Hotline Volunteers

Volunteers have always been a critical component of the success of the tenant hotline. Since 1992, there have been 1,113 volunteers who have donated over 36,000 hours of their time. The four area law schools have been the primary source of these volunteers (and the Minnesota Justice Foundation continues to play a key role in sending volunteers to work on the hotline). Here are the 10 volunteers who have volunteered the most time to HOME Line:

1. Charlie Warner
2. Walt Shaw
3. Andy Schmidt
4. Katherine Kelly
5. Adam Van Alstyne
6. William Mose
7. Matt Clementson
8. Susan Anderson
9. Joseph Cox
10. Korina Hackert

Thanks again to all of the volunteers who have made the hotline the success it is!

HOME Line provides free legal, organizing, educational and advocacy services so tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. HOME Line works to improve public and private policies relating to rental housing by involving affected tenants in the process.
Organizing helps tenants come together and work toward solving common issues. HOME Line’s program focuses on preserving federally subsidized apartments and developing tenant leadership to empower those affected to become spokespeople for themselves and their neighbors.

Since 1997, HOME Line has helped preserve more than 8,000 units of affordable housing. We have also adapted our organizing to work with renters to prevent the loss of affordable market-rate housing and to respond to emergency and ongoing repair and substandard housing situations.

Via our tenant organizing program, HOME Line has:

- Organized tenants in a variety of low-income and subsidized apartment complexes across the state, developed leadership to preserve affordable housing, get repairs made, and stop bad management practices. Thousands of Section 8 and Rural Development affordable rental units have been kept affordable for low-income Minnesotans as a result of tenants speaking up.
- Created an inventory of all the federally assisted privately owned housing in Minnesota and identified properties at risk for loss of affordability.
- Door-knocked thousands of apartments to inform tenants of their rights and engage them in public policy issues relating to their housing.
- Conducted an annual Section 8 survey 16 years in a row to determine landlord acceptance of Section 8 vouchers in the marketplace.

Some 2011 Victories Include:

- Organized residents over several years involved in a multi-building lawsuit that preserved 131 Rural Development units.
- Organized residents at Shingle Creek Towers to ensure a HUD foreclosure sale resulted in affordable rents and a professional owner.

Tenant leader & MTA Member Linda Hymes speaks about her experiences at a 2008 HUD Rally to defend Section 8 funding.

Tenants and housing advocates rally in front of the Minneapolis HUD building to oppose 2004 federal cuts to housing.

HOME Line is part of a legislative task force that revises many of Minnesota’s tenant/landlord laws to make it more understandable and better protective.

HOME Line becomes an independent nonprofit corporation.

Tenant Hotline expands to Anoka and Dakota counties.
Stories give power to policy

HOME Line knows the power behind storytelling in our grassroots organizing and policy work. Tenants like Dorothy across the state bring their own power to the table by offering a different perspective from the narratives that dominate housing policies—both public and private.

Stories from renters provide authentic, concrete feedback to policy makers and have remained the key ingredient to HOME Line’s successful campaigns. Stories drive change.

Public Policy Advocacy

Through this program, HOME Line builds tenant leadership into local, state, and federal efforts focused on affordable housing policies.

On the state level, HOME Line has influenced a variety of legislation:

• Provisions in the 2010 Tenant Bill of Rights make Minnesota law more tenant-friendly and save tenants millions of dollars through revisions to policies on tenant screening fees, late fees, attorney’s fees, and security deposits.

• The Tenant Impact Statement, a one-year notice before owners terminate federal subsidies, along with an annual appropriation of $10 million to preserve affordable housing.

• The Tenant’s Right to Privacy, establishing legal standards for landlords entering an apartment as well as other laws strengthening tenant screening protections.

• Since 2004, we have organized to successfully preserve and protect the Renters Credit property tax refund, a program to keep Minnesota’s tax system balanced.

On the federal level HOME Line helped influence important laws and programs:

• Enact legislation that created the National Housing Trust Fund, a tool to develop and preserve thousands of units of affordable housing nationwide.

• Advocate for full funding of public housing, voucher and project-based Section 8 programs, and rural rental housing.

• Work on a grassroots level to involve low-income tenants in discussions with the Department of Housing and Urban Development on recent proposals to overhaul all major federal rental housing subsidy programs currently known as the Rental Housing Revitalization Act.

