism requires a collective effort. Black leaders should collaborate with all communities and like-minded individuals to build strong coalitions and alliances. Leaders can leverage their experiences and resources by joining forces to create a more inclusive society. Leaders' networks might be their biggest strength in making change. Collaboration also facilitates the exchange of ideas and strategies, strengthening the movement against racism and ensuring lasting change.

Creating Systems of Support

Black leaders must prioritize the creation of supportive structures within their communities. By establishing apprenticeship programs, scholarships, social groups, clubs, and entrepreneurship initiatives, leaders can provide opportunities for growth and success. Additionally, mental health support networks should be developed to address the emotional toll of generational trauma. By fostering a sense of community and providing resources, leaders can uplift and empower individuals affected by racism.

Leading by Example

Ultimately, Black leaders must lead by example, embodying the principles of integrity, compassion, and perseverance. Their actions and achievements serve as beacons of hope and inspiration for others. By demonstrating growth and determination in the face of adversity, leaders empower individuals to navigate the challenges of racism and work towards a more equitable society.

To read more by Brandon Jones or subscribe to the newsletter, follow The Leadership Dynamic on LinkedIn.

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Our mission is to promote and pursue optimal mental health from infancy to young adulthood.

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We don't do this work alone and this month's partnership organization is part of MACMH's Infant and Early Childhood division. We recognize that getting an early start in children's lives makes a huge difference in their mental health and in that effort, we are proud to work with

Minnesota Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Coalition

This coalition represents local, regional, and statewide early childhood stakeholders and coalitions.

We believe by focusing on children facing racial, geographic, and economic inequities, all children in Minnesota will be born healthy and able to thrive within their families and communities. Our purpose is to:

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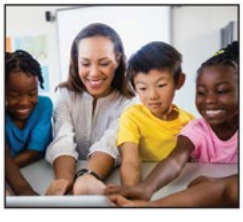

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PHOTO SARAH WHITING

"Women are the real architects of society."

— Harriet Beecher Stowe

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Minnesota Women's Press has been sharing the stories of women since 1985, as one of the longest continuously published feminist platforms in the country. It is distributed free at 550 locations.

Our mission: Authentic community-based journalism that amplifies and inspires the stories, action steps, and leadership of powerful, everyday women (cis and trans) and nonbinary people.

Our vision: We all are parts of a greater whole. Our stronger future will be built from the collective energy of people who shift narratives to effect change.

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Cover: Rinal Ray, assistant commissioner of the new state Housing Stability Division. Photo by Sarah Whiting. See her story on page 14.

The womenspress.com website and magazine photography have been honored three years in a row by the Minnesota Newspaper Association.

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The Foundation of Housing

by Mikki Morrissette

Several years ago, I interviewed Julie at Dignity House. She was connecting twice a week with an advocate there to build stability back into her life after an accident that left her with brain damage, which led to the loss of her job, which ultimately led to being unhoused.

It has been seven years since I talked to her, but something I remember to this day is that she told me one of the items on her wish list was to be able to afford to wear new undergarments again, instead of hand-me-downs.

As someone who has generally been steadily housed and employed, this detail about dignity is something I had never considered. It struck me how much I did not know about what Julie, and others impacted by the kinds of challenges she faced, had to navigate.

Julie told me that the advocate she worked with helped her feel someone cared and wanted to see her succeed. She rediscovered that she mattered. "I lost that for a while," she said. "Not knowing where to turn is humiliating. I became simply another number. One of those people who needs help instead of a person."

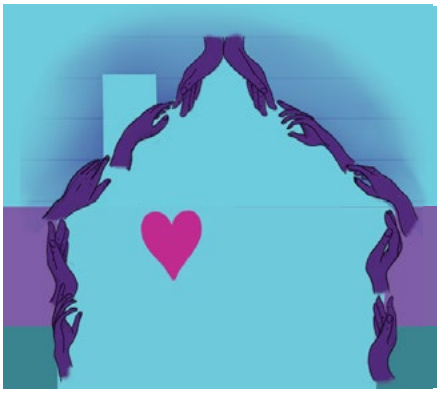
Two years ago, I met April Chouinard, who appreciated having a place in Saint Peter to recover from substance use. She told me she was supported by her peers at Solace after she relapsed. "To be able to stay gave me a huge sense that I am worth something — that even if I cannot love myself yet, they do," Chouinard said. "All of a sudden you feel like somebody has your back and you matter. You are not just an addict. That grace is huge."

More recently, I visited Peace House, where unhoused people arrive for an afternoon lunch, conversation about a question of the day, and sometimes a massage, haircut, or bike repair. The house was opened in 1985 by Sister Rose Tillemans with a mission to provide a welcoming space for people who tend to otherwise not be invited over for dinner. She wanted to offer an opportunity to share conversation for "those who had no one to listen to them."

Thanks to 2023 bipartisan legislative work, Minnesota currently has historic financial and policy support to help solve long-simmering underinvestment in housing.

The people featured in this issue recognize that dignity, support, respect, and a sense of belonging are invaluable to the foundation that comes from housing.

We unpack statewide needs, share data, and begin to explore with advocates, government voices, and community-based innovators some of the solutions in process, even as experts — who include people with experiences of housing instability — sort out what the right next steps might be and how best to get there.



To support ongoing coverage about "The Foundation of Housing" for informed statewide conversations, please become a Badass member.

Topics to include: women in trades and affordable development, passive energy construction, preservation, accessibility, Saint Paul's encampment and guaranteed basic income solutions

womenspress.com/be-a-badass

Online: Politics, Ecolution, Perspectives

story development designed for stronger conversations about statewide values, solutions, and action steps

Diversity in Politics

We have stories about the inauguration of the new Saint Paul City Council — a diverse group of three incumbents and four newcomers, all women — as well as a deep Q&A with Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter.

We talked with the new council members. Hwa Jeong Kim told us: "I believe that intrinsically women create a different culture around our relationships. I believe deeply that we will govern differently, not simply because of our gender, but also because of our experiences, our identities, our ethnicities, our religions. ... It is necessary, particularly now given our political climate, to watch smart, capable people disagree."

womenspress.com/diversity-in-politics-series

Ecolution

Our spotlight on cooperative economies includes a three-part series of essays. "Nurturing Healthy Collaboration in a Community Economy" suggests that differences of perspective tend to be about whether we have limited resources that should be controlled by some, or whether we are capable of collaboration in providing for all.

In "Faith in Humankind," the question was asked: "Does it boil down to a fundamental sense of superiority that others do not deserve what we seek to have for ourselves?"

In "Welcome to the Year of Healthy Collaboration," the goals of Changemakers Alliance story development and the April 13 event were revealed: "Who is grasping the magic of healthy collaborations to make our ecosystem work better?"

womenspress.com/ecolution

Legacy

We are reaching into the extensive archives of Minnesota Women's Press to provide context about what has and has not changed over the decades. One story, "When It Comes to Child Care, You Haven't Come Very Far, Baby," was written in 1998, but sounds similar to today: "Even middle-income families can't afford to pay the true cost of child care. What we end up with is a system that is underfunded and has a high staff turnover."

womenspress.com/legacy

Commentaries

Becky Cole in Elk River writes with an update from her October 2021 commentary about the lack of regulation and oversight in the operation of homeowners' associations (HOAs). She heard from others who read the essay and had similar concerns, approached her representative, and got legislation passed that took effect January 2024.

Krista Hartman, a realtor in Ortonville, shares her perspective about how rural communities are dealing with lack of housing.

