

# MANAGING

Governance and Regulation

## Multigenerational Communities Sprout to Aid Vulnerable People

By Jennifer C. Berkshire

CHAMPAIGN, ILL.

**W**HEN Lynda Komanecky learned about a new community in Portland, Ore., specifically designed to house elderly people to help families raise foster children, she knew that it was the place for her.

“I had a feeling that I could really make a contribution,” says Ms. Komanecky, 65, who moved to Bridge Meadows from her Illinois home last spring. “I have a lot of love left to give, and that’s what these kids need.”

Bridge Meadows, which opened in 2011, is home to three generations of residents: older people, like Ms. Komanecky, who receive discounted rent in exchange for volunteering 10 hours a week; foster children; and the families who are in the process of adopting them.

Derenda Schubert, Bridge Meadows’ executive director, says that the concept is so effective because it responds to the distinct needs of the residents.

“Our elders feel like they have a purpose, that they’re needed, while the families get supported and the kids get

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loved and cared for,” she says. “We’ve seen an incredibly positive impact in a very short period of time.”

### Forming Relationships

Proponents of this approach say that Bridge Meadows, and an expanding network of similar groups, could help all sorts of vulnerable people, including wounded veterans and developmentally disabled adults. And with the housing market finally on the rebound, they see an opportunity for expansion.

“I believe that this is a 21st-century solution to helping fix problems that traditional social services haven’t been able to fix,” says Brenda Eheart, executive director of the Generations of Hope Development Corporation, who created the first of these programs.

“Think about the way a strong community works. People of all ages know each other and care enough to want to help one another. That’s exactly the dynamic that we’re trying to create.”

Pioneers of this concept are now being recognized for their vision. Last month, Judy Cockerton, founder of Treehouse, a multigenerational community in Easthampton, Mass., received a \$100,000 Purpose Prize from Encore.org for her work. The award is given annually to people age 60 and up who have tackled social problems in an innovative way.

The multigenerational strategy has drawn support from the W.K. Kellogg and Heinz Family foundations, among



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL MCDERMOTT, FOR THE CHRONICLE



other grant makers; Kellogg made a \$7.7-million grant in 2007 to accelerate Generations of Hope’s expansion to 18 states.

“We’re used to funding social-service programs to fix community problems,” says Ted Chen, a former program director at Kellogg who oversaw the grant. “With this investment, we were trying a different approach. We wanted to see if the natural relationships that form in communities could be more effective in helping people.”

Mr. Chen says he has continued faith in the innovative approach Kellogg supported. But spreading the idea isn’t easy, say organizers.

Despite promising results, building such communities from scratch can present challenges in raising money, ac-

quiring land and property, and creating the organizations to support them.

### All Ages

Communities like Bridge Meadows, Treehouse, and others can trace their origins back to 1994, when Ms. Eheart, a sociologist at the University of Illinois, created Hope Meadows at a shuttered Air Force base in Rantoul, Ill.

She saw the original community as a way to help two very different types of people in need: foster children, many of whom have endured neglect and abuse, and elderly people, who often feel cast aside in a youth-obsessed culture.

Today, Hope Meadows is home to 48 people age 55 and older, 36 children, and 14 parents.

What’s more, the success of Ms.

**Three generations of people call Bridge Meadows home: foster children, their future adoptive families, and older adults who volunteer in exchange for discounted rent.**

Eheart’s concept can be measured in the educational accomplishments of the foster children who’ve grown up in the Illinois community. While just 30 percent of foster children across the country graduate from high school, 100 percent of Hope Meadows kids have earned a high-school diploma or its equivalent.

“When you give foster children a secure and stable environment in which to grow up, they thrive,” says Ms. Eheart.

She believes that just as the seniors have a “stabilizing influence” at Hope Meadows, they can play the same role in programs serving wounded military veterans, children with developmental disabilities or autism, and mothers returning from incarceration.

