



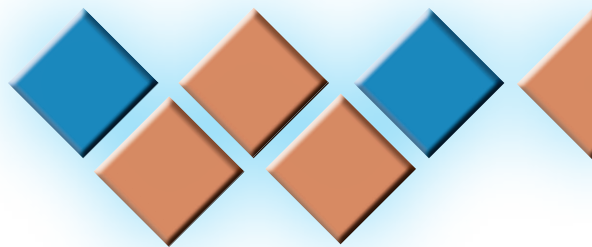
Building

Whether you set out to change the whole world, rebuild a community or just improve one person's life, the first thing you need is hope.

by Rick Broussard



on Hope



A house is not a home, and in the world of social services, a group home is often just a house with lots of rooms. For a kid, it can seem about as far from “home” as a person can get.

This is not to say that human services organizations don’t try. Most do the best they can with limited resources, growing client lists and a good deal of public indifference. They have to emphasize the services they offer and often there just aren’t enough funds left to create a homelike environment for residents.

Easter Seals N.H. operates five residential facilities across the state, housing more than 100 children. They work on a daily basis with families struggling through the heartbreaks of mental illness, disability, mental retardation, addiction, poverty and, sometimes, sheer frustration with life and its challenges.

“Our goal is to provide our residents with the best places they have ever lived,” says Easter Seals N.H. President Larry Gammon. But he admits that even in the best situations the residents would rather be independent, living in a real home.

For boys in the Easter Seals system, one “house” most closely resembles a home and also represents the way out of social services and into independence.

It’s called the White House Intensive Residential Treatment Facility, situated at the west end of Mammoth Road in Manchester. The house is a drafty 1930s-era two-story building with a small kitchen and a three-season porch. Out back is a patch of grass and a basketball hoop, but this spring the White House will undergo a transformation to an energy-efficient, attractive and boy-friendly environment.

The White House is the first project of a newly formed committee called “Building on Hope.” Its mission is to draw upon the Granite State’s barn-raising heritage and rally local builders, suppliers and volunteers to rebuild and refresh old but serviceable facilities — to transform worn out spaces, turn houses into homes and improve residents’ quality of life and the effectiveness of non-profit programs.

“We knew there wasn’t much happening for the builders lately,” says Emily Shakra, co-chair of Building on Hope.

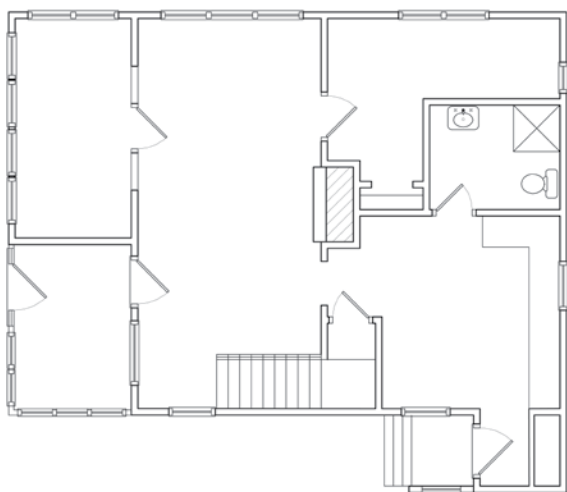
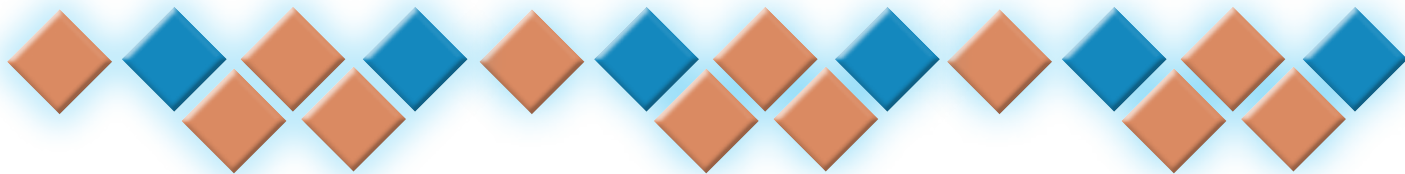
Her husband, Nick Shakra, is in the real estate business and she organizes the Palace Theatre Kitchen Tour each year. She says the building and remodeling industry needed a morale boost, a cause to rally around. Building on Hope sounded like an idea they could all get behind.