LeAnn Littlewolf, of the American Indian Community Housing Organization in Duluth, writes: "When we strengthen ourselves collectively, we double the impact of individual lives."

womenspress.com/perspectives

PHOTO BY BRIDGET KRANZ, CITY OF SAINT PAUL

The new Saint Paul City Council, pictured with Mayor Melvin Carter at left, was inaugurated on January 9. (From l-r): Anika Bowie, Rebecca Noecker, Saura Jost, Mitra Jalali, Hwa Jeong Kim, Nelsie Yang, and Cheniqua Johnson

What the Housing Crisis Looks Like

Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP) bi-annually reports state- and county-level data about the status of housing. The organization started tracking state data in 2015, and the story it tells has never looked great. Many people cannot afford a home, and those with rents are paying more than they should based on available incomes. This cost-burdened status affects 63 percent of senior renters statewide and impacts 279,000 children in low-income households.

For example, Wright County in central Minnesota has 50,290 households; of those, 11,334 households are "cost burdened," defined as at risk of being forced to choose between a home and paying for other basic needs like food and medicine.

By sheer number, Hennepin County has the largest number of cost-burdened seniors, with 41,567. Other counties with more than 30 percent of senior renters and homeowners paying more than they can afford on housing include: Isanti, Morrison, Carver, Ramsey, Dakota, Sherburne, Waseca, Scott, and Washington.

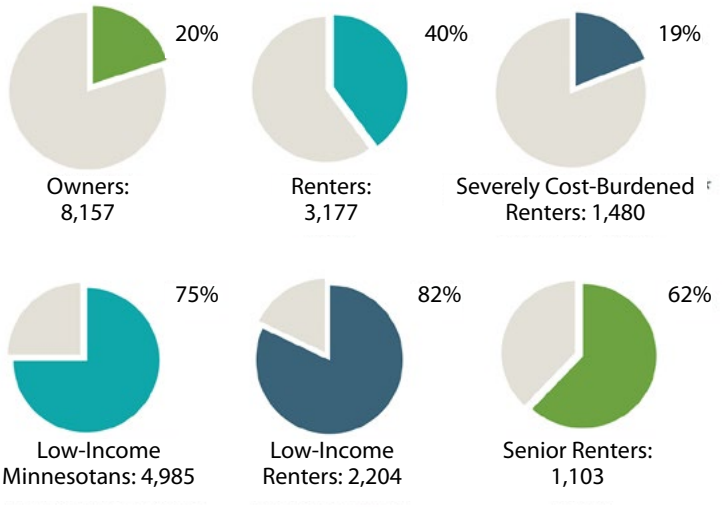
In the general population, the number of cost-burdened households has increased by 71,977 — or 13 percent. That increase has grown substantially since the pandemic, from 590,538 to 641,549 households. It is estimated that the cost-burdened status of renters will be up by 50 percent between 2022 and 2023 alone.

The average annual eviction number before the pandemic was 16,841. In 2022, there were 22,455 evictions statewide. Olmsted, Clay, Stearns, Ramsey, and Dakota have seen the most significant increases in eviction filings. For example, the average eviction filings for Olmsted between 2012 and 2019 went up by 138 percent in 2022.

Racial gaps in home ownership continue to be extreme, especially in Stevens, Benton, Swift, Polk, and Stearns counties. According to the 2022 American Community Survey, only Maine has a wider disparity gap than Minnesota. MWP

Find data for all counties at mhponline.org

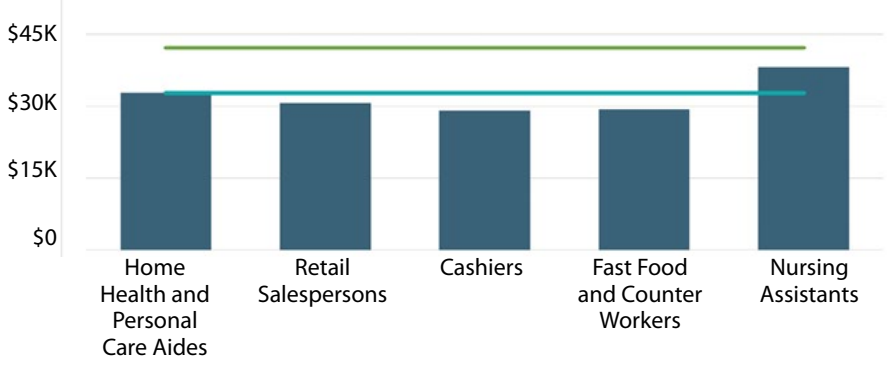
PERCENTAGE OF COST-BURDENED WRIGHT COUNTY HOUSEHOLDS



Cost burden: spending 30 percent or more of household income on housing costs.
Severe cost burden: spending more than 50 percent.
Low-income: households earning under $35,000 annually

Source: Minnesota Housing Partnership

AVERAGE SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA JOB SALARIES AND THE COST OF LIVING IN NOBLES COUNTY



$42,210
= Salary needed to afford a median-priced home

$32,720
= Salary needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

The State of Minnesota Housing in 2024

reported by Amy Gage

Irene Ruiz-Briseño, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund

There's never been a better time to be a housing advocate in Minnesota. Or to be a person in need of better housing. Since the $1.065 billion housing omnibus bill was signed into law after the 2023 legislative session, boosted by another $250 million from other legislation, "Go Big and Go Home" has been the catchphrase at Minnesota Housing. That state department is charged with bulking up existing programs and creating new ones to counter what advocates characterize as decades of disinvestment in affordable and equitable housing.

Although the 2023 legislative accomplishments in housing were all good news, housing advocates caution against seeing this windfall as a one-time blessing that will fix all problems. They argue instead for ongoing investments and systemic change. Leaders in the industry statewide articulate four challenges that, if met, could make Minnesota a role model in housing nationwide.

1. Put People First

Housing advocates readily cite the stats, well practiced during years of lobbying at the Legislature:

- More than 100,000 units of "accessible and deeply affordable" housing are required to meet current demand statewide, says Anne Mavity, executive director, Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP).
- Although 30 percent of income is the accepted definition of affordable housing, some tenants pay twice that percentage or more for their rent or mortgage, says Kari Johnson, director of state and federal policy, Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD).
- Ramsey County alone is 15,000 units short of the deeply affordable housing needed, says John Slade, east metro congregational senior organizer for the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAH).

Numbers and data may accurately frame the state's complex housing challenges, but they fail to tell the whole story. Statistics hide human beings: children, the elderly, folks suffering from addiction or other mental health challenges, people who live with physical disabilities or are chronically unemployed.

"We have to shift the focus from an economic frame — the market is bad — to a human frame," says Jenny Jones, director of communications at MHP, which is leading a collaborative statewide project called Changing the Narrative on Housing, a collaboration with the Housing Narrative Lab in reframing how Minnesotans talk about housing.

Irene Ruiz-Briseño is manager of the emerging developers of color program for Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF), a nonprofit and certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that seeks to address the housing needs of underserved areas and people throughout Minnesota. She works with entrepreneurs of color who are new to developing or preserving affordable housing.

One of her clients had only a refurbished duplex under his belt when GMHF helped him access funds from the City of Minneapolis for two multi-family projects. In Duluth, Ruiz-Briseño recently provided financing to a project called Annie's House, turning a five-bedroom, single-family home into supportive housing for young mothers experiencing homelessness.

Suitability and *choice* are key words in Ruiz-Briseño's definition of affordable housing. She describes multigenerational Somali American families in St. Cloud who must live apart because two-bedroom apartments are their only affordable options.

The state's "Going Big" strategic plan to spend the historic influx of $1.3 billion will lead to investments in existing programs and new initiatives: an additional $495 million to preserve and create new homes, $120 million to increase housing stability, and $267 million to support homeownership.

"My goal is not to take our eye off the ball," says Commissioner Jennifer Ho, a former Obama administration official who heads Minnesota Housing.