In New Orleans, Generations of Hope  
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# TECHNOLOGY



LEAH VERWEY

After a decade at the Nonprofit Technology Network, Holly Ross will take the helm at the Drupal Association.

## Nonprofit Technology Leader Steps Down

AFTER 10 years at the Nonprofit Technology Network—the last five leading the group, commonly known as NTEN—Holly Ross has stepped down as executive director.

She presided over a period of significant growth. Last year, nearly 1,800 people attended the group's annual Nonprofit Technology Conference, up from 1,100 participants in 2008, the year Ms. Ross took the reins.

She says she's proudest of her ability to help nonprofit technology experts connect.

"Oftentimes, the person who does the technology work is the only person that does the technology work at the organization," she says. "It's so isolating. That we've provided a place for those folks to find a real sense of community is the best thing that we could have done."

On February 1, Ms. Ross will start a new job as executive director of the Drupal Association, a membership group that supports the Drupal open-source software project. Jill Farrow, NTEN's chief financial officer, is serving as acting executive director.

## Donors Who Use Work E-Mails Give More

DONORS WHO PROVIDE their work e-mail addresses when they make online gifts tend to contribute more than those who use free e-mail services like AOL, Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo, according to a new report that analyzed about 320,000 gifts from 165,000 online donors.

People who used work addresses contributed \$165 on average, while those who used Gmail addresses gave \$143 per donation, according to Qgiv, an online and mobile fundraising platform used by small to midsize nonprofits. People with AOL addresses donated on average \$138 each time they gave online; those with Hotmail addresses gave \$128; and those on Yahoo, \$120.

The findings are based on a sampling of a year's worth of donations, starting in November 2011, to more than 1,000 charities. About 51 percent of donors used work e-mail addresses with their names or Internet domains they had established to send mail or create Web sites; 19 percent used Gmail, 15 percent used Yahoo, 8 percent used AOL, and 7 percent used Hotmail.

## Charity Shares Mobile Lessons

SOCIAL INTEREST SOLUTIONS, a nonprofit technology group, has long offered an Internet tool that lets people determine their eligibility and apply for government benefits, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Now the Oakland, Calif., group is testing a mobile version of the service—and documenting what it learns along the way.

During a six-week test, staff members at nonprofit health clinics used the mobile application on tablet computers to help patients apply for benefits.

One lesson: The application's portability, which is one of its biggest strengths, allows employees to use it in places that lack computer workstations, like clinic waiting rooms. But it also raises questions about patient privacy and data security.

Social Interest Solutions has published a report detailing what it learned from the test.

TO READ THE REPORT: Go to [socialinterest.org](http://socialinterest.org).

—RAYMUND FLANDEZ AND NICOLE WALLACE

# Groups That Focus on Wounded Veterans and Disabled Adults Are in the Works

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Development Corporation is advising Dylan Tête, an Iraq war veteran, who wants to create a community that will bring together veterans with severe traumatic brain injuries, their families, and elderly people.

Called Bastion, the community will be housed on an old naval support base and will eventually be home to 155 residents.

"Returning veterans run the risk of being homeless or institutionalized or committing suicide," says Mr. Tête. "There are so many military families that are disintegrating. This is a way for us to keep families intact but surround them with support."

Mr. Tête's passion for the intergenerational concept was born of personal experience. He returned from combat with no physical wounds but plenty of psychological scars.

Deeply depressed, he ultimately sought treatment through the Department of Veterans Affairs, but it was his experience volunteering at an annual summer camp for children who had lost a parent to military service that really helped him.

"It gave me the courage to live on," Mr. Tête says.

While Bastion is still in the planning stages—the nonprofit that will oversee the community was created last fall—the idea has already attracted some high-profile support.

Bastion has received a \$100,000 grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation, started by the ABC television reporter who sustained serious injuries while covering the Iraq war in 2006.

### Independent Living

Yet another community is in the works near Hilton Head, S.C., this one for families who have adult children with developmental disabilities.

