



Media Release

NRH AGM Highlights Client Stories on Affordable Housing

NIAGARA REGION, October 10, 2008 – Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) departed from the traditional format by featuring a panel of clients at last night's Annual General Meeting. A range of NRH clients participated in a DVD titled "Second Chances" and panel discussion that highlighted those who have struggled to find affordable housing in Niagara. Their stories were diverse, heartfelt and focussed on the importance of affordable housing to a healthy life.

One panellist and former tenant recently purchased a home through the Welcome Home Niagara Homeownership Program. As he recounted the series of events that took him from a well-paid job and his own home to living in a friend's trailer, Brian choked back tears. "I was feeling mentally and spiritually broken" he told the audience, but today he is thrilled with his personal progress and with the opportunity to be a homeowner.

Other panellists echoed Brian's emphasis on affordable housing as a prerequisite for stability. A 78 year old widow recounted how her "life fell apart" after losing her husband. Her health and state-of-mind deteriorated quickly and, with her pension halved, she looked for an affordable home where she could feel secure. Another participant came to Niagara from eastern Canada in search of employment and instead ended up on the streets before finding affordable housing in non-profit Genesis Court.

"The common denominator in all of these stories" commented Karen Murray, Chair of the NRH Board, "is that they were unable to cope with life's challenges when they didn't have a home. You can't get your mental and physical health to improve when you're living on a couch or on the street or in a place where you can't afford both rent and food. Affordable housing is one of the first steps to a better life."

Lora Beckwith, General Manager of NRH, stressed that there is a severe shortage of affordable housing in Niagara, saying "we have more than 4,200 households on our waiting list – this means more than 8,000 people in Niagara who are struggling like our panellists were before they were housed...resolving this requires the commitment of all orders of government. I'm hopeful that our AGM will help to highlight some of the issues that Niagarans are facing". For more information, see the Niagara Regional Housing website at www.nrh.ca

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