

The Villages, Inc.

*By updating its 40-year-old homes and by increasing its endowment,
The Villages will secure its commitment to providing emotionally supportive families and homes
for troubled children and youth who have nowhere else to turn for help.*

Supportive Homes for Children in Need

The Villages, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)3, state-licensed agency which was founded in 1964 by Dr. Karl Menninger to provide homes for children who had been abused, neglected or abandoned. In 1969, The Villages' first of seven group homes opened its doors. In every one of these homes, the goal is to provide a therapeutic family environment for each child.

The Villages is committed to modeling appropriate family relationships and to offering the opportunities a positive family environment provides children to heal and change.

The Villages operates five group homes in Topeka and two in Lawrence. Each provides a supportive home for up to 10 children ages 6 to 18. The youth are parented by professionally-trained couples who serve as role models. The houseparents, often with children of their own, live in the homes providing food, clothing, shelter, guidance, and love.

The group homes provide daily structure, controlled activities, counseling, and professional academic tutoring in an atmosphere of loving, learning and growth. In addition, children are encouraged to participate in extracurricular and recreational activities such as sports, clubs, drama camps, etc. They are supported as they take advantage of public libraries, museums, and other cultural or educational opportunities.

Along with the houseparents, additional Villages professional staff and social workers work with the children in the homes. All staff attend training throughout the year to help them meet the diverse, multifaceted needs of the children.

The Villages' W. Clement Stone Nature Center, as part of the therapeutic environment of The Villages, provides Villages youth with nature education and adventure challenge programs. In addition, the Stone Nature Center serves from 12,000 to 16,000 others each year -- mainly children from the community. The Stone Nature Center manages a 372-acre private nature preserve lying along the Kansas River and supports a wildlife rehabilitation unit which rescues more than 2,000 injured, sick and orphaned wild animals yearly. Its forest adventure challenge course is one of the largest in the state.



Dr. Karl Menninger, Founder

About the Children

Children come to The Villages from both the foster care and juvenile justice systems. Some have significant behavioral issues and/or mental health problems that were too difficult for their biological parents; others have been abused or neglected by the adults in their lives. Over the last five years about one-fifth were awaiting adoption and more than two-thirds have been adjudicated as juvenile offenders. The Villages accepts boys and girls, ages 6 to 18, of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. More than 170 children and youth lived at The Villages last year for an average of six months. Some children have extended stays at The Villages for four, five or six years. Here are two of their stories:

Sha

Born in Lawrence, Kansas, 18 years ago, Sha has lived half her life in foster homes.

Her father was sent to prison as a sexual predator when she was seven and is still incarcerated. As a young child, there were many times when there was nothing to eat and no place to stay when the rent wasn't paid. Sha and her older sister spent a lot of time with their grandmother -- times when their mother came home drunk. Her mother's parental rights were severed when she was nine years old, because her boyfriends abused Sha. It got so bad that Sha finally said something to a counselor at her elementary school.

Sha was at The Villages for more than four years. She has been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. "Between Sylvia [Crawford, Executive Director], the Burtons [houseparents Russell and Andrea], my doctor and medication I haven't had a depressive episode for a long time. I used to have hallucinations twice a day. Twice I ended up in the hospital," said Sha.



Sha had always been in special education. "I don't do well in large classrooms," explained Sha. She attended Tallgrass Alternative School half the day where she was a National Honor Society candidate. The rest of the day she attended Kaw Area Technical School studying horticulture. She continued at Kaw Tech after she moved out on her own. Eventually her goal is to be a bridal consultant.

What has The Villages meant to Sha? "I always wanted a big family," she said, laughing. (Russell and Andrea have three children, Ben, Brianna and Zoe, and care for 10 foster children.) "I like to listen when Andrea reads to Ben and Zoe at night. It's my home; it's all I have."

Sha left the Villages in May, 2007. At the time she said, "It's a big challenge to leave. I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have this place." Since she initially moved out, Sha has been back to stay at Russell and Andrea's a couple of times for a few weeks and continues to live in Topeka and visits the Burtons home several times a week.

