

# Faces of Home

32-year old Jarrett lived in his car for a period, struggling to keep a job or to stay sober before getting into treatment and coming to live at Edwinton Place, the only Burleigh County Housing Authority (BCHA) property dedicated to providing adults who have experienced chronic homelessness with Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). “It’s hard to sleep in your car in the wintertime,” said he, lowering his head. “You need a little something.”

In November 2021, Edwinton marked its second anniversary. It is the third property in North Dakota serving chronically homeless adults, people with a disability who reside in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter for a year or who have experienced homelessness on at least four separate occasions over the past three years. The other properties are Cooper House in Fargo, which opened in 2010, and LaGrave on First in Grand Forks, opened in 2018. Each has about 40 apartments with the tenants selected through a coordinated entry system serving North Dakota and West Central Minnesota.

Homelessness results in increased use of emergency rooms, hospitals, police and jails, in addition to the costs associated with shelters and services. The largest component of costs is healthcare. The US Interagency Council on Homelessness estimates that people experiencing chronic homelessness cost the public \$30,000 to \$50,000 per person per year, and without stable housing the services

## You need a little something.

provided make little improvement to their lives or health and well-being.

Nicole, a BCHA housing supervisor, initiates the next steps to connect people to housing and services when Edwinton has an opening. “Coordinated entry is a powerful tool designed to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness or

said, “I don’t know where I’d be if I hadn’t gotten the help I needed, when I needed it. This is the first time I’ve been independent, doing the right things, working and paying rent, and taking care of my own place.”

The Housing First model doesn’t require the tenants of PSH properties to use the



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at risk of homelessness are matched with the right intervention, as quickly as possible,” she said.

In November 2021, there were 130 people on the prioritization list who were chronically homeless. Once Nicole receives a referral, it takes her about two weeks to move an individual into Edwinton. The Housing First model employed at the property ends the person’s homelessness and serves as a platform for improving their quality of life.

Reflecting on his time at Edwinton, Jarrett

supportive service offered. Having a choice is valuable, theorizes Housing First, and exercising that choice is likely to make an individual more successful in remaining housed and improving their life.

“It is difficult to take care of your health, to get or keep a job when you don’t know where

you are going to

[watch video](#)

sleep at night,” said Jeannie, the property’s supervisor. “The individuals who move into Edwinton usually have a history of being chronically homeless due

to an addiction, mental illness or both. Once an individual is stabilized, it's much easier to get them to buy into the available services."

Like Cooper House and LaGrave on First, most of Edwinton's financing was provided by federal and state housing programs administered by the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency (NDHFA). "The state has prioritized the use of our limited development resources to address North Dakota's need for community-based permanent supportive housing," said Dave Flohr, the agency's executive director. "Having a stable home provides the foundation for a new life where individuals feel safe and can begin their journey to stability and recovery."

The development assistance provided by NDHFA doesn't cover the cost of supportive services so even when a community has a demonstrated need for such housing, it can take four or five years of planning before a PSH-project is able to break ground.

At Edwinton, such services include case management, education and employment supports, independent living skills, and assistance accessing appropriate healthcare and benefits that support independence including food assistance, social security, disability or VA benefits.

PSH projects that use a Housing First approach have been proven to be highly effective for ending homelessness, particularly for people who have higher service needs.

One of the first tenants of Edwinton, Sabrina, was homeless for three years before she entered treatment for an addiction to methamphetamine. After treatment, she was fortunate to share a bedroom in a transitional

living facility. When Sabrina learned she'd been selected to live at Edwinton, she was so excited at the prospect of having her own apartment, that she walked to the property daily to watch the final phases of construction.

Now, at 49-years of age, she is planning to



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move on, to have a fresh start, and Sabrina is grateful. "I meant something to the people who worked hard to get this building up. This is what they wanted. They wanted me off the street. They wanted me to go through rehabilitation. And they wanted me to have a secure place to live," she summarizes.

Without the opportunity, Sabrina says that she would probably be on the streets, probably using and might even be prostituting. Her tenancy at the property has brought stability to her life. She's been able to get her disability payments

reinstated, and she's had time to focus on her physical and mental health.

"This population has a difficult time with rules and structure, we work with them to provide the resources needed for their recovery" said Jeannie, when asked how tenants have fared during the property's two-year history. Nicole added, "We have a had some really good success and some not so good success."

Of the property's 40 original tenants, 26 still call Edwinton home, five of whom are sober and working towards recovery. A few have reconnected with family, one moved out after being sober for over a year and is enrolled in school, and two tenants moved out with other housing assistance. Two have passed away and one has gone to prison, only four have been asked to leave.

"I am privileged to be here," said Sabrina. "I am moving on to bigger things because of this apartment. I wouldn't be able to do that without the people in Bismarck who helped me. I've come so far from where I was."

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### Cost-Burdened Households

Across North Dakota, there is a shortage of rental homes affordable and available to extremely low income households. Many of these households are severely cost burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. Individuals facing economic limitations, physical disabilities, mental health issues, substance abuse, and justice involvement must sacrifice other necessities like healthy food and healthcare to pay rent. These difficult trade-offs increase the risk of unstable housing situations like evictions and homelessness.