2. Address Racial Disparities in Housing

Genesia Williams' great-grandfather, Charles Dawkins, did not own a home until he was more than 70 years old. A child of Bahamian immigrants, whose family initially settled in the Miami-Dade area of Florida, he served in a segregated unit in World War II. Unlike other returning soldiers, however, her great-grandfather never reaped the benefits of the G.I. Bill — the legislation that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law in June 1944 that provided low-cost home loans to white veterans.

"It's a family story for me, a lived experience," says Williams, who is Black and does not yet own a home, despite having been in the workforce since she was 13 years old.

A term she learned recently on a consulting project is "entry-cost assistance" — the need for help to build credit, understand closing costs and other fees, and amass a 20

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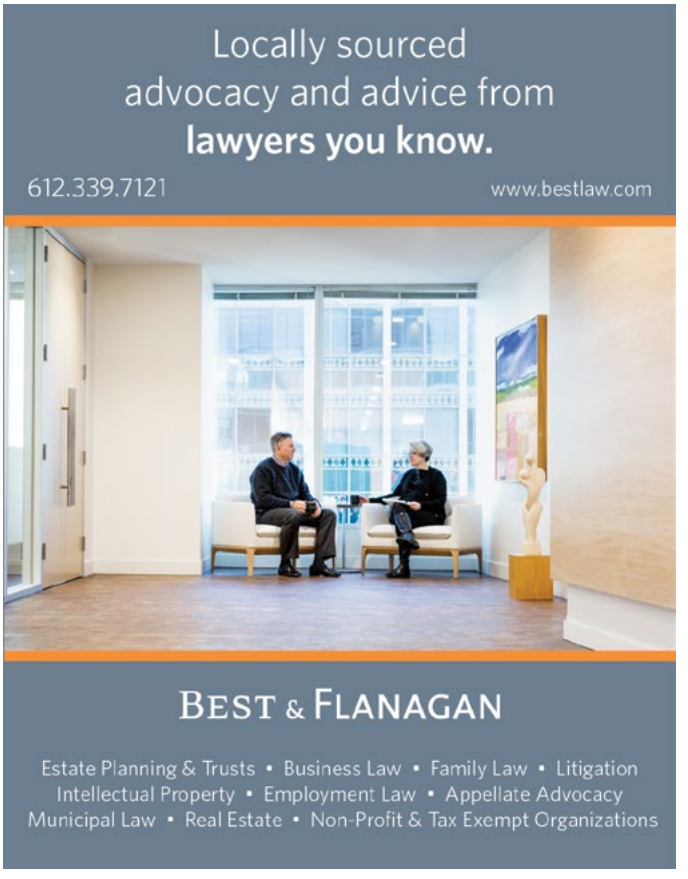

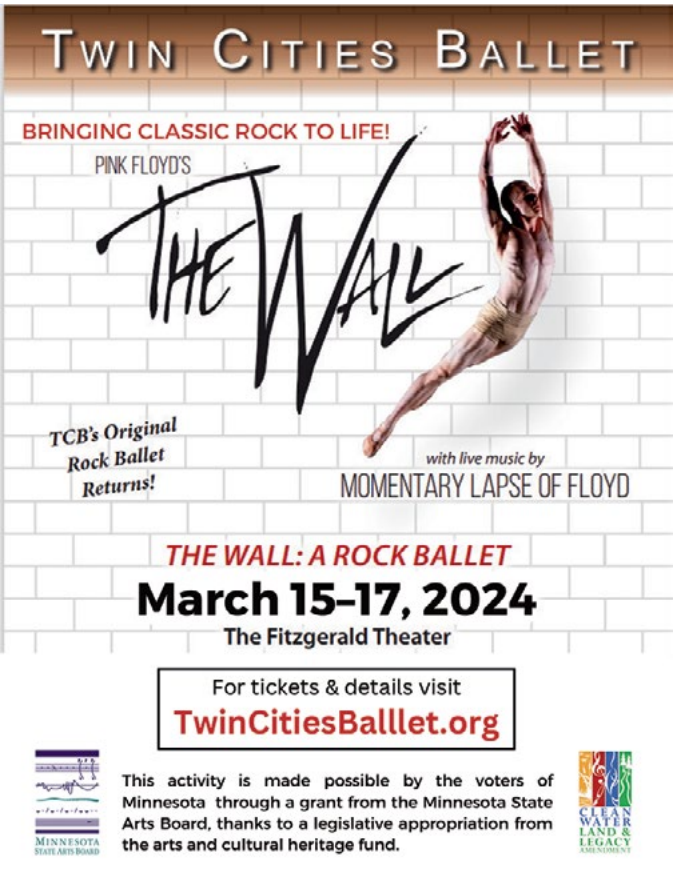

percent down payment. Today, Williams is director of communications and community engagement at GMHF.

GMHF's President and CEO Andrea Brennan came to the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund in 2023 from her role in economic development for the City of Minneapolis. She speaks of "years, decades, centuries of oppression" that helped white people build wealth through real estate while people of color were denied loans and redlined out of certain neighborhoods.

"We created these disparities intentionally," Brennan says. "The only way to close those disparities is to be as intentional as we were in creating them."

New initiatives in the Walz-Flanagan administration's "One Minnesota Budget" include $100 million to CDFIs for first-generation homebuyer grants and $3.7 million for homebuyer education and training. Those dollars will help bridge Minnesota's racially based homeownership gap — among the worst in the nation. Statewide, 77 percent of whites own their own home compared with 25 percent of Black people.

"We're making sure that what we do isn't just for one type of community," says Commissioner Ho.

HOME Line Public Policy Director Michael Dahl says, "Black single mothers are the most hard hit by evictions and other issues." HOME Line offers free legal help to renters. More than 20,000 calls in 2023, an all-time high, dealt with repair problems, leases up to 60 pages long, and evictions, which have soared since pandemic-era interventions ended in mid-2022.

3. Frame Housing as a Holistic Issue

MCCD's Johnson can still recall a key finding from her work years ago in partnership with the Wilder Foundation, which produced the state's "Homework Starts with Home" rental assistance program. "If a child is unhoused for just two weeks, they can lose an entire year of educational progress," she says. Learning that "broke my heart."

The rental assistance program is slated to receive $5.5 million in the new housing budget.

Looking at the housing issue broadly is a common theme among advocates. "If you have stable housing, you can have more stability in every other area of your life: education outcomes, health outcomes, better transportation, or economics," Johnson says. "Without housing, that's the only thing you can focus on. 'Where am I going to sleep, or be safe?'"

The state's Going Big budget focuses not only on rental and homebuyer assistance, but on chronic challenges that may push people in and out of homelessness.

Two weeks before Christmas, the federal government declared homelessness to be at an all-time high across the nation.

Commissioner Ho started to work on homelessness in 1999. Family homelessness in Hennepin County, the largest of the state's 87 counties, drives the increase in Minnesota's numbers, she says. Investments in strategies like strengthening the supportive housing model and statewide rental assistance — budgeted at $46 million, with an expected $77 million boost by a new metro-area sales tax — are key to reversing the rise in the unsheltered population's numbers.

Prevention measures also are essential, Ho says: "We want to help people before they become homeless or, if they do, to get them immediately back into homes. "

"Supportive housing" is the industry term that describes affordable housing linked with social services "that foster housing stability and improve residents' health and quality of life," explains Jill Mazullo, communications director at the Minnesota Housing Department. Supportive housing serves veterans and seniors, as well as people with other needs. It has a $25 million boost in the housing budget.

4. Push for More Than One-Time Money

The responsibility and approach to fund and fix housing is uniquely bipartisan for these times. There are needs for a mix of types, from single-family and multi-unit to supportive housing and tribal homes; for a variety of places, from small towns and suburbs to the urban core; and for a range of prices that allow everyone in Minnesota to have a stable home.