Sha performing as part of The Villages Drama Camp

Brad

Describing himself as a “poor kid in the ghetto,” Brad had a rough time growing up in Kansas City. He started dealing drugs so he could make money to buy clothes. His father connected him to drug suppliers. He also started using drugs himself to “take the worry away.” But he found himself becoming increasingly angry with a fuse that got ever shorter.

After being in a locked down rehabilitation facility, and doing time in jail, a judge gave him three options: he could remain in jail, be placed under house arrest or go to The Villages. Brad knew he had to make changes in his life, but he had never followed through. "I wanted to, but the cycle would start all over again."

His first year at The Villages focused on drug rehabilitation. Brad spent two more clean and sober years at The Villages and learned that the key is keeping himself occupied and not letting little things hang him up.

He says the structure at The Villages made all the difference in his life. He had high expectations to meet. He had to complete his chores satisfactorily. He also had to establish trust with his houseparents before he could go out for sports. “It was my choice to accept the rules and work with the program,” he said. "Now, I have a great relationship with my Mom. She knows her son is back."

Brad finished the commercial construction program at Kaw Area Technical School where he received one of two Outstanding Student awards given each year. Eventually he'd like to have his own business. “My dream is to make enough money to build a youth center to get kids off the street. It would have apartments, in-home study with tutors, a recreation center and a kitchen. I want to share my experiences to influence kids’ decisions about the consequences of their actions.”

Brad remained in Topeka when he left The Villages in the summer of 2007 after graduating from high school and Kaw Area Technical School.

“People here just wouldn’t give up on me,” he said. “Deep down I knew The Villages was the best place for me. I can always come back for counsel if I need it. I’m always welcomed back.”



Brad finishing a concrete path at The Villages as a volunteer with his class at Kaw Area Tech.

Securing the Future

Children referred to The Villages today are more troubled than in the past. This is, in part, because these children have experienced multiple placements offering inadequate attention to their deficits. It is not unusual for children to have moved from 4 to 15 times; some have been in as many as 30 different failed placements. Everything at The Villages is focused on providing a normal family life and home for troubled children and youth. Less than six percent of the budget goes to administrative costs.

“The greatest natural resource we have is our children. The way we treat them will indicate the future of our society.”

~ Dr. Karl Menninger, Founder

Providing a healing environment for very troubled children staffed by well trained and supervised professionals is costly, but necessary, if these children are to have any hope of a productive adult life. Private donations from generous individuals, corporations, and foundations help provide for the opportunities necessary for any child to succeed.

To ensure that The Villages continues its mission of providing emotionally supportive families and homes to children and youth in exceptional need, an effort is underway to refurbish the homes and increase the endowment fund.

While The Villages homes have always been kept in good shape, they are nearly 40 years old. The present challenge is to prepare the homes to meet the needs of the children and houseparents for another 40 years. The cost of needed improvements is budgeted at \$1.6 million. With funding received so far, the work has begun on the highest priorities. The children are very appreciative. As Sha said, “We actually got to repaint and get new furniture. We don’t get to do that very often, so it was nice to have the funding.”

The second goal of the Lasting Legacy campaign is to increase the endowment from \$1.7 million to \$4 million. Earnings from the endowment fund will ensure that the operating budget is adequate to meet the needs of these troubled children and to continue necessary maintenance of the homes. The campaign has benefited from gifts in excess of 1/2 million dollars each from the Estate of Jesse Stone, from Tensey Oldfather and a pledge from JoAnn Klemmer. Also, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka has contributed a forgivable loan of \$610,000 toward renovation of all 7 homes. These very generous gifts, numerous smaller gifts / pledges, and earnings have brought us to a point that the campaign goal of \$3.9 million is in sight.

With your help we are hopeful of successfully concluding the campaign before the William Menninger Cottage (the first Villages home) celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2009. Your gift will help ensure that Dr. Karl Menninger’s vision and legacy will be fulfilled for many more years to come.

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