

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 14, 1995

*file child care/
defense*

The Hon. William Perry
Secretary of Defense
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Perry:

During the President's recent visit to the First Armored Division in Baumholder, Germany, I had the opportunity to meet with some of the families of our soldiers who will be deployed to Bosnia and to hear their concerns. I also talked with about twenty-five spouses of officers and enlisted men to learn about plans to support the families during the deployment of our peacekeeping forces.

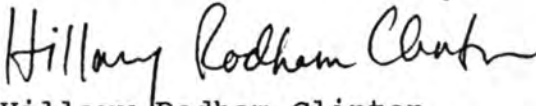
As you know so well, the deployment of our troops places additional stresses on individual families as well as on the entire community left behind. I was pleased to learn that the concerns of the families are receiving priority attention.

Many of the wives told me about the critical need for child care on the bases before and after school hours, as well as for respite care on weekends and evenings. I told them that I thought that the '96 Defense Appropriations provided additional funding for the construction of new child care centers and for child care staff, particularly for before and after school care. I hope it will be possible to direct these additional funds first to meeting the needs of the families where fathers and mothers are being deployed in Bosnia and elsewhere in the world.

I know of your strong commitment to promoting initiatives that support and enhance the quality of life for our military families. I hope every effort will be made, particularly during the Bosnian peacekeeping deployment, to do whatever is possible to support the families and provide additional resources for child care, education assistance for spouses, parent support, especially for young mothers, youth counselling, and other dependent family needs.

Thank you for your longstanding concern. I stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to support the families of our troops.

Sincerely yours,


Hillary Rodham Clinton

cc: Tony Lake, National Security Advisor
Alice Rivlin, Office of Management and Budget Director

THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR FORCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Jan 15, 1997

Melanne -

Attached is DoD's
Publication on
Family Friendly Work-
place in response
to the President's
initiative. NPR
folks love it. DoD continues
to surprise!
Carolyn Secrest



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full DOD



DEPARTMENT
OF DEFENSE
AND FAMILIES:
A TOTAL FORCE
PARTNERSHIP



Melanne -

Mrs. Clinton
wanted you to have
a copy of this
for your files -

~~Keep~~ Liz
File under DoD

file

To: Mrs. Clinton
Fr: Liz Bowyer
Da: 2/23/96
Re: Hope Meadows

I did some research into Hope Meadows, the residential community for abused and neglected children in Rantoul, Illinois. After studying recent news articles and talking with children's advocates in the state, my impression is that Hope Meadows is an inspiring example of a village coming together to protect and nurture its children.

I had a long conversation with Brenda Eheart, the University of Illinois professor who founded Hope Meadows. She is an energetic advocate for foster children, and seems to be well-respected in the advocacy community. Basically, as your news article explained, Eheart works to place neglected and abused children who are languishing in the foster care system with permanent families at Hope Meadows, a residential community on the former Chanute Air Force Base. There are currently 10 families with 29 children living at Hope Meadows, most of whom fall into two categories: Babies with special needs, whom no foster family is willing to care for (particularly drug-exposed infants); and sibling groups with special needs who would be spilt up in the foster care system. Eheart's goal is to have 50 children living at Hope Meadows.

With its emphasis on permanence, Hope Meadows attracts families who have been frustrated with the transitory nature of the foster care system. Rather than offering short-term stipends for items like books or clothing (like many foster parents receive), Hope Meadows offers long-term incentives like rent-free housing and an \$18,000 salary for one parent to stay home and care for the children. The families live together in one "neighborhood" on the base, and provide a support network for each other.

Hope Meadows also has an important intergenerational component -- about 50 senior citizens live in the community, and act as surrogate grandparents to the children. The seniors receive subsidized rent in exchange for about 10 hours a week working with children. A number of seniors help families by providing child care for a few hours a day, and several of them have developed mentoring relationships with children in the community. Brenda Eheart told me that seniors are an important part of the "village" at Hope Meadows, because they give children a sense of being part of a larger, caring community. Eheart has also leased a portion of the apartments at Hope Meadows to non-foster families, to help prevent any stigma that adopted children might feel about living at Hope Meadows. Several of those residents are police officers, and have become "big brothers" to some of the older boys in the community.

Hope Meadows obtained housing on the former Chanute Air Force Base in 1993 under a stipulation in federal law that requires portions of closed military bases to be set aside for public use. However, Brenda Eheart claims that it took more than four years of fighting bureaucratic resistance at the Pentagon and at the state level before she could purchase

military housing on the base. Eventually, she was able to successfully lobby the state legislature for a \$1 million grant to purchase and renovate the surplus housing. Hope Meadows is almost completely state-funded, although rent revenues from senior tenants cover about one-quarter of the community's costs. Eheart says that funding from the state seems relatively secure for the next several years, but she is hoping to find a corporate sponsor who will set up an endowment for Hope Meadows.