MCCD's Johnson works statewide and has lobbied at the past six legislative sessions. "Every county in Minnesota has housing needs. The needs might be different," she explains, "but [all counties] have a shortage of single-family homes, rental homes, or shelter capacity. That's why we've seen bipartisan support for housing investments."

Continuing bipartisan support will be key in the 2024 legislative session, when housing advocates plan to push for a constitutional amendment, framed as "Our Future Starts at Home," to ensure ongoing investments in housing.

Only "long-term predictable funding" will create the quantity and quality of housing that Minnesotans deserve and need, says MHP's Mavity. But true systems change begins with conversations and the words we choose. "How do we change the narrative on housing?" she asks. "Like the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat: home is absolutely fundamental to everything we do." MWP

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Land Trusts and Co-op Housing: Building Better Neighborhoods

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

written by Sophia Kulow

When she was two, Andrea Reese moved with her mother and her older brother from Minneapolis to Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota. As a single mother, Reese's mother wanted to move her children to a place that felt like home. There, Reese learned especially from her elders that self-service "is taking care of your people."

Eventually, as an adult and mom to a growing family, Reese moved eight times in ten years. Her young family needed more space, a better location, or the ability to get away from increasing rents in a neighborhood that had become unaffordable.

In 2012, she began working for Mni Sota Fund, a nonprofit designed to increase access to homeownership for Native homebuyers. For the next four years she learned a lot in that job, including what a credit report does. She was able to become a homeowner. Today she provides a stable, multigenerational home for her kids and her mother.

Reese attributes her ability to buy a home to budget coaching, homebuyer and financial education resources, and people who helped her improve her credit score and savings.

"If we can afford to rent something, we should be able to afford to buy something of our own, right? But that's not always true," Reese says. "There are barriers. We also need to understand credit and debt. That pre-work to being mortgage ready is very important to learn."

Today, Reese is executive director of the City of Lakes Community Land Trust (CLCLT), expanding on the multi-generational and community values she appreciated growing up. CLCLT holds land with a 99-year lease, enabling people housed on that land to live more affordably. The cost of the land is not absorbed by the owner. The homeowner's children and grandchildren can renew the property lease.

CLCLT has programs that allow low- to moderate-income people to purchase higher-quality homes, secure from evictions. Mortgages through CLCLT are made with consistent and affordable principal and interest payments. One homeowner went from paying $1,100 per month — most of her Social Security check — to $704 a month. CLCLT has helped more than 400 families achieve homeownership.

As Reese notes, prices for homes in the open market are increasing steadily partly because housing stock is bought up by investors, many of them not based in Minnesota, and then rented at unaffordable rates.

Land trusts and shared equity housing — which have resale restrictions on subsidized housing, such as the One Roof

model in Duluth — are a growing option, in part to counter the steady increase of home market prices. The Grounded Solutions Network indicated in a 2022 report that there has been a 30 percent increase in alternative housing models since 2011.

A land trust strengthens communities because of local ownership, Reese says. "The more community owners we have in those homes, the more we're going to build that into a better block and a better neighborhood."

The multigenerational aspect of holding the land in trust, Reese adds, is also about "paying it forward."

Reese is currently paying $100 less for her mortgage than she did as a renter. "When you are a renter, you are paying someone else's mortgage," she says. With a more affordable monthly housing payment, Reese has been able to buy a reliable vehicle and pay down debt.

The biggest benefit of homeownership for Reese, however, is something she considers invaluable: "I think moving my mom in with us has had the biggest impact. My kids can have this close relationship with their grandma. I can have cousins over for extended periods of time. I can be this anchor. That's what homeownership has really provided for my family."

One of the obstacles to growing the model is that housing stock for land trusts is limited — there are "not enough single-family homes, condos, units." The CLCLT can purchase land for housing developments, but often it is more affordable to purchase land where houses and condos already exist.

CLCLT collaborates with organizations such as Hope Community; together they have created seven condo units in Minneapolis. It is working with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to develop 17 townhomes. MacKenzie Scott, the private philanthropist formerly married to Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, recently added CLCLT to her list of organizations receiving donations.

Manufactured Homes and Cooperatives

Another growing solution to address limited access to affordable and secure housing is the cooperative model.

People who live in manufactured homes — aka mobile homes — don't own the land they live on. This exposes the community to potential lot rent increases. Manufactured homeowners also lose their right to live on the land when the owner sells it for redevelopment.

Northcountry Cooperative Foundation (NCF) is a non-profit organization in Saint Paul, founded in the late 1990s to develop cooperative models for housing. The foundation works with the seller of a manufactured home lot or — starting more recently — a multifamily apartment to buy the property. NCF provides a coach to help members organize a co-op structure. Members select an interim board of directors to lead the co-op process. By the time the transaction is complete, the co-op team has secured a loan, has created community rules, and has policies and procedures in place for its ownership. Eventually, the community is 100 percent member owned.

The co-op works to stabilize rents by controlling operating expenses. "There are no third-party profit motives," says Victoria Clark-West, NCF's executive director. "There are no outside shareholders they need to pay. The co-op's primary purpose is to provide affordable housing."

NCF has helped 14 manufactured home communities become cooperatively owned, including in Wisconsin, Iowa, and many places in Minnesota such as Cannon Falls, Gaylord, and Fairmont. In 2021, NCF assisted in the development of Woodlawn Terrace Cooperative in Richfield, which is licensed for 53 households.

Bev Adrian, the Woodlawn Terrace board president, lived through a manufactured lot closure in Bloomington in the early 2000s, weeks after she moved in. She quickly became an advocate for owners of manufactured homes. Adrian explains that without the co-op ownership model, investors who own lots could "raise the rent two times a year [by] 10 percent."

A large manufactured home park in the Twin Cities was recently purchased by an investor group. Lot rents were raised to nearly $1,000 a month. In comparison, Adrian's lot rent at Woodlawn is a more affordable $625 per month. Since she has no mortgage on her manufactured home, that is her total monthly housing cost.

"The co-op model is all about rent control," she says. MMP

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PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Solving Issues *With* the Unhoused

a conversation with Rinal Ray

I am the oldest daughter of four in an Indian American family. I grew up in the Chicago area. My parents were the first in their families to immigrate to the U.S. We had extended family — aunts, uncles, and cousins — who stayed with us as they were arriving in the U.S., until they could get stable and settle into homes of their own.

Until recently, my mom ran a convenience store in Chicago. It was also like a training ground for some of my relatives to get job skills. As a child, I saw the kind of support my relatives needed as they got started in a new country — to learn English, apply for jobs, get into school, get into the right grade in school, find housing.

I learned amazing lessons about community care and how we show up for one another. That was really formative for me. I learned that we all need different things to be supported, and we access those things in different ways.

I joined Minnesota Housing, the state's housing finance agency, in August 2023 as assistant commissioner of the new Housing Stability Division. Before that, I was the CEO at People Serving People (PSP). The organization works with families experiencing homelessness, providing shelter and wraparound services. It also works to prevent the experience of homelessness through prevention programs and advancing systems change. I had been with PSP for almost six years, and became the CEO in 2020 — which was a wild time to take on that role.

What I enjoyed most at People Serving People was partnering with families on the Guest Advisory Council, listening to families talk about the things that were working and not working.

This ranged from issues in our shelter space to navigating community resources. We tapped into their ideas and solutions. It was my job to figure out how to make that happen with them. That was really fun. We made some good changes together that reduced barriers and stress, and centered dignity.

During the pandemic, everything was changing daily. We were worried for everybody's health and safety. We were clear on what our values and priorities were, to see everybody through in the best way that we could. I'm proud of the work we did together, navigating a health crisis at the same time that our communities were literally burning down because of racial injustice.

I learned a lot from PSP and the families we worked with.

