Housing Missourians With HIV

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Cooper House in St. Louis.

St. Louis is known as the Gateway to the West. For thousands of Missourians living with HIV, the city's Doorways Interfaith Residence organization is known as a gateway to stable housing and health services. Doorways offers five different programs, each based on level of need. Cooper House, for example, is a residential facility for nearly 40 homeless folks needing 24-hour nursing care and meal services. And the Jumpstart program provides support for homeless single parents living with HIV.

Doorways owns seven additional residential buildings, providing homes to about 250 residents who are capable of independent living but need financial and health services. Another 1,500 clients are able to live in their own homes and simply require assistance with rent and utilities. And then there's the Outstate program, which offers similar aid to rural residents in more than 100 counties in Missouri and Illinois, while also providing transportation dollars so clients can get to medical appointments.

Their client base—about 67 percent are black and 70 percent are male—mirrors the epidemic in the Show Me State. The biggest hurdle they face, according to Doorways president and CEO Opal Jones, is that "folks are isolated and stigmatized. And Missouri not expanding Medicaid continues to be a challenge—not just for HIV-positive people, but for low-income people period."

Doorways allows clients to move from one program to another as needed, but providing a home is only part of its services. "What's exciting is that we've expanded our program," Jones says. "We now have an employment specialist, and we do programming around mental health, substance abuse and physical health. We even do after-school tutoring and summer camp for children of clients." This year, Doorways hosted an adult prom, complete with the Gateway Men's Chorus, drag queens and Miss Missouri. "It was a place," Jones says, "we could take down barriers and just have some fun."

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