The Chicago Tribune did a front-page story on Hope Meadows last week (see attached), and Eheart says she has been flooded with calls from people around the country who want to replicate the program. Eheart has some ideas for reaching out into the surrounding community, but does not yet have plans to expand the program elsewhere. She has also received a number of calls from the media, including Jane Pauley, who may do a story on Hope Meadows in April.

(Note: I misleadingly told Melanne that Hope Meadows was only about 30 miles outside of Chicago -- it's actually 130 miles.)

Community sowing Hope for children

BY MATT KELLEY
Associated Press Writer

RANTOUL, Ill. — At Hope Meadows, families get free housing and an \$18,000 salary for one parent to stay home and take care of the children. Retired people get reduced rent for doing everything from reading to the children to working as school crossing guards.

The government-subsidized community, set up at an abandoned Air Force base, operates according to an African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

The project is aimed at children who have suffered from the abuse and addictions of their biological parents. The 22 "Hope children" are those in state custody who are older or have special medical or behavioral problems that make them hard to place elsewhere.

The Hope Meadows residents, along with child-welfare workers
See **COMMUNITY**, Page 5A.

Community

• Continued from Page 1A
and volunteers, are building a community focused on serving children.

"It's going to make a lot of difference in a lot of people's lives," said Debbie Calhoun, who has seven children in her family's home — two foster children, four adopted children and her biological daughter.

Calhoun said she and her husband, Ken, decided to move to Hope Meadows when it opened in 1994 because of the program's promise of a stable, long-term family setting for foster and adopted children.

Hope Meadows is the brainchild of University of Illinois child psychologist Brenda Krause Eheart. She became concerned about the growing number of children raised in foster care, group homes or other "temporary" arrangements.

"We have about 50,000 children in foster care in Illinois, and about one-third — over 15,000 — will not go home and will not be adopted," Eheart says. "No wonder the system is failing, when we don't have a legal means of providing stable families. We can't just let kids flounder for five years or 10 years."

While Eheart was searching for a solution, the Pentagon decided to close Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, a town of about 15,000 that is 20 miles north of the university campus in Urbana. After a long battle with military officials and a fax to President Clinton, Eheart's Hope for the Children charity in 1993 became the first nonprofit group to get surplus military housing.

"I wanted to create my own community, with the child in the center of the community. I had no money, nothing. I was crazy," Eheart said with a laugh.

A \$1 million grant from the state helped buy and renovate the former Chanute duplexes, and yearly state funding of about \$650,000 pays most of the program's bills, Eheart said.

Once the program is running at full capacity of about 40 children, the costs are expected to be about half of the \$30,000 per year it takes to raise a child in a group home.

The idea, Eheart said, is to create a community diverse in age, race, religion, family income and legal status of children.

Hope Meadows residents said it's working.

"Several of the children have done a complete turnaround," said Elmer Davis, a retiree who moved to Rantoul from Florida to join the program. "One boy, Joe (another volunteer) caught him spitting on us, but now he's turned around 100 percent. He's polite, a nice kid now."

The kids call all of the retirees "Grandma" and "Grandpa," something that the volunteers say just happened.

Still, Hope Meadows is not Utopia. Several children continue to have behavioral problems such as acting up in school and defying authority. Helping those children takes a lot of patience, courage and love, parents said.

"You have to be really committed to do something like this," said Beverly Gardner, who with her husband, Larry, is raising four Hope children. "It isn't easy, but what makes it easier is there are so many other people who are doing the same thing."

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EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1; ZONE: N

LENGTH: 1512 words

HEADLINE: UNWANTED CHILDREN FIND A HAVEN AT AN OLD AIR BASE;
GROUP DEVELOPS REAL NEIGHBORHOOD FOR REJECTED KIDS

BYLINE: By Wes Smith, Tribune Staff Writer.

DATELINE: RANTOUL, Ill.

BODY:

Eighteen phone calls. Eighteen child-care agencies. Eighteen rejections. No one wanted the baby found abandoned in a hospital restroom in Evergreen Park last fall.

Then Baby Jacob found hope on an abandoned military base 130 miles south of Chicago, where a unique long-term residential community has been established for neglected and abused children who are unlikely to be adopted or reunited with their biological families.

Here children find not just parents and a home, but also grandparents, playmates, and an entire neighborhood designed to help them grow up in a secure and nurturing environment.

"We are going to create a new language," said Brenda Krause Eheart, a University of Illinois professor who conceived the idea for Hope Meadows. "It's not an orphanage. It's not a foster-care village. It's a neighborhood with streets and homes."

Eheart had conducted a 10-year study of the adoption and foster-care systems in Illinois, and her findings troubled her. Too many children never found permanent homes. Too many were passed around like unwanted pets.

With the help of a group of like-minded colleagues and friends, the professor designed not simply a child-care program, but an entire community that would guarantee at least one parent present in every home, and caring neighbors of diverse ages, races, incomes and backgrounds.

"I started with the idea of providing what I would want for my two children if my husband and I were killed," she said.

Eheart established her Hope For the Children foundation to try

to transform that notion into reality. She had no money and no property to work with, but when the federal government shut down Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, she homed in.

