

Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs
Oregon Housing and Community Services
Bridge Meadows: Building Intergenerational Community

“The community is the intervention. We just facilitate. Staff guide but do not govern.”

– Dr. Derenda Schubert, Executive Director, Bridge Meadows

Vision

Traditional, extended family providing for the needs of young and old is an ancient concept with modern-day implications for children living in foster care and seniors experiencing social isolation. Many foster children long for the stability of a permanent home, as well as togetherness with their siblings. Providing affordable, safe and convenient housing to families agreeing to adopt foster children helps provide the stability foster children need. Blending these families with low-income seniors who need access to affordable housing, as well as a purpose in life, addresses two social issues, while also creating a vibrant, healthy and functional community.

Bridge Meadows is an innovative Portland affordable housing development where families adopting foster children and low-income seniors share an intergenerational community. It consists of nine homes for families with foster children, housing for 27 elders in proximity to each other (18 units in an intergenerational center and nine elder units scattered throughout the property).

How Bridge Meadows meets the judging criteria:

Innovative

Bridge Meadows is one of only three similar developments in the country. Its unique way of sheltering seniors and families adopting foster children, coupled with ongoing supportive services, is a model example of creativity.

What happens at Bridge Meadows is simple and unique. The Oregon Department of Human Services refers eligible families adopting foster children to Bridge Meadows staff. These families need help with rent and large enough places to live. They must begin the process of permanently adopting their foster children within 12 months of arrival. Most of these families have agreed to adopt more than one child to keep siblings together.

Bridge Meadows elders must meet income qualifications and donate 10 hours per week to the families. They help with babysitting, running errands, cooking, teaching the kids how to bake cookies, reading to them, or anything else that a grandparent might do.

To help them understand the unique needs of the children, the elders take classes on babysitting and respite care and are coached in a kinship support group.

Responds to important state housing need

In 2011, 8,650 Oregon children were in foster care. Many of them bounce around from foster home to foster home. For these children, being adopted into a family not only provides stability and permanency to their lives, but also keeps them together with their siblings.

Provide benefits that outweigh costs

Bridge Meadows provides permanent housing for families adopting foster children. This decreases the burden on the foster care system. More importantly, it delivers long-term benefits for children: success in school, pride, hope, and better health. Studies also demonstrate that socializing has beneficial health effects on seniors, which in turn lessens the burden on the Medicare and Medicaid systems.

Demonstrates measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers

Bridge Meadows' onsite social worker Renee Moseley says, "It's amazing to see the difference in the children almost immediately. There is a great change over the kids as they settle in and relax. There is a great change over the elders as they become less isolated and integrate into a community and become productive. They come alive. They also relax because they feel safe in the development, with no fear of walking outside at night."

Bringing the children and elders together creates not just community, but family. Children receive all of the love and guidance the elders have to give. Elders receive the joy only a grandchild can bring. Bridge Meadows' staff holds a weekly happy hour in the central community room, where elders and children can meet each other. The children's natural curiosity serves as the icebreaker. "We have games planned, but so far we've never needed them for people to talk to one another," says Renee.

Has a proven track record of success in the marketplace

Hope Meadows, the model development in Illinois that inspired Bridge Meadows, is the national standard in supportive services and affordable housing. Although Bridge Meadows just opened, funders and supporters alike have said it is an incredible success.

Effective use of partnerships

How Bridge Meadows came to be is as inspiring as the community it is creating. After reading Wes Smith's book, *Hope Meadows*, about a similar development in Illinois, aptly named Portland resident Rhonda Meadows visited Hope Meadows and then returned home, where she began lobbying to create Bridge Meadows.

In January 2004, Rhonda began visiting Portland officials to raise interest. Next, she had to secure funding, learn how to form a 501(c)3, and with the help of an active, dedicated board, worked with a variety of non-profits and private organizations to raise money.

In 2006, the board hired Dr. Derenda Schubert as Bridge Meadows executive director. In 2007, with the help of Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, Portland reserved land for the project.

To help make that community a reality, Oregon Housing and Community Services provided \$100,000 in Trust Funds, \$793,782 in Low Income Housing Tax Credits and \$2,325,511 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Tax Credit Assistance Program funds to the developer, Guardian Real Estate Services. Other funders include the City of Portland, Meyer Memorial Trust, the Oregon Community Foundation, Walsh Construction, Guardian Management, and a number of other charitable organizations and private donors.

Partnerships continue to play a key role. Bridge Meadows contracts with an outside agency to provide onsite supportive services. Counselors are on-hand and ready to help children and families cope with issues as they arise. At least one counselor is present daily, a natural part of the landscape.

Replicable

At Bridge Meadows' grand opening in June, founder Rhonda Meadows said, "Success is contagious. Now, the rest of the country can replicate what we have here." Now, with Bridge Meadows and Hope Meadows as models, other communities don't have to recreate the wheel, but can use the existing developments as models to follow.

Demonstrate effective use of resources

Bridge Meadows has a very small but effective staff, composed of a social worker with experience working with foster children, an executive director who is a psychologist and an adoptive mother of two, and an administrative assistant. The board of directors holds regular fundraisers for ongoing financial support.

Human resources go beyond board and staff. The resident seniors provide at least 10 hours per week of donated supportive services in the form of tutoring, babysitting, running errands and preparing meals.

Achieve strategic objectives

One of Oregon Housing and Community Services' primary objectives is to provide permanent, supportive housing and services to low-income Oregonians.

Bridge Meadows' accommodation for a special needs population helps us fulfill our mission. The residents receive quality of life and dignity, as well as high quality, clean, safe, energy-efficient affordable housing.

One senior resident fulfills her 10 hours of required volunteer time by hand-knitting a unique sweater for each child who moves in. The children not only receive this special gift – they also get a permanent home.



Bridge Meadows warm and inviting units



Bridge Meadows grandma and baby



Bridge Meadows grandmas