

# Reciprocity through Engagement in Intergenerational Housing

Bridge Meadows  
Portland, Oregon



## Acknowledgements

The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities is grateful to Bridge Meadows for participating and the Kresge Foundation, which provided a generous grant to support the work of the Center for Engagement and Neighborhood Building. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Foundation.

The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities is a national organization dedicated to achieving our vision of a healthy and equitable society. The Alliance works for systemic change by harnessing the collective power of its network of hundreds of nonprofit human-serving organizations across North America as they translate knowledge into best practices that improve their communities. Working with and through its member network on leadership, innovation, and advocacy, the Alliance strives to achieve high impact by reducing the number of people living in poverty, increasing the number of people with opportunities to live healthy lives, and increasing the number of people with access to educational and employment success. Go to [alliance1.org](http://alliance1.org) for more information.

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.6 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities through grant-making and social investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and community development in Detroit. In 2015, the Board of Trustees approved 370 grants totaling \$125.2 million, and nine social investment commitments totaling \$20.3 million. For more information, visit [kresge.org](http://kresge.org)

Bridge Meadows is a unique and innovative solution to the current foster care crisis. Located in the Portsmouth Neighborhood of Portland, Bridge Meadows is a three-generation housing community consisting of homes for adoptive families and apartments for elders 55 and older.

## Introduction

Through a series of organizational profiles, we will explore engagement practices being applied by organizations across the spectrum of human services that translate to meaningful results in health and well-being, equity, and safety and security for families and communities. The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities defines engagement practices as the approaches, methodologies, and strategies employed by professionals and organizations that empower people to access and experience their inherent strengths and gifts, in order to fully participate and contribute to society.

At Bridge Meadows in Portland, Oregon, residents are at the center of how the organization functions each day. “Engagement is at the core of our mission; it is in our residents where change happens—through what they offer and how they engage and contribute their gifts and talents,” describes Associate Director Renee Moseley. Open since 2011, Bridge Meadows is an intentional multi-generational housing community. Home to three generations of residents—former foster youth, adoptive parents, and elders—29 elders, nine adoptive parents, and 29 children<sup>1</sup> build a community together. “Children move from the instability of foster care placements to permanent homes and families. Adoptive families receive essential resources and guidance, and elders each volunteer 100 hours per quarter in service to the community while continuing to build the meaningful social connections that support ongoing health and wellness.”<sup>2</sup> By integrating child welfare, foster care, affordable housing, and elder services, Bridge Meadows is able to create deep, sustained impact in the lives of residents and within the Portland community.

### Systems Approach

Bridge Meadows was inspired by Hope Meadows in Illinois and Treehouse Communities in Massachusetts. Both are intentional, intergenerational communities that have been highly successful in moving children in foster care into loving adoptive homes and connecting them to honorary grandparents and mentors in the community. In Portland, the Bridge Meadows team, along with city officials, recognized the model addressed a number of issues simultaneously. It addressed the increased need for permanency for foster youth, family support for adoptive families, and affordable housing for older adults. Leveraging the social capital of residents, families and elders move from surviving to thriving.

The Bridge Meadows model weaves together a variety of offerings to create solutions for individuals and families facing a variety of complex challenges. For the elder population, the issue of isolation and poor health is being addressed through Bridge Meadows’ supportive housing opportunities, which creates a neighborhood of residents who check in on each other and clinical staff members who provide wellness/therapeutic support for residents. For adoptive families and children moving out of the foster care system, Bridge Meadows provides access to affordable housing and built in supports to help care for, educate, provide stability, and mentor the children. Parents benefit from the extra support and community opportunities built into the supportive model of Bridge Meadows as well. The staff at Bridge Meadows tie everything together and operate a lean, efficient model because they work with all populations together rather than isolating them and treating them separately. Bridge Meadows is an example of one action or program structure that addresses problems across multiple systems and creates solutions that are often impossible if addressed in individual settings.



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-09-27/strangers-become-family-at-this-multigenerational-housing-project/?utm\\_campaign=shareaholic&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_source=socialnetwork](http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-09-27/strangers-become-family-at-this-multigenerational-housing-project/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=socialnetwork)

<sup>2</sup> 2014 Alliance Commitments Award application

## Longstanding Approach Leads to Unique Outcome

Moseley attributes the success of Bridge Meadows to the organizational culture built around contribution and engagement of both staff and residents alike. “There are two philosophical principles at the core of our model that we adapted from the Generation of Hope Community, Hope Meadows. First, residents of an intergenerational community provide the organizing focus of the community, and are viewed not as problems-to-be-managed, but as ordinary people requiring the same connection to family and community that we would want for ourselves. Second, individuals have an enduring capacity to care and can care for one another ways that are beyond traditional interventions. These founding philosophies shifts the organization away from the traditional social service provider to community partner.”

Without this common understanding, communities cannot effectively grow and flourish, Moseley says, “It requires an underlying foundation or belief that people’s strengths and talents are part of how social challenges are addressed and that allows people to thrive.” Moseley believes it’s easy to slip into a traditional service provision without this basic belief. Ultimately, greater impact can be gained when all individuals, staff, and residents feel empowered to fully participate and contribute to the community’s well-being and successes. At Bridge Meadows, she explains, “Our structure is different, there is a different feel about who is benefitting and who is providing the benefits.”