Name: Norothy
Phone number: 123-456-7890

This is how I use my renters' credit:

First, I show up at a tenant meeting, which is a place to talk about housing issues. Second, I talk to my landlord, who helps me understand my rights and responsibilities as a tenant. I try to be a good neighbor and take care of my home.

I’m grateful for tenant housing when I live in a house that is clean and safe.
Policy, Organizing, & Legal help Maintains Homes for Many

In 2008, HUD's budgetary shortfall meant that landlords across the country were receiving delayed rent payments (by several months) from HUD, putting tenants at unprecedented risk of homelessness. While leading a grassroots response to this disaster, HOME Line received a story from a Park Street tenant who wrote about the importance of affordable senior housing in Cannon Falls. It turned out that her landlord was exiting the Section 8 contract at her building as well as two others in Minnesota. Housing advocates feared a mass exodus of landlords from this critical program.

This grassroots policy work led organizers to work with Park Street tenants to address concerns about affordability with their landlord and his plan to convert their apartments into assisted living units. This meant that the owner intended to deny residents their federal right to section 8 vouchers, and require those eligible to shed their assets in order to apply for county assistance and receive assisted living services whether they needed them or not. Ineligible residents would be forced to move out of their homes, although many had lived at Park Street for as many as 28 years.

Outraged tenants formed an association, "Park Street Apartments--Home Sweet Home," and requested support from the city, Minnesota’s Congressional Delegation, local businesses, churches, and other city residents to help them stay in their homes. Residents even wrote articles for the local paper, The Beacon, explaining their issue and rallying their community for support.

Tenant leader, Michelle Spencer wrote, "With the support of fellow tenants, our community, HOME Line, and its partners, we saved our homes. This team effort brought our work here to a success. We are safe in our homes, and residents have grown even closer together than we were before.”

While simultaneously addressing concerns with building repairs and learning their rights as renters, Park Street Apartments--Home Sweet Home saved the Section 8 in their building as well as for one other complex of the owner's in Lake City.

Section 8 Report

In 1995, HOME Line set out to investigate the effects of Congress's proposed restructuring of HUD programs in a housing market experiencing 2% rental vacancy rates. HUD had reduced its Fair Market Rents (FMR's) by 3%, further reducing access to affordable, decent homes to families all over Minnesota. The thought in Washington at the time was to convert all of HUD’s housing programs to Section 8 Vouchers without regard to the realities of the housing markets or the barriers that low-income families face when striving for stability.

HOME Line’s survey of area rents and landlord acceptance of Section 8 revealed substantial lack of access to decent housing due to high rents and discrimination against voucher holders. We continued to conduct the survey over the next 15 years, which has allowed us to better understand broader trends in the rental housing market.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS & TOOLS FOR TENANTS

HOME Line has worked to develop tools that renters can access to help them stay better informed and equipped to prevent or mitigate their rental housing troubles. We created:

- Blogs on Public Policy & Landlords in the News.
- An online list of cities with heat codes with rental inspector contact information.
- Low-cost legal representation for tenants seeking greater support for their housing problems.
- Our first tenants’ rights book, How to be the Smartest Renter on Your Block.
- Low-cost webinars & CLE’s for Minnesota attorneys seeking continued legal education.
- A wacky & successful annual fundraising campaign, the Treadmill-A-Thon, to help keep our services available to tenants.
- Landlord trainings.

2005-2006
- HOME Line organizes renters affected by the condo conversion crisis; helps enact tenant protections for Minneapolis renters.
- 20,000 students reached via high school speeches.
- Tenant Hotline expands to St. Paul.

2006-current
- Landlord foreclosure rate soars. HOME Line adds foreclosure focus to hotline & successfully lobbies for stronger tenant protections on state and federal levels.

April 2008
- Tenant Hotline answers the 100,000th call from a renter.

2010
- HOME Line partners with Legal Aid & passes provisions of MN Tenant Bill of Rights.

February 2011
- Tenant Hotline answers the 100,000th call from a renter.

2012
- Tenant Hotline answers the 100,000th call from a renter.

2014
- Tenant Hotline answers the 100,000th call from a renter.