“When the ‘Extreme Makeover Home Edition’ crew came through Manchester a while back, everyone got so excited, but after it was over, there was a feeling like, ‘What now?’ Everyone wanted to keep up the momentum of good deeds,” she says. “Well, this is their chance, and it’s not just to help one family, but who knows how many people will be helped.”

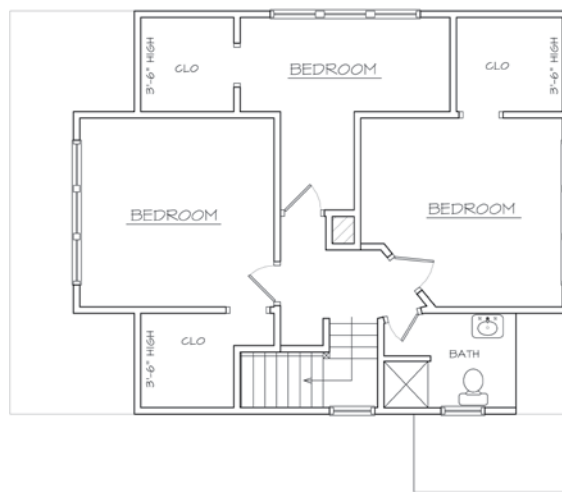
Shakra and a small committee have been developing the idea for several months, working closely with Easter Seals, but no one was certain how the building community would react to being asked to volunteer time and materials during a down economy.

Almost as soon as word got out about the program, their doubts evaporated.

“Literally everyone we have asked has said yes,” says Shakra.



1 FIRST FLOOR PLAN
A2 SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



1 SECOND FLOOR PLAN
A3 SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

One of the first to sign on was Jonathan Halle, of Concord's Warrenstreet Architects. Halle is now on the Building on Hope committee and had been one of the principal organizers of the Extreme Home Makeover of Rey and Casey Voisine's flood-ruined home back in October of 2007. He knew how generous builders and suppliers could be when called upon, but he warned against the kind of hype that the ABC "reality" show generated. And he urged the committee to keep the focus where it belongs, on the project, not the participants.

"Most builders don't care about having their name up in lights, they just want to do a good job for a good cause," he says.

The Building on Hope Web site is designed with those words in mind. All building participants share an equal presence, however those making substantial donations of materials or cash are included as sponsors by Easter Seals.

At a kick-off event for the project on Dec. 10, about a dozen builders and designers joined with Manchester Mayor Frank Guinta and Mayor-elect Ted Gatsas to hear about the scope of the project. New windows, insulation and an efficient heating system will make the house "green." A tiny kitchen will be enlarged to allow five growing boys space at the table. Extensive improvements to the living

spaces will make things comfortable and attractive. Interior designers will match fabrics and choose colors that will encourage calmness and cooperation.

Challenges are many. Five boys would be hard on any home, but many White House residents have problems with anger and "acting out." The Easter Seals facilities team must respond quickly when furniture is damaged or a hole is punched in a plaster wall. In fact, most walls in the White House have been replaced with metallic panels that withstand abuse. But Building on Hope interior designer Melissa Gray-West is eager to tackle the project and apply some imagination.

High-density wallboard that will hold paint can be installed. Art and posters in the boys' rooms now must be taped to the wall, but cork panels would allow personal touches. New vinyl upholstery is as strong and soft as leather and can be kept clean. "We want to use green materials whenever possible," she notes.

"We know we're limited in what we can put into the rooms in terms of furnishings and accessories. Also, we don't want the designers to create a space that makes the boys feel like this is not their own. We want a good neutral palette that allows them to be creative, put things up and take them off without ruining it for the next tenant."

One feature that she intends to leave as it is: a stained glass window at the top of the stairs. Its blue and orange panels turn the adjacent wall into a bright harlequin when the sun shines through.