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**—Bridge Meadows Associate Director, Renee Mosley**

The practices Bridge Meadows employs, making sure that conversations are collaborative, and that each individual is seen as a valued and vital contributor to solutions, has its roots in the late 19th century settlement house movement. Community builders and settlements refer to this concept as asset-based development. In this concept, organizations are oriented to, and seek to build upon, the inherent strengths and abilities of individuals and families in the community. “The outcome of this model, grounded in principles of human potential, community strengths, and fairness, can create a cumulative benefit for individuals

and communities that goes beyond the value of service provisions.”<sup>3</sup> With a renewed sense of belonging, sense of efficacy, and sense of possibility among individuals and families, communities such as Bridge Meadows can begin to build upon the inherent strengths and abilities in place to continue to grow and flourish.

## Reciprocity brings its own ROI

Bridge Meadows believes that residents’ strengths and talents are crucial to addressing social changes. It therefore fosters an environment that allows for mutually beneficial relationships across all resident groups, and its residents are asked to contribute their skills and talents to positively impact the community. By intentionally focusing on the assets present within the community, Bridge Meadows fosters an atmosphere where residents build strong ties with one another and therefore look out for one another and hold each other accountable for their actions, thus strengthening impact and stability.

<sup>3</sup> Overcoming the Odds: The Settlement House Advantage, United Neighborhood Houses, NYC

Informal relationship building outside of the formal program structure creates added benefits for each group of residents, while the ability of the members of the community to address social challenges is increased by uniting to create a stronger, supportive, collective unit.

### Young But Strong

“Our key to success is that we talk, a lot,” says Moseley. Self-reflective conversations reveal behaviors and actions that empowering, yet can also hinder continued engagement and growth. The challenge then, according to Moseley, is to focus on what is working and discovering how to do more of it. The continuous evaluation and feedback process has allowed Bridge Meadows to be agile and adapt to the needs of the current residents and the community at large, and has even led to low turnover rates among its residents. Bridge Meadows is not a good fit for everyone. Yet, in the short five years since it opened, only three families have left because they were no longer participating in the foster care program, another two families found their own homes, and only eight elders have decided to live elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Co-creation of program structure and social offerings by staff and residents alike has allowed the community to be more impactful and supportive of the current resident’s needs, increasing the social bonds and sense of community.

Despite being a young organization, early outcomes are good and have resulted in national attention and replication requests. Bridge Meadows is continuing to build on its successes, as well as responding to the demand for its program offerings. Its programming will soon expand with the creation of New Meadows. As a leader in the Portland community, Bridge Meadows partnered with New Avenues for Youth, the state of Oregon’s largest provider of job training and transition services for foster youth, to identify a specific need among youth aging out of foster

care. The result is New Meadows, which creates an innovative community housing model that includes 15<sup>5</sup> apartment units for youth ages 18-24. “Leveraging Bridge Meadows’ intergenerational healing community and New Avenues’ expertise helping foster, at risk, and homeless youth transition to self-sufficiency, the two organizations envision combining resources to build and operate a trauma-informed housing and life-skills program.”<sup>6</sup>

The City of Beaverton, Oregon approached Bridge Meadows to propose the idea of expanding the intergenerational model. In April 2017, Bridge Meadows will open a new \$15.2 million, 41-unit facility<sup>7</sup> in Beaverton that will replicate the three-generation approach. The city’s Development Division cites the increased access to affordable senior housing, as well as connecting seniors and youth in the city as goals driving the new development effort.<sup>8</sup> “After five years of welcoming people home to our intergenerational community in North Portland, we feel an ethical responsibility to broaden the impact on families well beyond the existing neighborhood.”<sup>9</sup>

Bridge Meadows continues to draw national and local attention alike for its continued success in impacting the lives of residents and addressing multiple societal challenges by taking a systems-level approach in the vision and execution of the organization.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-09-27/strangersbecomefamily-at-this-multigenerational-housing-project?utm\\_campaign=shareaholic&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_source=socialnetwork](http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-09-27/strangersbecomefamily-at-this-multigenerational-housing-project?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=socialnetwork)

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-09-27/strangersbecomefamily-at-this-multigenerational-housing-project?utm\\_campaign=shareaholic&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_source=socialnetwork](http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-09-27/strangersbecomefamily-at-this-multigenerational-housing-project?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=socialnetwork)

<sup>6</sup>[www.bridgemedows.org](http://www.bridgemedows.org)

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.bizjournals.com/portland/blog/real-estate-daily/2016/09/nonprofit-breaks-ground-on-15-2m-project-to-help.html?ana=e\\_me\\_set1&s=newsletter&ed=2016-09-08&u=yWWEu6yEZ4aM49ZU%2BVeBeNpshk5&t=1473345535&j=75716882#g1](http://www.bizjournals.com/portland/blog/real-estate-daily/2016/09/nonprofit-breaks-ground-on-15-2m-project-to-help.html?ana=e_me_set1&s=newsletter&ed=2016-09-08&u=yWWEu6yEZ4aM49ZU%2BVeBeNpshk5&t=1473345535&j=75716882#g1)

<sup>8</sup><http://www.beavertonoregon.gov/1563/Bridge-Meadows>

<sup>9</sup>[www.bridgemedows.org](http://www.bridgemedows.org)