

## American Indian Homelessness in Minnesota

American Indians are vastly overrepresented in Minnesota's homeless population and deserve focused attention in local efforts to end homelessness. Nationally, a history of systemic oppression and forced re-location has created a unique and devastating cycle of homelessness for a portion of the American Indian community. Homelessness among American Indians occurs in high percentages in urban, rural, and reservation communities. Reservations are particularly challenged because of the lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities, as well as geographical isolation from other housing or service providers. The good news is that research and experience have provided us with answers to addressing this crisis. Prevention services, permanent supportive housing, and culturally-oriented services offer a strong base for creating and maintaining stable housing and improving well-being for American Indians facing homelessness.



### Key Facts about American Indian Homelessness

- Prevalence in Greater Minnesota. Outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, nearly 20% of adults experiencing homelessness are American Indian.
- Disproportionate representation among homeless youth populations. While American Indians constitute only 1% of Minnesota's population, 20% of homeless youth (one in five) aged 12-17 in the state are American Indian.
- Deeper levels of poverty than other homeless groups. The average monthly income for homeless American Indians was \$364 in 2006, compared to \$517 in the general homeless population.
- Greater likelihood of experiencing abuse. Nearly half of all American Indian homeless adults reported having been physically abused as a child, as opposed to a 37% rate of abuse among their counterparts. Additionally, one in three homeless American Indians report experiencing childhood sexual abuse.
- High prevalence of mental health disabilities. American Indians experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder than their counterparts, with 56% reporting a serious or persistent mental health condition.
- Higher incidence of alcohol/chemical dependency disability. Over half of American Indians experiencing homelessness in Minnesota report a history of alcoholism or chemical dependency, as opposed to only 32% across all homeless populations.

### Homelessness on American Indian Reservations in Minnesota

According to a survey by the Wilder Research Center<sup>1</sup>:

- Finding and maintaining adequate housing on American Indian reservations is a challenge; statewide, over 1,200 people are homeless or near-homeless on reservations.
- Overall, 30% of homes were overcrowded on reservations; 18% were "severely overcrowded."

<sup>1</sup>Wilder Foundation, "Homeless and near-homeless people on northern Minnesota Indian reservations." 2006

## Hearth Connection's Role

Hearth Connection's mission is to end long-term homelessness. Hearth Connection directs regional service collaboratives that offer people with long histories of homelessness access to intensive case management services and housing. Hearth Connection partners with a network of community organizations to form regional service collaboratives like the Northeast Regional Project.

## Northeast Regional Project to End Long-Term Homelessness

The Northeast Regional Project has an emphasis on serving the American Indian community and addressing their over-representation in Minnesota's homeless population. The Northeast Project has always been challenged to deliver services that are appropriate and sensitive to cultural factors for American Indian participants.

The Northeast Regional Project is an historic partnership in this area of the state. The Northeast region had little evidence of collaborative projects to serve vulnerable community members, and a tremendous amount of planning, communication, and trust-building had to be established before this regional collaborative could be initiated. Collaborative stakeholders are proud of their focus on addressing homelessness within the American Indian communities of Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and the urban Duluth area, and of the housing stability and recovery that has been accomplished. Much has yet to be done, but holding a common vision and working toward accountable outcomes has resulted in progress for hundreds of American Indian adults, youth, and families in this region.

### Northeast Project Partners

Bois Forte Human Services  
Carlton County Human Services  
American Indian Community Housing  
Organization (AICHO)  
Churches United in Ministry (CHUM)  
Human Development Center  
Fond Du Lac Human Services  
Life House  
Salvation Army  
Range Mental Health Center (RMHC)  
Perpich Apartments (RMHC)  
Center City Housing Corporation – New San  
Marco

## Data and Outcomes of the Northeast Project

- In 2009 and 2010, the Northeast project served 366 total individuals.
- 61% of Northeast program participants (241 people) identify as American Indian.
- 57% of American Indian participants had experienced homelessness 4 or more times in the past 3 years, while 40% had experienced homelessness for a year or more at a time.
- 56% of participating American Indian households have been stably housed for over a year.
- Of the 18 American Indian households who voluntarily exited the program during this time period, half found housing with family or friends, and 39% moved into subsidized housing.

## Vision for the Future: Ending Homelessness

Hearth Connection has a vision and a plan for ending homelessness. In agreement with approaches endorsed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, we believe that ending homelessness must be grounded in the following: data collection and evaluation of outcomes, focus on the disproportionate number of American Indians and persons with disabilities within homeless populations, investments in prevention and early intervention methodologies, integration of housing and health care systems, and the expansion of supportive housing opportunities.

---

For more information, please contact:

David O'Leary, Regional Manager of the Northeast Project: (218)-464-4499 or david@hearthconnection.org

Richard A. Hooks Wayman, Executive Director: (651) 645-0676 x103 or richard@hearthconnection.org