

Newsletter of
The Treehouse Foundation
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Improving the odds for children
who experience foster care

Fall 2008



news from the Treehouse

Our primary vision is to provide children in the public foster care system with enduring family relationships and supportive community connections by implementing innovative programs and practices.

“Since 1970 I have been professionally engaged in the creation of affordable housing communities as a public employee, private attorney, and real estate developer. I have worked on redeveloping distressed downtowns, shelters for battered women, mixed income developments in suburban communities, and the conversion of public housing projects to mixed income developments. Of all of these projects, Treehouse presents the best opportunity for immediate improvement in the lives of those in critical need.”

—Howard Cohen
President
Beacon Communities LLC
Treehouse Housing Partner

Treehouse—Catalyst For Change

Every year as many as 25,000 young people experiencing foster care in America “age out” of our foster care system without any enduring family relationships or community connections. This usually happens on their 18th birthday. Suddenly, after a childhood spent in a system that has made every important life decision for them, they are on their own with no one to count on. The result: they are at risk for homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, and early parenthood.

As a country, we can and should do better for our children. The Treehouse Foundation is re-envisioning the way we guide children who experience foster care before they exit the system as older teens without the safety and security of a permanent family, caring neighbors, and positive role models.

Since its founding in 2002, the Treehouse Foundation has been working to change this “aging out” reality by creating new solutions and unique partnerships to cultivate enduring relationships that all young people need and deserve. That is the primary goal of Treehouse, and we hope you will join with us to support our efforts.

The Foundation’s major initiative has been the creation of the first Treehouse Community, a replicable multi-generational neighborhood that builds community connections and life-long relationships. Treehouse opened in June 2006. It is a neighborhood where families who are adopting children from the public foster care system live with caring neighbors. Over 100 people, ranging in age from 3 to 90, live on Treehouse Circle.

At the Treehouse Community, people of all ages are engaged in community and relationship building. At Treehouse we seek to find out what it takes for neighbor-



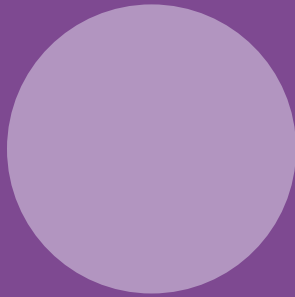
hoods to become truly invested in the lives of all of its community members. We actively collaborate with people and organizations to create new engagement options that invite people of all ages to step forward and contribute to the Treehouse mission and vision.

Recently four generous individuals helped fund our flourishing Treehouse Community Garden Program, Intergenerational Programming, and an Arts and Learning Project designed to inspire and motivate students to learn. These innovative programs bring valuable resources to the neighborhood, support community building, and provide us with learning that we look forward to sharing with others.

Treehouse is proud of our most recent collaborations with School Sprouts, Holyoke Rows, Snow Farm, and the Enchanted Circle Theatre. Their combined support makes a bold statement: The Treehouse Approach is worthy of investment.

This holiday season, please join others who support the Treehouse mission and give a life-changing gift to the Treehouse Foundation. It’s a gift that brings promise & hope. We invite you to collaborate with us to transform lives and strengthen communities. Together we will be a catalyst for change!

Judy Cockerton
Founder



“In my view...

We are about to enter the season of thanks and holiday celebrations. For many children who have experienced foster care this is a challenging time, often reminiscent of the many losses that they have faced: loss of their birth parents, of their siblings, loss of history, loss of connection. The list goes on.

At Treehouse our job is to understand the impact of loss and how it can reverberate in children’s lives. We strive to cultivate awareness among community members while providing enduring family and neighborhood connections that can help children navigate through their sense of loss and thrive.

These connections, that span the generations, are the true gifts for which we give thanks. Within our community it is this web of connectedness that gives us strength and benefits us all.

Kerry Homstead
Community Facilitator
Treehouse at Easthampton Meadow



My life is so enriched with friends, children, love, and learning. I feel valued and am honored to be here. My cottage is a beautiful comfortable home surrounded by gorgeous images wherever I look.

—Elder living at Treehouse



“The Treehouse Foundation was established because one foster/adoptive parent was paying attention and realized that we need to re-think, re-design and re-envision foster care in America. How amazing is that?!”

—Elder living at Treehouse



“We know what to do to improve the lives of 800,000 children in this country who experience foster care. Treehouse is actually doing it. Together we are providing life-long family and community connections for vulnerable children. I am so proud to be a part of Treehouse.”

—Parent living at Treehouse



Why Does Treehouse Matter?

“I can’t tell you the joy I am feeling as I watch my children here... This is so right for them. I feel such a sense of peace, safety, and hopefulness for our future.”

