



Big Sister League's Housing Program has made a critical difference
in the lives of many women. Here is Rachel's story:

"...Mental illness has been a part of my life since 1979. My mother had died and I felt like there was nothing to live for. My father remarried and soon after that I had a bipolar episode. Suddenly I was in the scariest place I had ever been in my life -- a psych hospital. That multiplied the devastation of being without my mother ten-fold. In the following years, I had major manic episodes in between normal life and working in the high pressure corporate world. People were always shocked at what they would see happen when I unraveled. Throughout the years I have lost jobs, apartments, and often, friends. My worst episode started at the end of 2002. For the next 3 years I was in and out of hospitals and spent all of 2005 hospitalized. It was at the end of that hospital stay that I learned about Big Sisters.

Moving into Big Sisters instantly gave me the supportive environment I needed - a house full of women with mental illness just like me. I no longer felt alone - I was around people who also struggled with having their lives disrupted. They knew exactly what I was going through. In addition, the house moms were attentive and I knew they cared about me. I learned to laugh again. Another huge benefit was the Big Sisters' requirement for weekly activities. I immediately got into volunteerism. This prevented me from wallowing in despair over my circumstances. It also got my very mushy brain working productively again.

I moved out from Big Sisters in April 2007. Currently, I live on my own and I do freelance work as an events and special projects assistant at two service organizations, and I do a lot of volunteer work. My particular passion is prison ministry. There's no greater joy than being able to give back and help someone else who is in great need of encouragement. My new life is something I could have never imagined during my years of struggle. And it all developed while I lived at Big Sisters. Big Sisters helped me transition back into the outside world after my darkest hour. For that, I will be forever grateful."

For more information about the Big Sister League Housing Program,
go to: <http://bigsisterleague.org/housing/default.asp>.