

# WHERE DO I START WHEN SEEKING HOUSING FOR MY LOVED ONE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS? (Part One)

by Jacqueline A. Lukitsch

Research tells us that stable housing is an important factor in assisting persons with mental illness in moving towards recovery. Yet available housing for persons with mental illness is often difficult to find. It requires much research about available housing options, payment sources and local idiosyncrancies in the community. In most cases, finding housing will not be quick, unless it is emergency housing (in some cases this too is not quick). However, it is possible to find decent housing and this article is designed to assist towards this effort.

In deciding where to start when seeking housing for a loved one with severe mental illness, you first need to know what type of housing your loved one needs. Typically, persons with mental illness need one of three types of housing: emergency/temporary housing (usually if they are homeless or in a crisis); independent housing (with or without community support); or around-the-clock support (residential facility). Therefore, this article is divided into three sections: **1) Emergency/Temporary Housing; 2) Independent Living; and 3) Residential Facilities.** Part one of a three-series article will discuss emergency/temporary housing.

## **Emergency/Temporary Housing**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that approximately 30 percent of the homeless population have mental illness and more than 50 percent of this group suffer from co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorders (also referred to as dual diagnosis). Therefore, it is possible that your loved one may need emergency housing or shelter at some point in their life. Emergency housing is defined in this article as shelter that is needed immediately. There are several options available in the St. Louis area, all of which may be at capacity at any given time.

### **Emergency Shelter with Family/Friends (when staying with you is no longer an option):**

One option is to find a family member or friend who is willing to provide shelter in their home for a short period of time. If the individual has a dual diagnosis, it is important that they not take shelter with others who have substance abuse issues so that they will not be tempted to continue their addiction. It is doubly hard to find someone with a substance abuse problem housing--no matter if it is emergency, temporary, or more permanent. While they are living with a family member or friend, you can assist your loved one in finding more permanent housing. For instance, your loved one may need assistance in paying for rent for an apartment. There are several options available for this type of assistance including subsidies (partial on-going payment of rent) from the local housing authority (section 8), subsidies specific to persons with disabilities, subsidies specific to persons with mental illness, and public and private housing with

subsidies. All of these subsidies vary in availability at any one time and it may take from 3 months to a year or longer to obtain. Subsidies will be discussed in detail in part two of this article. Also, local community mental health center case managers can assist your loved one in finding housing as well. If your loved one does not currently receive services, it would be well worth it to get him/her enrolled in case management services by calling the local community mental health center's intake line.

### **Homeless Shelters:**

Homeless shelters are another option for emergency housing and usually provide shelter for up to 30 or 45 days, sometimes longer. Most homeless shelters in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County are accessed by calling the Housing Resource Center (HRC) at 314-802-5444. It is important to note that the individual must be homeless when calling. HRC will not make arrangements for a future date. Additionally, you will need to identify the last place of residence--whether it was in the County or the City. Persons are placed in a City shelter if their last place of residence was the City and vice versa. You cannot request a certain shelter. The HRC makes the decision as to what shelter you will be referred to given available capacity and need. Some thought should be given to whether to disclose a mental illness to the HRC or not. On the one hand, given this information, the HRC would look for a shelter that is known for its ability to serve persons with mental illness. On the other hand, these shelters are usually at capacity, and in this instance, it may be better not to disclose a mental illness (they cannot legally ask if the person has a mental illness). Additionally, the HRC has a list of shelters that are independently funded and not accessed through them. For example, the New Life Evangelistic Center run by Larry Rice is one in which they cannot access through their system. However, they can give out the phone numbers of these shelters.

Homeless shelters can pose difficulties for persons with severe mental illness, particularly those who are not receiving treatment. Rigid rules and regulations may be hard to follow (not all shelters have these). Prior incidences of symptomatic behavior at one shelter may put persons on a list that will alert other shelters of past behavior. In this instance, a person may not be accepted in the shelters for years to come.

### **Crisis Beds:**

Community Mental Health providers have a limited number of "crisis beds" available to their clients. Crisis beds are non-medical beds located in treatment facilities and provide a place for an individual with mental illness to obtain shelter for 3 to 7 days. It is important to note that the individual in need should be a client of a local mental health provider like BJC Behavioral Health, Hopewell, Comtre, or Crider Center. If the individual in need is not a client of any community mental health facility, to access a bed, they would need to call Behavioral Health Response (24-Hour Crisis Hotline--314-469-6644). However, crisis beds are unavailable to persons who are actively intoxicated.

### **Temporary Housing**

Temporary housing, also referred to as transitional housing, is housing that can be utilized for a temporary period of time like six months and usually has some type of treatment or supportive services attached. Transitional housing is usually the next step for persons leaving homeless shelters. This type of housing is accessed through the homeless system in St. Louis and is designed to house individuals and families while they are getting back on their feet. The individual or family needs to be at a homeless shelter that is accessed through the Housing Resource Center and needs to show that they are making progress towards being capable of living on their own in the community. Typically, a shelter employee will work with the individual to complete an application and submit it to the "Transition Board" for review. The Transition Board is made up of employees of shelters, transitional housing, and community agencies. This process can be difficult to pass both in terms of finding available capacity and in meeting rigid eligibility requirements.

Additionally, there are transitional housing centers that do not operate through the homeless system in St. Louis (one does not need to be in a shelter first). Rosati Center, a program operated by St. Patrick's Center, is a transitional living center for homeless individuals with mental illness who have been referred from agencies or hospitals. Residents receive counseling and learn daily-living skills. Additionally, St. Philippine Duchesne Home provides temporary housing and substance abuse treatment for women. (This is not a complete listing.)

The March/April edition of the newsletter will include a detailed look at permanent housing for those who wish to live in the community, including available housing subsidies (assistance with payment of rent) in the St. Louis area.