Our families were strong. They were resilient. I knew they were working as hard as they could to be on their path to stability. I saw the staff at PSP working hard to support them, within systems that don't quite work as they should. The county shelter system was at 300 percent capacity. More supports were needed to prevent homelessness. That's part of why I came to Minnesota Housing, to make that path to housing stability smoother for families.

The misconception is that encampment residents don't want housing. That's not the case. Everybody wants the dignity of housing. Everybody wants respect. It just looks different for how they want it.

Root Causes of Housing Instability

Early in my time at PSP, I really wanted to understand the root cause of homelessness. I learned it was caused by a lost job, an eviction, a sick kid, a sick parent, a caregiver who had passed away, or somebody they were staying with who couldn't house them anymore. Limited access to adequate mental health care, child care, and transportation were also factors. I heard many individual circumstances that led families to People Serving People.

What I could not ignore was structural and persistent racism that affected families of color, in particular Black and Indigenous families. Yet, even during the pandemic, I remained hopeful about finding solutions to the housing crisis people are facing. I was hopeful because, at the height of the pandemic, we had the lowest shelter utilization in my time at PSP. That's because there were adequate resources supporting families to stay safely housed. The child tax credit from the federal level, rental assistance, and the evictions moratorium all made a difference. We had low shelter use because people were staying stably housed.

So, we know how to do this. Now we need to figure out a way to keep people permanently and stably housed.

People experiencing homelessness work very hard to navigate the systems that are a patchwork of safety nets duct-taped together. I want to help make the systems work for people.

This is a unique moment, with the new appropriations for housing. We've never seen an investment like $1.3 billion before. We have a generally supportive legislature and executive branch, and a housing commissioner who is driven to move the needle around housing instability and homelessness.

The new strategic plan, "Crossroads to Justice: Minnesota's New Pathways to Housing, Racial and Health Justice for People Facing Homelessness," is a great example of that. The report is the culmination of a 1.5-year process co-led by 10 people with lived experience of homelessness from around the state, chaired by Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and led by assistant commissioner Cathy ten Broeke. It sets a deep process of statewide collaboration around meeting goals and enhancing resources.

Different parts of the state need different things. Minnesota Housing's single-family, manufactured housing, and multifamily teams finished selections for affordable housing developments. Those three teams together have approved $350 million for over 4,700 housing units. They're in partnership with developers and communities to meet different needs.

I think Minnesota is starting to listen better to people who have experienced homelessness and housing instability, who have navigated our systems from the ground. There's more energy and focus on that, as part of creating a process that leads to more equitable results.

Instead of the same old top-down solutions, I think we're getting much better at intently and intentionally listening, and then acting based on what people are telling us needs to happen. This kind of change can be hard for people in

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government because it questions the way we do things and holds us accountable.

The Housing Stability Division I now lead is new at Minnesota Housing. We're working to elevate housing stability in an agency that's focused on affordable housing development, housing preservation, and helping more people become homeowners.

Three Goals for Our Division

1) Preventing the experience of homelessness. Through the division's grant programs, we will reduce the disparities in who experiences homelessness by increasing access to resources and supports.

2) Adequately resourcing permanent supportive housing. We are inadequately funding both the supportive services and operational needs. Luckily, we received funding in the last legislative session to try to make this model more effective for the people experiencing housing instability, in partnership with colleagues at the Department of Human Services. This also involves addressing inefficiencies that lead to housing vacancies and long wait times for people to get into housing.

3) Housing stability at the intersections. We have programs that work at the intersection of disability, mental health, people living with HIV and AIDS, families with young children, and chronic homelessness. Each of those populations has slightly different needs. We are increasing effectiveness in figuring out what needs to happen within those communities and the providers that support them.

There's a lot that I'm learning. There's still a lot that I don't know. But those three goals will get us closer to ensuring housing stability for Minnesotans.

One of the reasons I loved the Guest Advisory Council at PSP was that I got to see how mostly moms were showing up for other moms in that space — how they were a support to one another. We know how to support each other in moments of crisis.

I think about the staff I had the privilege to work with, many with lived experience of housing instability or other adversities. I saw the compassion and empathy and passion they had. They knew that the people we were working with were not too different from them.

How do we embed that kind of ethos and love of community, that love of people, into the systems that we're working in? That's my secret mission. MMP

Rinal Ray (she/her) has a B.A. in international studies and political science from Macalester College and a law degree from William Mitchell College of Law. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and seven-year-old son, enjoying bike rides and Uno tournaments.

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Assistant Attorney General Katherine Kelly on How the State Protects Renters

The attorney general's office has focused on protecting tenants' rights and has won judgments against outside investors and local landlords who violated the financial, health, and safety rights of their tenants. We talked with Katherine Kelly, who works in Attorney General Keith Ellison's office, about her work leading this effort in consumer protection, and why it is so important to focus on the imbalance of power between landlords and tenants.

How did you get to the role you are in today?

The attorney general has the authority to protect consumers in the state by enforcing protection laws. In 2023, after receiving dedicated funding from the legislature, Attorney General Ellison launched a new Civil Rights Division and tasked it with enforcing the laws that protect tenants — one of his priorities is to protect people's rights to safe, decent, legal rental housing. I am the attorney who manages that division.

Growing up, I never thought I would be a lawyer. But after I graduated with a B.S. in engineering, I went to law school. I became a litigation attorney, practicing securities and antitrust class action law and volunteering with HOME Line. After about 10 years, I decided to switch to full-time public service and joined the attorney general's office.

As an assistant attorney general, one of my jobs is to monitor the marketplace for violations of rental laws. An example of a tenant-protection lawsuit that I work on is the State's case against Investment Property Group, Inc., an out-of-state corporate landlord that systematically and illegally imposed significant utility charges onto thousands of its tenants in the middle of their tenancies. Another example is the State's case against HavenBrook Homes and Progress Residential about their failure to make repairs and their violation of the lead-paint hazard laws.

How do you do your work?

We get reports every day from the public, mostly via our website intake process. Minnesota has many protections for tenants — mandatory disclosures about fees, what can be charged, what can't be charged, when you can change someone's terms, what you have to tell an applicant before they sign a rental agreement.

Sometimes we can help individuals who are having trouble

continued on next page

by writing a letter to the landlord, but our focus is monitoring the marketplace. If we see a pattern of complaints about a specific landlord, then we can look further into the issue, since it seems to be a company practice, not a singular mistake. We investigate by interviewing tenants and gathering evidence.

If we discover that a company systematically violated the rights of its tenants, we can sue the company to seek restitution and obtain an injunction to stop the illegal conduct. We can also ask the court to penalize the landlord to deter the conduct in the future.

Historically, Minnesota Women's Press has written about exploitation of renters, extortion by landlords, and people forced to move from public housing because of new development. What do renters continue to experience in Minnesota in 2024?

Renters continue to experience a large imbalance in the power dynamic exerted by landlords. In our country, the way our society and laws are set up, the burden is on the renter to know what the law is and to have the ability to take legal action to protect themselves.

If your mortgage company does something wrong with your mortgage, you can turn to one of several federal and state regulators for help. But there is no regulatory agency that tenants can turn to when their landlord breaks the law.

We as a society expect tenants to know the law, know if it's being violated, sue their landlord in court, or defend themselves if they're being sued by their landlord. Many tenants do not want to jeopardize their home, so they do not fight back when their landlord breaks the law, even if those tenants are aware of applicable laws.

Starting in January 2024, additional laws went into effect to help balance the power dynamic between tenants and landlords, but there are still improvements to be made.

In the rental space, enforcement actions prioritize habitability. We do go after extortion of fees and expenses and other problems, but habitability problems affect daily health and can have a lasting impact.

