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My name is Krysten Farrell, and I am a social worker with the Community Health Centers of Burlington. I work for Safe Harbor, the Health Center's homeless healthcare program. The services we provide include hygiene supplies, campsite outreach, housing case work, therapy, psychiatry and primary medical care.

During this testimony, I'll share my perspective as a service provider, presenting anecdotal evidence from my year in homeless services, changing individual's names for confidentiality. My hope is to highlight the impact and value of supportive housing programs, and to stress the necessity of more affordable housing in our communities.

Housing is healthcare. When a person is homeless, the concept of preventative health care is unrealistic. It is nearly impossible to take a preventative stance on one's health when one's experience of life is completely reactive. Reactive to their environment and to their immediate needs- shelter, safety, sleep. Health takes a backseat to one's mission of survival. When health needs rise to a crisis situation, it is often at that point when folks seek medical care, and from the emergency room.

Late spring of last year, Safe Harbor received a telephone call from UVM Medical Center's ER. The staff person was concerned because they had not seen David for months and she worried he had died. David is an individual who was very well known to the ER. He had not died; he had moved into the Beacon Apartments a few months earlier and had been managing without their services. In addition to a decrease in the use of costly emergency services, after someone receives housing we often witness an increase in medication compliance, leading to improved physical and mental health.

Permanent supportive housing programs, such as the 19-unit Beacon Apartments where I work, is an established, cost-effective model of housing that pairs affordability with individualized services.

Rent in Chittenden County is expensive. "Affordable Housing" as a term, means a monthly housing payment that does not exceed 30% of one's income. Typically, within the permanent supportive housing model, a household pays no more than 30% of its monthly income toward rent. This rental rate is available throughout the entire tenancy, allowing the household to use the rest of its income toward bills, utilities, food, entertainment, and savings. For a person with little to no income, this increases the likelihood that a housing situation will work out long term.

A person eligible for Supplemental Security Income in our state receives \$787.04 each month. If you are a person receiving SSI without access to subsidized rental assistance or a

financially secure support system, finding safe and secure housing may feel impossible. It may be impossible.

At the Beacon Apartments, we have been lucky to partner with the Burlington Housing Authority to receive Section 8 vouchers and Shelter + Care funding in order to subsidize rental payments. This setup has afforded Hannah the opportunity to complete a Personal Care Assistant training program and to begin a Licensed Nursing Assistant course with a roof over her head. It has allowed Donna to maintain her housekeeping business and have a place to return to at night.

Individuals who are homeless- who have little to no income- will never be able afford housing at the fair market rate. If Vermont's goal is to end homelessness, funding for more affordable housing- 30% of one's income, affordable housing - is imperative.

A key component of permanent supportive housing programs is the support, often in the form of on-site or nearby staff. Staff work to build relationships with tenants that promote housing stability. At the Beacon Apartments, folks have access to support staff seven days a week; interacting with staff is on tenants' terms and driven by their goals and needs. We provide education, coordinate services, help with paperwork, give support, problem solve, plan community activities, and advocate for and with the tenants.

There are Beacon residents who I see every day, and folks who keep their distance until they have a question. Tom, a thirty something year-old lifelong resident of the area, has lived at Beacon since last January. We wave when we see each other but have never met for case work. Prior to moving into Beacon, he was not in regular contact with his family. This is an email from his mother to my supervisor:

“Hi Erin...wanted to touch base. I saw Tom the other day and he told me how nice everybody in the office has been to him. He looks so much better and is always welcoming when I drop by. I am so grateful to you and your team for giving Tom a place to live and the opportunity to do better”.

As staff who show up every day, we have become reliable sources of positive human contact. Folks have come to expect our presence and count on us for things ranging from hot coffee in the morning, to support addressing their neighbor who's making noise late at night. The role we play as support staff is an important one.

During year one, my position was funded with grants from UVM Medical Center, the Fanny Allen Foundation and United Way. As Safe Harbor's housing program expands, philanthropic funding cannot be the main source of funding for our work. Having the state's support, or the ability to draw Medicaid dollars down to bill for our services would have a major impact. It would allow for the creation of more affordable housing units.

And more housing units would allow more opportunities for people to feel like this. From Tina, a Beacon resident:

“You ever feel like things are going so well that something bad might happen? I have a job now. I’m in at the suboxone clinic. I couldn’t do that before. How could I do that while living in a tent? I’ve improved; I was really bad. Sick all of the time. I didn’t even get my flu shot”

Housing people who are homeless saves money. But it does a whole lot more than that. To quote another Beacon resident, “people need housing for stability...to feel like themselves...to make them feel whole again.”

To the committee, thank you for the work that you are doing, and thank you again for the opportunity to share my perspective.

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