Osprey Village bills itself as a "purpose-driven neighborhood." Its goal is to allow developmentally disabled adults to live as independently as possible, alongside other residents who volunteer as caregivers and helpers.

The nonprofit organization is currently in negotiations to purchase a plot of land in Bluffton, S.C., so it can build six residences for special-needs adults and 16 homes and an apartment building for family members and elderly residents.

David Green, a co-founder of Osprey Village and the father of a 30-year-old son with developmental disabilities, says that the vision for the community stemmed from necessity.

Currently, 2,500 disabled adults are on waiting lists to

live in group homes in South Carolina.

Says Mr. Green, "If you're a parent of an adult child with special needs, you can't help but worry: What if I'm not around to care for my son or daughter?"

### 'Many Moving Parts'

While Bastion and Osprey Village both offer the promise of aiding vulnerable people, both are also facing the challenges of trying to build a community from scratch.

"There are so many moving parts—it's like playing chess," says Mr. Green.

Money has been a challenge for Osprey Village, which was created six years ago and has spent much of that time raising funds to pay for the project.

It will cost \$7-million to buy the land and build the facility—and beyond that, operations costs will need to be covered.

For the initial phase of the project, the group is applying

*"So many military families are disintegrating. This is a way to keep families intact."*

for a federal rural-development grant, with hopes of raising the rest from private sources.

The organization opened a thrift store a year ago to help produce revenue; it has also run fundraising events and received a grant from a local community foundation.

### Building Boards

But Osprey Village isn't the only intergenerational community that struggles for money.

At a rough cost of \$8,000 per person annually, Generations of Hope Development Corporation can provide support to residents more cheaply than can many more traditional charities and government agencies.

However, its multifaceted mission—to serve seniors, foster kids, wounded soldiers—often doesn't appeal to foundations that have narrow grant-making programs.

Government money also helps fill the financial gaps. For example, both Bridge Meadows and Treehouse were built with the help of federal tax credits that subsidize low-cost housing.

Ms. Eheart says that her

group is often contacted by people who have heard about Hope Meadows and want to create their own version but lack the skills and support they need. "You need a functioning organization," she says. "It can't just be one person with a vision."

A planned community requires structure, including a charity to oversee the project and a board of directors made up of people with fundraising expertise, savvy about government programs, and deep knowledge of how to serve people who face specific challenges.

Bridge Meadows' board, for example, includes former foster and adopted children as well as adoptive parents.

"We felt like we really needed that authentic voice," says Ms. Schubert.

### Housing Rebound

Ms. Eheart has high hopes that the rebounding of the nation's housing market will make it easier for groups like Osprey Village to see their ideas through to completion.

Kellogg's \$7.7-million grant to help Hope Meadows expand arrived just as the housing market collapsed and dozens of promising projects foundered in the resulting credit crunch.

Today, four additional communities are in the planning stages, including one for foster children in Tampa, Fla., that will be located in a formerly foreclosed apartment building.

In Massachusetts, Treehouse is celebrating its sixth year as an intergenerational community of seniors, foster children, and adoptive families.

The neighborhood of senior cottages and family dwellings is currently home to just over 100 people, roughly half of whom are foster kids and families that are in the process of adopting them. The rest are elderly people.

Rosa Young, 68, learned about Treehouse through a segment on NPR. At the time, Ms. Young, who is originally from Michigan, was in search of what to do with the rest of her life.

"I'd been traveling around in an RV, and hearing that story was sort of serendipitous," says Ms. Young, who has been at Treehouse for almost six years. "I wanted to give back, and that's exactly what I'm able to do here. We help the parents, the parents help us, and we all help the kids. It's a very rich interchange."

### A WINNING FORMULA

Read an interview with Judy Cockerton, of Treehouse, on receiving a \$100,000 Purpose Prize. For details, go to:

[@philanthropy.com/extras](http://@philanthropy.com/extras)