One example is a case we filed against a landlord who primarily rented to single Black mothers in North Minneapolis. He deprived them of their habitability rights by intimidation. He convinced them that it was illegal for them to go to housing inspectors. They were scared and put up with horrible conditions. He refused to do the right thing and comply with the law, so we ended up going to trial.

One of the remedies we always seek is injunctive relief — that's our phrase for stopping the bad conduct. We do monitoring after the fact to make sure the court's order is being complied with.

Courts are generally loath to force someone to cease doing business, so it is rare to get relief by forcing the company to close its doors in Minnesota. But bad actors sometimes go to a state with less consumer-protection oversight.

Homeowners' associations can require hefty fees that are hard to pay on limited income. Is there anything the office is able to do?

I have heard of problems with HOAs — the assessments that come out of the blue, or odd choices that HOAs make and then impose on their members. A housing owner has more say than renters do, because technically they are a member of the HOA. They have a vote, and an ability to advocate to the board. But we are seeing that many common-interest communities hire a management company. They outsource governance to an entity that perhaps does not represent the best interest of the people who live there.

Some states have an ombudsman's office for home owner association members — a place to go to that offers knowledgeable oversight. Minnesota homeowners and associations need an advocacy resource, but that does not exist in our laws currently.

What other trends are you seeing?

The movement into this marketplace by private equity and other investment companies is not illegal. But the incentive to focus on returns for your investors, instead of the people living in your home, is a dynamic that is not great.

Renters feel like they have an absentee landlord. They can't talk to a human. FinTech has pushed into the rental market, which historically has been much more mom and pop — you used to know your landlord and be able to call them up. When private equity and investment companies get involved, that disconnect is magnified. It's happening in Minnesota and all over the country. I do think it's something people should pay attention to.

What do you think Minnesota does well?

There is no statewide licensure for landlords, only county-by-county ordinances. It is up to each local unit of government to license and inspect rental homes. So for example, the City of Minneapolis has a regulatory services division, which licenses all landlords in Minneapolis. Its safety inspectors can fine a landlord and take away the license if they're violating habitability laws. Saint Paul has a similar office. But we have a lot of communities in Minnesota with no rental ordinances or licensure system; we also have communities with ordinances, but no resources are provided to enforce them.

So, my answer is that it is a mixed bag. There is no one grade I'd give the whole state in terms of leveling the playing field for renters. But some of the new laws that went into effect this year are a step in the right direction.

In the work you do, what has given you satisfaction?

I have really appreciated the broad authority the legislature gave the attorney general to protect vulnerable Minnesotans. In some states, the AG's role is more limited, but here, the legislature has provided authority and funding to work on important cases like these.

The industry is more complex than most renters realize in terms of all the players in the chain. When you apply for an apartment, for example, often you're not applying with the landlord — you're applying with a company they've outsourced that process to. There are a lot of actors in that marketplace who are taking a cut. That is all usually legal to do, but we have regulations to make sure renters aren't paying more for that process than they need to.

For example, Minnesota law says that a landlord can only charge a rental application fee for one unit from one tenant at a time. But some landlords were taking $50 to $100 from multiple applicants all for one apartment. One company wasn't refunding the application fee to those who they rejected. We were able to enforce the law and get refunds for people who paid application and screening fees for an apartment that was not available to them. We are regularly doing work to protect consumers for something they might not even be aware is illegal.

That's the way it should be. That's a good government. I'm grateful that we have the laws that we have.

There's room for improvement, of course. I'll be watching the next legislative session. I hope it builds on the last one, with more protections for people. MMP

To file a complaint, go to ag.state.mn.us/office/complaint.asp

To understand more about the roots of housing disparities: *The Color of Law* (Norton, 2018), by Richard Rothstein

Rulings Against Landlords

In December, a Ramsey County district judge ruled on behalf of the Minnesota Attorney General's Office that HavenBrook Homes and Progress Residential violated laws regarding lead paint removal. The lawsuit included allegations of tenants living with no heat, backed-up sewer systems, and doors and windows that did not close.

The company is owned by Pretium Partners, a New York–based hedge fund — reportedly with $30 billion in assets — which has 600 single-family residential properties in the Twin Cities metro area.

For more on past rulings against property owners, see womenspress.com/court-judgments-against-landlords

"Squeezed, Hounded, and Harassed"

reported by Jennifer Thaney

In 2000, reporter Jennifer Thaney explored the correlation between the dwindling number of available rental units in the Twin Cities and an increase in reported incidents of sexual harassment toward women tenants. Elana Dahlager, attorney at Mid Minnesota Legal Aid Housing (formerly Housing Discrimination Law Project), recently told Minnesota Women's Press that she sees sexual harassment continue to occur in rental housing. "[In 2024 there] is a tight rental market and so people are vulnerable to discrimination. We continue to affirmatively litigate sexual harassment cases."

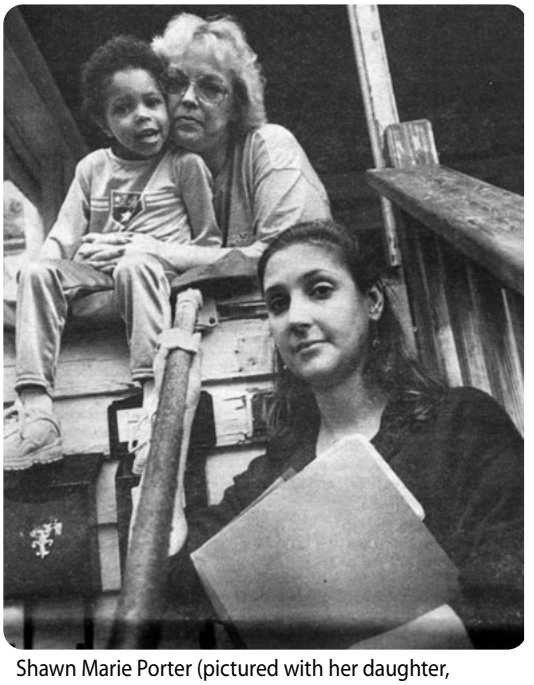
The following story appeared in the June 2000 issue of Minnesota Women's Press. Twice per month in 2024, MWP is uplifting select pieces from our 39-year archive with a focus on longstanding issues. This story has been edited for length; find the full story at womenspress.com.

So, you want to rent an apartment. You'll need persistence, ready cash, and lots of luck.

And you also need to beware that the Twin Cities' tight housing market — only 1 percent of the metro area's rental units are vacant — has given rise to an apparent increase in sexual harassment by landlords toward women tenants.

While this does not happen in all or even most buildings, incidents of sexual harassment in housing are increasing, said James Wilkinson, an attorney with the Housing Discrimination Law Project, which offers legal services to tenants facing discrimination issues. During the first three years of the project, Wilkinson was aware of only one case of sexual harassment in housing. In the past two years, however, Wilkinson and his colleagues have successfully litigated six cases, recovering $200,000 for their clients, and are preparing another five right now. "And these are only the most egregious cases," Wilkinson noted.

PHOTO PAULA KELLER



Shawn Marie Porter (pictured with her daughter, Alexus) and Porter's attorney, Laura Jelinek, won a sexual harassment claim against a landlord who tried to force Porter to have sex with him.

Women who are sexually harassed by their landlords are often reluctant to report it, either out of embarrassment or because they do not know they have recourse.

Sexual harassment in housing usually takes two different forms, explained Laura Jelinek, an attorney with the Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services who has worked with "numerous, numerous" sexual harassment victims. In some cases, landlords create a hostile environment for tenants by making constant, unwelcomed sexual advances, including inappropriate comments, gestures, and touches. In other situations, the harassment is quid pro quo: landlords seek sexual favors in exchange for continued tenancy.

For example, Jelinek said, if a woman is late with her rent, a landlord might not evict her as long as she has sex with him. Or, a caretaker might make needed repairs if the tenant who requested them performs oral sex.

