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September 11, 2007

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State Honors Next Step Housing of Yakima with a *Friend of Housing* Award

SPOKANE, Wash.—Sept. 11, 2007— Next Step Housing, Wash., was recognized last night by the State of Washington for years of service to the mission of providing affordable housing for the benefit of Washington residents. In an awards ceremony at the Davenport Hotel in Spokane that was part of the annual Housing Washington conference attended by more than 700 peers and colleagues, Next Step Housing Executive Director John Mifsud received a 2007 *Friend of Housing* award from the Washington State Housing Finance Commission.

“Next Step Housing is all about providing that next step into the future for many residents of the Yakima Valley,” said Commissioner Mario Villanueva. “Over the last 17 years, this nonprofit organization has become a national award winner in special needs and clean and sober low-income housing and our state is proud to now also honor them.”

In 1991, in Yakima, members of the community saw the need to address homelessness and its inherent issues; Next Step Housing responded and through that decade and into this century, they have achieved remarkable results.

In 2007, they began work on Pear Tree Place, a planned 26-unit development in Yakima that will contain 11 three-bedroom town homes. These will be Alcohol and Drug Free units dedicated to large families. As extensive as this list is for a relatively young organization, Next Step not only provides counseling services, it hires from its resident pool. Single parents are given the opportunity to manage the affordable housing communities in which they live.

The following gives the history of Next Step Housing projects—all successes. In 1997, they purchased Chambers House and Denney House, two cooperatively run homes providing 17 units of transitional housing for adults in early recovery. In collaboration with Community Development Services Incorporated, Next Step Housing won the *1997 National Tax Credit Housing Coalition Award for Excellence!* for designing the Yakima

Housing Authority's Families for Self Sufficiency Program and creating on-site case management services for the 120-unit Cornerstone Cooperative Apartments.

In 1999, they purchased Clean House Apartments, 21 clean and sober studio units with 6 units set aside for adults with developmental disabilities. In 2000, they purchased Lamplighter Apartments, a 16-unit building consisting of 12 one-bedroom and 4 two-bedroom units with four-units set-a-side for adults living with developmental disabilities.

In 2003, they purchased Sommerset Apartments. This property has 20 one-bedroom, 20 two-bedroom, and 5 studio units of permanent housing and two commercial units. Eleven of the apartment homes are reserved for homeless households living with disabilities. The Sommerset is the largest, affordable Alcohol and Drug Free Community in Washington state. This community also has on site case-management services for residents and their families. They also won the *Northwest Affordable Housing Management Association 2004 Community of Quality Award in two categories: Exemplary Family Development and Outstanding Turnaround of a Troubled Property.*

Next Step is also dedicated to creating housing and communities where children can grow up free of substance abuse. During 2006, Next Step housed 246 people in 179 households, 167 of which were under 30% of area median income. The majority had substance abuse issues. Sixty-two percent were formerly homeless. Over 18 percent were either developmentally disabled or chronically mentally ill. In addition, 63% are still housed, 27% found permanent housing and 20% found employment while housed.

The Commission received a record 49 nominations for the *Friend of Housing* awards from people working in the public, private and independent sectors of the affordable housing industry. Honorees are selected for their leadership and exceptional contribution to creating or supporting affordable housing, implementing housing-related programs, creating innovative financing mechanisms for housing, supporting homebuyer education or technical training efforts within the housing community and helping to solve housing problems.

Washington State Housing Finance Commission is a publicly accountable, self-supporting agency dedicated to increasing housing access and affordability and to expanding the availability of quality community services for Washington state residents.

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