

# Documentary breaks through stigma

By **BRUCE INGRAM**  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

**T**wo struggles are on the screen in the new documentary "Unbreakable Minds." First is the day-to-day



## FILM

challenge of coping with severe mental illness faced by three North Shore men — and two families — counseled by the Northfield psychiatric treatment center WilPower Inc.

Second is the typical resistance WilPower faces when it tries to open a group home: specifically, its new housing facility in Skokie.

"We decided the stigma of mental illness is the thing that's most important to address," said veteran Canadian producer Irene Lilienheim Angelico, who began shooting "Unbreakable Minds" here six years ago with her producer/director husband, Abbey Jack Neidik. "We were attracted to people's initial reaction that the mentally ill are undesirables."

"In the past, people with mental illness have been so isolated, like people with cancer were once isolated or people with AIDS today. We hope this film will help break the stigma so people can get the support they need. Every door that opens helps."

"Unbreakable Minds" will receive its Chicago premiere with three screenings next week at the Highland Park Theater and one at Northwestern University's Block Cinema. A panel discussion including a WilPower representative, a family member and a psychiatrist will follow the film each night. Angelico and Neidik will discuss the film Tuesday. \$20 tickets benefit WilPower.

### Zooming in

Why would a world-traveling, award-winning, Canadian husband-and-wife producing/directing team spend six years (without pay) working on a documentary about a small mental-health center in Northfield?

The flip answer would be to say Angelico's mother told her to do it. Angelico grew up in Evanston and Glencoe and graduated from New Trier West before emigrating to Canada. Her mother, Lydia Lilienheim, still lives in Glencoe and was one of WilPower's founders.

Angelico has sympathy of her own for the mentally ill, however



Like "Minds:" The husband-and-wife filmmaking team of Irene Lilienheim Angelico and Abbey Neidik.

She also felt the WilPower story was important for Canada, which is moving toward deinstitutionalizing the mentally ill. Telefilm in Canada agreed and made the unusual decision to fund a project that did not deal directly with Canadian citizens or issues.

WilPower was founded in 1987 by parents in the area of New Trier Township who could not find housing, programs and services for their children with schizophrenia and other major mental illnesses. After securing a grant from the state, which typically funds licensed agencies, WilPower hired the Chicago psychiatric agency Thresholds to run the center for 15 years, then took over its own operations.

For three years, Angelico and Neidik followed the personal progress and setbacks of Deerfield resident Randy (last name withheld at the request of his parents), Highland Park resident Brad Budnik and New Trier grad Rob Logan — all being assisted with management of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder at WilPower.

During filming, all three men took up residences in new homes facilitated by WilPower, including Logan, who had to wait for his new



House warming: Rob Logan (right) celebrates at the opening of WilPower's new group home in Skokie.

### ► 'Unbreakable Minds'

8 p.m. Tuesday through Oct. 27,  
Highland Park Theater, 445 Central  
Ave., Highland Park  
6 p.m. Oct. 28, Block Cinema,  
Northwestern University, 40 Arts  
Circle Drive, Evanston  
\$20 (tax deductible)  
(847) 501-2878, Ext. 4

home in Skokie to be approved by the Village Board, despite the resistance of residents.

"Fear of the unknown is universal," said Neidik, whose recent projects range from "She Got Game: Behind the Scenes of the Women's Tennis Tour" and "Vendetta Song," a film about the tradition of honor killings among rural Kurdish tribes in Turkey.

"When you get to know these people, though, you realize they're remarkable. Their souls are very close to the skin. When they're vulnerable, they're really vulnerable; when they're happy, they treasure their happiness. They have handicaps but they struggle with them heroically."

WilPower Executive Director Sue Shimon says she admires the way "Unbreakable Minds" captures the various phases and stages of the lives of its subjects.

"The public has images and perhaps even experiences of people who are acutely mentally ill," she said. "This film does a brilliant job of illustrating that while people are sometimes so disturbed by symptoms they're not functional, other times they are at the opposite extreme, functioning the way normal people function at their best."

"When people managing schizophrenia are stable and they're in line with you at Target, they might be noticeable or they might not. Usually, they're not."