Jelinek said these landlords tend to pick tenants they believe are least likely to complain — primarily low-income women. Jelinek also noted that many victims are women of color, which she attributed to landlords' perceptions that Black women have even less power and recourse to stop harassment.

Pam Jackson, community education coordinator at the Saint Paul Tenants Union, said that the tight housing market traps women into putting up with sexual harassment. "As long as there is such a huge demand for housing, women, particularly those with children, will think real hard about what's more important: having a landlord who [sexually] harasses them or living in a shelter," Jackson said.

Jackson said she receives approximately two calls a day from tenants who feel their privacy has been violated by landlords or caretakers who let themselves into apartments when women are getting up from bed or showering in the morning. Calls about blatant sexual harassment are more rare, she said, estimating one call every four or five months.

Not so at the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights, where Investigative Supervisor Rosalind Sullivan has received about 10 calls this year from women who claim they have been sexually harassed by landlords or their landlords agents. This compares with zero calls over the past four years. The increase, said Sullivan, "is because landlords know people are in a housing crunch."

Jelinek said statistics are difficult to track because tenants are often too embarrassed by the harassment or are afraid of losing their housing to report landlords. While she has tried only three cases in court, Jelinek has heard many more stories that don't make it that far. "I think sexual harassment in housing has been going on for a long time. It's much more prevalent than we think."

When women do finally report sexual harassment, said Jackson, it's because they can't take it anymore. "They are at their wit's end."

The federal Fair Housing Act and the Minnesota Human Rights Act prohibit sexual harassment in housing, and they require landlords to maintain an environment free of sexual harassment. Unfortunately, Jelinek said, it's up to tenants to set these laws in motion. "It's not until tenants step up and challenge the way they are treated that we can even use those laws."

Ignorance is no excuse, Wilkinson added. "If landlords are not keeping a close watch on their staff, they may be held responsible if their building manager, caretaker, or janitor gets into a sexual harassment situation."

Wilkinson noted that the movement to ensure fair housing for all has historically focused on eliminating discrimination based on race, disability, and familial status. To that Wilkinson hopes will be added sexual harassment, so that those who enforce fair housing laws are trained to recognize when boundaries are crossed and how to prosecute perpetrators effectively.

[Editor's Note: In 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development put into effect a rule about quid pro quo and hostile environment harassment. Dahlager says MMLA is working to ensure that landlords follow these rules, and is advocating for training to prevent all forms of housing discrimination.]

Unless everything about the current housing market changes, Jackson fears that women who are being sexually harassed by their landlords, caretakers, or apartment managers will continue to feel trapped. More vacancies are needed, rents need to be stabilized or capped for low-income women, and more affordable houses must be available for women to purchase, she said. MWP

— June 2000

Sexual Harassment in Housing: Resources

Updated for 2024 by Mid Minnesota Legal Aid

Legal resources

- Mid Minnesota Legal Aid, 1-877-696-6529 or 612-334-5970
- Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, 1-877-696-6529 or 651-222-5863
- A private attorney who practices in the area of civil rights and discrimination

File a complaint with a government agency

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Housing Discrimination Hotline, 800-669-9777
- Minnesota Department of Human Rights, 833-454-0148; Report Discrimination: mn.gov/mdhr/intake consultationinquiryform
- Some cities also have civil rights divisions. Minneapolis Complaint Investigation Division Discrimination Complaint Form, minneapolismn.gov, or call 311. Saint Paul Department of Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity, hrightscomplaints@ci.stpaul.mn.us or 651-266-8966

Mid Minnesota Legal Aid and Southern Minnesota Legal Services represent people with low incomes free of charge. These offices will provide advice or referrals. Government agencies investigate complaints of housing discrimination free of charge.

Listening to Minnesota's Housing Stories

written by Mikki Morrissette

Supportive community housing is about putting a safety net under and around people who need mental health and health care services, are transitioning out of substance use, or are relocating away from unhealthy environments or incarceration. Minnesotans are sharing their stories so more people understand why this housing is needed.

In 2007, Center City Housing in Duluth opened its first permanent supportive housing project. Nancy Cashman, executive director, told Minnesota Women's Press in a 2021 interview that the New San Marco "was unique at the time, in that we were providing housing for very barriered homeless single adults who were struggling with long-term alcohol use" and did not require sobriety.

A 24-hour front desk provides safety and support. Vans take people to appointments. Case management and navigators help with the court system and goal-setting. There are community-building activities, like walking clubs and model car development.

In 2018, Solace Apartments was established by Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership after a treatment court judge and a clinical psychologist recognized the support that was missing to help people succeed at recovery. With an often less than 1 percent vacancy rate in the Nicollet County area, people being discharged from treatment or jail were sometimes living in a car or moving back into an environment that was not conducive to staying sober.

A team came together to solve that challenge, including the treatment judge, the clinical psychologist, an architect, county human services and case management staff, police, probation officers, drug court graduates, city and county officials, the public defender and county attorney, and property managers.

One of the biggest challenges for Solace today is that it has a long wait list, serving Nicollet and Blue Earth counties. Many Minnesota counties do not have a good plan for working with community members struggling with addiction. In one of the earliest Changemakers Alliance (CALL) conversations, we connected members directly in a group conversation with Solace representatives. One of the members said she once worked for a nonprofit in northern Minnesota. If a person in a homeless shelter relapsed, she said, the person was given a bus token to travel to Duluth.

As someone who works with struggling families, the CALL member asked, how do we help people avoid the trap of thinking there are deserved poor or deserved addicts — that people in recovery are "throwaway people"?

Ashley McCarthy, resident services navigator at Solace, replied: "I feel like it all comes down to [listening to] individual stories."

We also hosted a CALL group interview with Amy Sullivan, author of *Opioid Reckoning: Love, Loss, and Redemption in the Rehab State* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), who did extensive research after her teenage child suffered from a substance use issue. Sullivan suggested that we need to pull together people from diverse backgrounds and experiences

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— policymakers, grassroots advocates, and the broader public — to have conversations with people who have worked on solutions with a primary question:

"You have created something for those who were not being cared for in your community. How can we all come together?"

She added: "We often do not treat people who are seeking help for a drug addiction with empathy. We treat them with judgment and scorn. When someone has lupus or cancer, we do not say they are failing at that disease if they go out of remission or need more chemo. Yet when someone has a relapse, suddenly they are no longer successful in recovery, even though it is the same type of thing. It is a disease. It is not a personal failing."

PHOTO ALEX CARNEY

Ashley McCarthy

Who Is in My Backyard?

Getting supportive housing built in Minnesota has not been easy — and the difficulty extends beyond funding.