—Parent living at Treehouse



Interested in supporting **The Treehouse Foundation?**
visit www.treehousecommunities.org

WE GIVE THANKS!

This holiday season, as we celebrate our third year as a community, there is so much to be grateful for!

Our 2008 Top Ten List includes:

- TREEHOUSE COMMUNITY MEMBERS
- Beacon Communities LLC
- Berkshire Children and Families
- Casey Family Services
- Highland Valley Elder Services
- School Sprouts
- Enchanted Circle Theatre
- Snow Farm
- Our wonderful volunteers and interns
- Our generous individual donors who support the development and implementation of each Treehouse program. We are deeply grateful for your contributions, large and small.

Treehouse appreciates everyone who has made this unique neighborhood possible. Each one of your donations moves the nation forward in a re-design of foster care in the US and helps us answer the question, "What does it take for a community to care for all of its citizens?"

With your continued generosity we will continue to thrive and benefit children and elders all across America.



"Judy Cockerton has issued a call to action that is both inspirational and innovative: Re-Envisioning Foster Care in America. Treehouse is a catalyst for change. Living at Treehouse means I am making a difference. So can you. Get involved! Your contribution matters."
—Elder living at Treehouse



Connecting the Generations: An Elder Perspective

It was nearly 2 years ago, when my dog Chloe and I jumped into our PT Cruiser overflowing with our belongings and drove 1,000 miles to Treehouse. The description of Treehouse Community in Easthampton on a National Public Radio, a conversation with Kerry, the Treehouse website and written materials lured me to take a leap of faith and move. I could not be happier.

Four years after retiring, I wanted to settle down where my contributions would make a difference in other people's lives. Having an opportunity to help children in a meaningful way was paramount.

We are blessed with the presence of 35 children at Treehouse. All of them are benefiting from being together in a community dedicated to creating a safe, loving and fun place where they can count on their families, friends and neighbors to help them become the wonderful, unique, talented children that they are. Kids at Treehouse play, laugh, dance, sing with the coyotes, paint, participate in sports, create music, share their ideas, and contribute their gifts. They are here for one another in a very special way. All of them know what life was like in foster care and they have a very special bond and relationship with one another because of it.

Elders recently wrote in a questionnaire that our children are wonderful, polite, loving, helpful, energetic, and a joy to be around. They call us Grandma, Grandpa, Mama and Dad. They embrace us, explore with us, work on projects with us, and help us every day. In short, they bless our lives.

Elders also shared that Treehouse provides opportunities to get involved in meaningful activities and grow. Treehouse is beautiful, convenient, safe, secure, affordable, and friendly. There are good neighbors, wonderful people of all ages, and friends who are willing to help one another. One Treehouse member wrote. "When I come down that hill and round the corner, I feel at peace. Treehouse is my home."

I am so glad I took that leap of faith and moved to Treehouse. Living here brings me so much joy.

Rosa Young



"How can I tell you what the past two years at Treehouse have meant to me? There are so many nice people here. People who care about me."



"When I wake up in the morning and remember that I am at Treehouse I feel smiley inside."



"Have you ever felt loved by LOTS of people? That's what I feel at Treehouse!"

"Certain things are too important to waste. A child's life is one them. Let us have the courage to face the everyday realities of the foster care experience for children in this country and come together to craft dynamic new programs and opportunities to create life-long relationships. Let us send vulnerable children the message that they are visible, valuable, and worthy of our investment in their lives."

-Judy Cockerton
 Founder
 The Treehouse Foundation

Today in America 800,000 children experience foster care. One third of those children will never return home and not be adopted. They will spend their childhoods in foster care and at the age of 18 launch out into the world alone and unprepared for life.

Why is America stuck here?

Because almost everybody is looking around and responding to what they see. They are focused on the reality of today's foster care system.

What is the solution?

Look around less! Imagine more! Imagine until your imagery becomes the new reality! Think out of the foster care box.

That is what the Treehouse Foundation is doing and it's working. People are re-thinking the options and choosing to become part of the foster care solution. We are partnering with others to bring about change that will honor the lives of our children who have no voice and no power. Think of the next generation. Think about what could be.

As President-elect Barack Obama says,

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."



Support the work of the Treehouse Foundation today!
 It's simple:
 You can send a check to:

<p>The Treehouse Foundation 1 Treehouse Circle Easthampton, MA. 01027</p>	<p>- OR -</p>	<p>Make a secure on-line donation at www.treehousecommunities.org</p>
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Thank you!

The Treehouse Foundation – Thinking Out of the Foster Care Box!