"That window has been there as long as we've had the house," says Cyn Fennely, a case manager for the boys in the White House. "And it's never been damaged."

When asked why not, she replies, "I think that some of these boys haven't had a lot of beautiful things in their lives, and so they protect it."

Fennely says that Building on Hope will be opening another kind of window for the boys in the home. "It lets the youth know the broader community is aware of them and wants to be supportive. Too often, it's like they are invisible or have just disappeared. This brings them out into view." She notes that the boys are all excited about the possibility of helping with the project once the rebuilding begins in May. The whole project will take about a week and will end with a community-wide party and the home will be added to the Palace Theatre Kitchen tour.

"We're going to need a lot of volunteers to make this a reality," says Emily Shakra, "but with so much support so early on, we've got every reason for hope."

NOTE: Writer Rick Broussard is editor of New Hampshire Magazine and co-chair of Building on Hope.

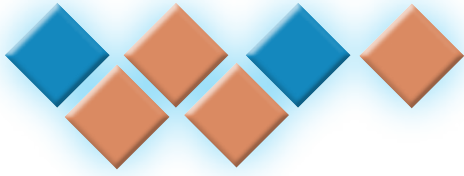


PHOTO BY RICK BROUSSARD

**BUILDING ON HOPE
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

• **Co-Chairs:**

**Emily Shakra
Nick Shakra Real Estate**

**Rick Broussard
New Hampshire Magazine**

• **Charter Members:**

**Courtney Demeritt
Palace Theatre**

**Lorrie Determann
LTD Company, Inc.**

**Jonathan Halle
Warrenstreet Architects**

**E.J. Powers
Montagne Communications**

**Nick Soggu
SilverTech**

**June Vailas
Buildling on Hope secretary**

**Karen Van Der Beken
Easter Seals N.H.**

**Melissa West
LKM Design**

BUILDING PARTNERS (to date):

**Warren Street Architects
Sullivan Construction
Pro Con Construction
SAM Mechanical
Eckman Construction
Milestone Engineering & Construction
Viens & Son
Longchamps Electrical
Home Depot
Advantage Signs
Great Northern Signs
Alternative Designs
Accompany Video Company
Gimas Electric
New Hampshire Magazine
Palace Theatre
LTD Company
Montagne Communications
SilverTech
Nick Shakra Real Estate
LKM Design
Granite State Cabinetry**

Visit www.buildingonhope.com for more information on how to get involved or to donate to the Easter Seals N.H. project.



Here's Hoping

To understand the value of a homelike environment to a young person's life, it helps to put a face on the situation. Meet White House graduate Codey McIntire.

Codey McIntire is just an average kid in most respects. His favorite food is pizza, he likes online role-playing games (he's a 44th level Paladin in World of Warcraft), his favorite subject in school is history and he likes playing basketball on the net out back of the White House on a nice day. "If the basketball's not flat," he notes. But when he was 7 years old, anger-management issues forced him out of his home and school and eventually into an Easter Seals group home.

Problems that early in life can leave deep scars. Unlike many kids in his situation, he took the experience to heart and realized he needed to make some changes. With help from the program, Codey began learning to control his temper and cope with frustrations. His progress was good enough to earn his way into the Intensive Residential Treatment Program where he has his own room, freedom to go on walks in the community and weekends at home with his grandmother in Keene.

"Of all my placements, this is the best," says Codey. He says he's made some friends during his six months in the White House, but that his main focus has been on getting the treatment and training he needs to go home and get his life back on track. His plans and dreams are still forming — he's considering careers as diverse as antiques dealer and stockbroker — but he knows he has to start by just getting back into high school, finishing up his last two years and then going to college. And those are goals that both he and his counselors are confident he can achieve.

Codey says there are lots of things about the White House he won't miss: the way some rooms are hot when others are cold, the living room ("depressing," he says) and the lack of decent TV or any Internet access ("It's hard to do any scholarship or job searching without it," he explains). But he knows he'll always owe the place a debt of gratitude as well. "The White House helped me figure things out and get focused," he says. "Now I know I'm ready."