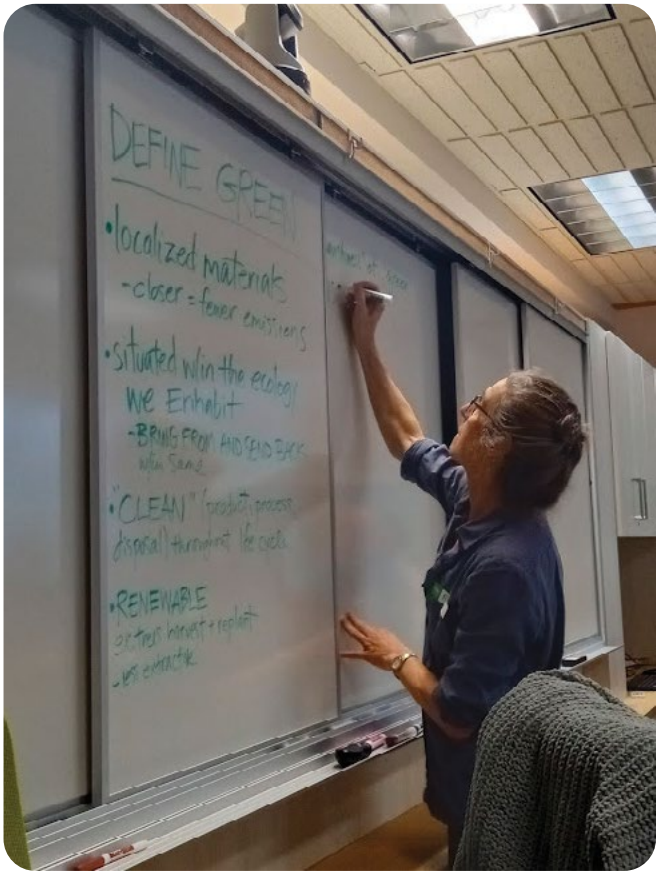
In 2014, Golden Valley's city council rejected a day mental health facility for children after some residents complained it would lead to security issues. In 2018, Forest Lake residents rejected a $20 million psychiatric residential treatment facility for children. Recently, Dakota County turned down $10 million in funding to build a homeless shelter in the community because residents were concerned about potential crime, drug use, and lowered property values.

Sue Abderholden, director of National Alliance on Mental Illness Minnesota, told us in a 2022 article, "The YIMBY vs. NIMBY Movement," that many mental illnesses are identifiable between the ages of 14 and 24, but go untreated because of the lack of options for families. In the end, the criminal system often takes over instead of having a health care response to mitigate mental illness.

Abderholden called a press conference in 2014 after Golden Valley's rejection of the day mental health facility (a decision that was later rescinded after additional public outcry). She pointed out: "One in five children lives with a mental illness. They are already living in Golden Valley and the surrounding communities. They live in every neighborhood, attend every school, worship at every faith community, play at every park. These innocent children have an illness, and they should not be subject to nor denied treatment because of the misinformed fears of adults."

If you want to be apprised of future discussions about housing narratives and solutions, including greater support for early intervention of mental health issues, join the Badass movement at womenspress.com/be-a-badass

PHOTOS COURTESY GREEN NEW DEAL HOUSING



An Emerging "Green-Collar" Workforce in Duluth

submitted by Natalie Lavenstein

Nearly a year ago, my partner and I packed up our things in Salt Lake City, Utah, and moved back to the Midwest — this time, to Duluth. The decision to leave Utah was fueled by our need for a variety of things: better air quality, reduced cost of living, and proximity to clean water, plus our genuine love and optimism for Minnesota's North Shore.

The backdrop for this decision? Duluth will become an increasingly appealing place to live, given the present and future impacts of the climate crisis.

In Duluth, I took an AmeriCorps position at the University of Minnesota's Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (RSDP). As sustainability project coordinator, I support a local nonprofit called Green New Deal Housing (GNDH).

GNDH aims to develop equitable, zero-energy housing throughout the Arrowhead region. Simply put, zero-energy homes produce as much energy annually as they consume. A pilot home was recently completed, and several new builds and retrofitting projects are underway.

As climate change promises increased extreme weather patterns, durable, robust, and resilient housing and infrastructure become increasingly important. The urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions means rapidly transitioning to clean energy sources for all our energy consumption, including our homes.

GNDH is working to develop a "green-collar" workforce in the Arrowhead region through free green construction training opportunities.

Unlike conventional training, green construction training emphasizes using eco-friendly building

materials and waste reduction techniques and incorporating energy-efficient renewable sources.

Over the last three years, GNDH has partnered with local organizations, such as Community Action Duluth and Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, to deliver workforce training in green building, focusing on teaching women and people of color. Excluding the current training program, GNDH has trained nearly 50 individuals so far.

Last summer, GNDH launched the Train the Trainers (T3) program. T3 is a free professional development opportunity for construction-related educators and tradespeople to facilitate the integration of green building principles and skills into their trades instruction. Green building principles fall under four main categories: health, durability, energy efficiency, and accessibility. The six-month program includes in-person and online coursework delivered by green building and building science professionals. Participants who complete the entire program can test for an industry-recognized Building Performance Institute credential in building science.

T3 emphasizes the importance of "seeing the forest through the trees." Professionals in the construction field — including builders, installers, architects, and engineers — often find themselves confined to their specialized domains, impacting their work's effectiveness. A whole-systems approach is needed in green building since all the parts contribute to a building's efficiency. Members are not merely absorbing information but actively applying insights and crafting training methods. These future trainers will play a pivotal role in shaping a sustainable future for us in Duluth and beyond.

Among the 16 members of the T3 cohort, five are women. This is a notably high percentage, especially considering that the Minnesota Department of Economic Development reports women make up less than 15 percent of employees in the construction field.

Housing currently accounts for 20 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. Until we adopt more sustainable construction methods, the inefficient building practices commonly employed in home construction will remain a significant contributor to the climate crisis. Initiatives like T3 offer practical methods to decrease and eliminate greenhouse gas emissions from homes.

I graduated with a degree in environmental studies and have been involved in climate-related work for several years. It has been easy to feel overwhelmed by the immediacy of our climate crisis. But initiatives like T3 give me hope. I look forward to continued collaboration and partnership dedicated to ensuring a bright future for this beautiful region I now call home. MWP

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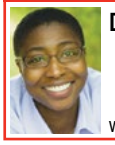
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Merry Rent Control

PHOTO COURTESY ZAMYA THEATER PROJECT

written by Lydia Moran

In December, I attended zAmya Theater Project's holiday "share-formance" at the downtown Minneapolis Central Library. The play was written and rehearsed over several months at the library during zAmya's "Creative Expression Sessions," which are free and open to everyone, but people with lived experience with housing instability are especially encouraged to attend.

zAmya uses artistic expression to unravel prevailing narratives about homelessness, and inspire action to stop the housing crisis. Each performance grows from stories lived by participants.

The December performance begins with "Scrooge Robert" grumbling about the holidays. "I feel society pressuring me to have a good time even though I don't want to," he says. "It hurts being alone."

Hearing this, the magical duo of "Street Santa" and a holiday elf appear and soon learn the reason for Robert's Scrooge-like attitude: he misses his mom and sister. The pair decide to take Robert on an adventure to expand his perspective.

They travel to a downtown Minneapolis homeless shelter on Christmas, where the best part of the holidays is being with others and watching TV. "People look at each other without all the stereotypical ideas," a cast member reflects. "Everybody walks away with gratitude because they didn't have to spend the day alone."

Next, the ensemble bursts into song and dance while holding signs: "Merry Rent Control" and "All I Want for X-Mas Is Rent Control." "You say it's always been that way; the rent goes up, and you have to pay," they sing. "Have you applied for Section 8? What did they say? Wait, wait, wait!"

After the song, a man shares memories of gathering with his large family for the holidays. They have all since passed away, and he, raising his arms above his head, fingers curled into claws, "was left to the wolves." Another speaker steps forward with a happier childhood memory of listening to a pack of wolves howling. Someone else comes forward to recount spying an uncle dressed up as Santa Claus. "Since that night, I've always believed in magic."

"I am captivated by those memories — family memories — I take them everywhere I go," a woman says about potlucks and late-night dancing. "And though I am captivated by them, they keep me strong." The audience murmurs in recognition.

Back at the shelter, the cast winds scarves around Robert's neck pulled from a bucket labeled "spirit." As they do so, they name how each one smells: "The lotion my grandma wore," "fish sticks," "bacon cooking." Street Santa declares that while the holidays can cause painful feelings, our happy memories of our loved ones might bring us joy again when we share them with others.

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zAmya's free Creative Expression Sessions continue at the library weekly on Tuesdays, 8:30–10:30am until April 4. The next share-formance is 4/10 at 6pm. zamyatheater.org

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