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**Grants Sustain Mentally Ill Homeless Program,
Results in Drops in Emergency Room Visits and Hospitalizations**

Columbia, S.C. – A \$50,000 grant approved recently by the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation will help keep open a day center program for mentally ill, homeless individuals.

The grant takes effect just as a five-year federal grant has expired for the Homeless Recovery Center (HRC), one of the programs run by Mental Illness Recovery Center, Inc. (MIRCI) in Columbia. The new grant will be used for the salaries of the program director, seven counselors, two mental health specialists, a driver and administrative support.

“Without this funding, we’d not be able to sustain the program. This will help cover our clients at this center, until we get them enrolled in benefits to which they are entitled through government programs such as Medicaid, Medicare or Social Security,” said MIRCI Executive Director Julie Ann Avin.

Started five years ago, the HRC now serves an average of 300 individuals a year who are chronically homeless and have serious mental illness – getting them off the streets, engaged in treatment and into permanent supportive housing. It provides a clinic, laundry, storage, showers, and meals.

The BlueCross Foundation has given a total of \$225,000 to MIRCI since 2008 for the HRC. Its services have resulted in a 35% reduction in hospitalizations for a savings of nearly \$433,000 in avoided hospital charges, a 47% drop in emergency room visits netting \$232,000 in avoided charges, and an 87% drop in psychiatric specialty hospital in-patient admissions over the previous year as well as fewer encounters with law enforcement.

“The BlueCross Foundation support is a great partnership for us. It’s nice to have the leaders in the community to step up and help us help the community,” said Avin.

The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation (www.bcbsscfoundation.org) is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

MIRCI – the Mental Illness Recovery Center, Inc. (www.mirci.org) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide community based services to individuals recovering from mental illness and/or severe emotional problems in the Midlands of South Carolina. This is accomplished through a variety of counseling, housing and financial management initiatives including HomeBase and Supportive Housing programs, Representative Payee program, and the Homeless Recovery Center.

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