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Mar. 11, 2015

Providing Housing for Those Most Vulnerable

By Jeffrey Steele, Contributing Writer



Boston—Capping a 13-year process aimed at building mixed-income housing for senior citizens and families with foster or pre-adoptive children, the homes and apartments of Treehouse at Easthampton Meadow in Easthampton, Mass., are now complete and occupied.

Featuring innovative, energy-saving technology, the buildings are home to a distinctive multi-generational blend of populations.

Starting in 2002, Boston-based Beacon Communities and the Treehouse Foundation, in collaboration with the city of Easthampton, developed the master-planned community of Easthampton Meadow. That 46-acre community contains three interconnected neighborhoods and housing options.

They are Treehouse at Easthampton Meadow, The Homes of Easthampton Meadow and seven single-family parcels sold to buyers interested in building custom homes. Treehouse was designed to help move children from foster care into permanent loving families, offer enhanced post-adoption support to their families and ensure elders can live connected and purposeful lives.

Easthampton Meadow includes higher-density development than zoning allowed, 17 acres of shared, permanently deed-restricted open space, pedestrian/walking system, wetland replication and Energy Star-rated homes among its sustainable development principles.

“Easthampton Meadow had a very experienced developer in Beacon Communities, which had the expertise and innovation to complete a unique and complicated project like this,” MassHousing executive director Tom Gleason told *MHN*. “Easthampton Meadow also had strong support from the city of Easthampton, as well as state social service agencies, [allowing] MassHousing and the state Department of Housing and Community Development to feel comfortable in providing financing for this type of housing, which had not been done in Massachusetts before.”

Judy Cockerton, founder and executive director of the Treehouse Foundation had the vision to create this one-of-a-kind housing community, Gleason added.

“Young people living on Treehouse Circle really appreciate living with their adoptive families in a neighborhood where all of the adults invest in their lives, hopes and futures,” said Cockerton, who became a foster parent in 1999.

“Adoptive parents living at Treehouse are grateful for the ongoing support they receive as they strive to meet the emerging needs of their children and families. Elders love being connected to so many wonderful people of all ages, living lives of purpose and meaning and feeling that their lives matter.”



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The Treehouse Foundation is important because every year in America, 25,000 young people 18 to 22 "age out" of foster care alone, Cockerton says. They're at risk for homelessness, unemployment, teen parenting, incarceration and lives of poverty. "That statistic was a catalyst for me to sell my businesses and establish the Treehouse Foundation so that we could move children out of foster care into loving adoptive families so they are never at risk of aging out alone," she said.

"I am delighted that the Treehouse Foundation collaborated with a blue ribbon housing partner like Beacon Communities LLC to create the first Treehouse Community."

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