

Good Morning Chairman Hogan and Committee members

My name is Denise Kramer. I am representing Prairie Harvest Mental Health from

Grand Forks. I am the Chief Program Officer at Prairie Harvest Mental Health. I

I would like to introduce you to my colleague, Becky Vakoc. She is the Chief

Finance Officer at Prairie Harvest.

Our brochures have been handed out that you may refer to.

Prairie Harvest serves individuals with serious mental illness. We promote independence and an enhanced quality of life. One area of importance is permanent supportive housing. In 1992

Prairie Harvest began partnership with Northeast Human Service Center. A lot of clients were homeless. They moved from homeless shelters to permanent housing.

Northeast refers clients to us for mental health recovery including permanent supportive housing.

Permanent supportive housing is an Evidence-Based Practice recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration-a federal agency. In their tool kit (page 8) they

indicate the “Consumers need for housing is no different from your need for housing.”

I would like to read you a story from a client.

I moved in Stern Place in November of 2013. The building was new. When I first saw the apartment, I wanted to move in right away. This is how my relationship with Prairie Harvest started.

While living in Prairie Harvest you get a case assistant. This is just someone you work one on one with. They can help for rides to appointments or to go somewhere and talk. They will help you as much as they can.

At Stern Place, there is also a nurse in the building who fills med boxes and will also do anything she can to help you. They have staff there from 5-9 to give rides to stores, to talk to, and to watch movies with. There’s lots of familiar faces and great people.

Prairie Harvest and the Stern Place facilities are what benefited me the most. By working with my case assistant and facility nurse, I was starting to understand my mental health. Then, I decided I’m going to use my tools, such as thought processing, that I learned from my therapist and Prairie Harvest. Soon, I would stop thinking negative of myself. I would use my thought processing skills and ask myself what’s true and what’s false. At first, I would use paper because I needed to see it.

While practicing, the staff from Prairie Harvest, Stern Place, family, friends, and Dr. S noticed these changes. I'm a hard guy for someone to give positive things to me. It kind of made me feel uncomfortable and I told people that I was not used to receiving positive compliments.

In January of 2015, I got custody of my son. Prairie Harvest worked with me and knew how important he was to me. They let him stay with me at Stern Place until I moved out on October of 2015. At this time, everyone told me how I changed in a great positive way. All the residents were understanding while my son and I lived there.

There were tough times financially and Prairie Harvest was very understanding and helped my son and I out a lot.

While being a resident at Stern Place, I grew to understand that having mental health does not make you any different from anyone else. This is an illness that I have got a lot of knowledge on and it's no different from diabetes. It's something I will always remember Prairie Harvest and Stern Place for.

My next goal is to work with Shelley, the facility nurse at Stern Place on filling my own med boxes. This will make me feel more responsible of taking care of my mental and physical health. Thankful and more confident because of Prairie Harvest.

For our clients with serious mental illness our housing has support staff for 24 hours all the way to the Fair weather Lodge approach, which is a peer support model. Our programming strengthens tenants' daily living skills so they can gain mental health wellness and recovery and thrive as contributing members of the community. Some activities our clients can be involved in are; group and individual sessions with varying topics on independent living skills, improving job skills, socialization, exercising at the Y, medication monitoring, rep payee, birthday club and so on.

Landlords out in the community do not always understand mental illness so it is difficult for individuals to maintain wellness. We work with Northeast Human Service case managers as a team to strive for daily recovery for our clients living in our housing.

This successful model doesn't come without challenges. There are individuals out in the community that are referred from Northeast Human Services, but our facility doesn't fit for what that person needs. For example: an individual getting out of the state hospital would be a better fit for housing that has 24 hour staff compared to a Lodge model. Presently we are at capacity and have a waiting list at three of our homes-Siewert Plains, Harvest Homes (24 hour staff on

sight) and Stern (staff on sight for four hours Monday through Friday). Our two Lodges, Prairie Lodge (3 available rooms) and Harvest Lodge (2 available rooms) have openings for five residents.

Requests for certain types of housing (individuals coming out of the state hospital, having dual diagnosis and ones in the community) are the struggles for serious mental illness individuals.

We had one individual who lived at Harvest Home from 1997 until 2000. He had 21 days of hospitalizations. He moved into the Lodge from 2000 until 2010. He had no hospitalizations.

This is only one example of how permanent supported housing works for individuals with serious mental illness.

Thank you very much to the Chair and Committee members for letting me talk with you.