For more than two years, Eheart, who has a doctorate in child care, worked as a woman with a mission. She stormed the state legislature and the Pentagon. "I was on the phone day and night, trying to keep things moving," she said.

In the end, Eheart completed the first purchase of military surplus housing by a non-profit agency--and created a new model for child welfare in the process.

On this 2,400-acre former base, Eheart oversees 65 housing units on 22 acres purchased for \$250,000 from the Air Force. Her command is a neighborhood devoted to saving children like Baby Jacob.

There currently are 10 foster families with 29 foster children. There also are 56 "senior" residents who act as foster grandparents.

More than 48,000 children are in the child-care system in Illinois, with 1,000 entering each month. The most telling statistic may be that 80 percent of the state's prison inmates were in foster care first.

"Nationwide, about one-third of the children entering foster care each year will not be returned to their own homes and will not ever be adopted--in Illinois, that is at least 15,000 children," Eheart said.

"Hope Meadows is for those kids."

Little Jacob is one of them. He was found abandoned in Little Company of Mary Hospital in Evergreen Park. Doctors suspected his mother was a drug user so the child was placed on a respiratory monitor.

The boy then was shuttled into the state's overloaded foster care system. Because of his suspect health, he was first placed as an emergency case in the privately operated St. Coletta's social service agency in Palos Park.

He remained there for 3 1/2 months while a caseworker for the state Department of Children and Family Services tried to find a foster home or child-care agency to take him.

But no one wanted a child in precarious health from an unknown background.

Then, last month, the caseworker called St. Coletta's to say that the boy had to be removed and placed in an emergency foster home because of the mounting costs of keeping him in private

care.

St. Coletta's social worker, Sandy Vanoskey, made a call to a place she had just heard about through the grapevine. It was a place that sounded too good to be true, an entire community created as a support system for children.

Opened in May 1994 with a \$1 million state grant and private donations, Hope Meadows already is home to 29 children who were considered unadoptable and difficult to place in standard foster care.

Many were referred by DCFS and other agencies. Most of these children are under 9 years old, their histories short but shattered.

Six siblings came to Hope Meadows after being taken from a cocaine-addicted mother and an alcoholic father serving 14 years in prison. A 4-month-old arrived after having been in four other foster homes. A 6-year-old had been in and out of six foster placements.

"This is their last stop. They've been bounced too many times," said Eheart, who wants to house 50 children here eventually.

"Hope Meadows is a wonderful place," said Vanoskey, who placed Jacob there. "I've never before seen a place where adoptive parents live together as one big family, working together and raising their children together. It is just wonderful."

Hope Meadow's adoptive parents go through five interviews and extensive training before being accepted. Most have been foster parents but grew disillusioned with the impermanence of that system. Here, they expect to keep the children that come to them.

"This is a lot different than working with DCFS, and with everyone in the neighborhood involved, people here understand each other's problems. Even the kids understand each other's needs," said parent Debbie Calhoun.

"The notion of serving kids in a community where there are intergenerational connections is, I think, actually kind of back to the future," noted Jess McDonald, state director of DCFS and a big advocate of Hope Meadows.

"You have a very supportive community for kids there," he added. "It's not for every kid, but it is a program geared toward longer-term care in a stable and unique setting."

Another incentive for the 10 sets of parents established so far is that they live free of charge in former military duplexes converted into spacious six- and seven-bedroom, single-family

homes.

The program also pays one parent in each household \$18,000 a year to stay home and provide child care. There are no per-child subsidies for schooling, food or clothing, as in standard foster care.

It costs between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a year to raise a child in state-run residential care programs. Hope Meadows is working to cut that cost in half. Eheart, who won a \$500,000 state grant for the second year of operation, plans to establish an endowment fund to make Hope Meadows financially independent. Already, fees from rental apartments cover a quarter of expenses.

The people in those apartments are resources for the children too. Hope Meadows offers a wide support system that includes not only parents and housing, but also volunteer grandparents, social service counselors, tutors, therapists, and role models ranging from police officers to psychologists.

"We wanted other families to live here with their own children so when our kids go to school, the other children don't know who has been adopted and who is living with biological parents," Eheart said.

There is a children's library within Hope Meadows and an activity center that offers classes in ceramics, cake decorating, arts and crafts. Children may participate in scouting and on the neighborhood soccer team. They attend public school at Pleasant Acres Elementary only a few blocks away.

The neatly kept grounds of the surrounding residential area that has flourished on the old military base includes a youth center, a swimming pool and a golf course in a relatively secure setting.

"If you drive around here too long, and we don't know you, odds are your license plate will be written down or someone will stop you," noted volunteer grandparent Bill Biederman.

Of all those who have come here to live, probably the most enthusiastic are those who serve as volunteer grandparents. In exchange for at least eight hours a week of baby-sitting, crossing-guard duty or companionship, the 56 seniors live in three-bedroom apartments for just \$325 per month.

"This is the best of both worlds," said Biederman, 58, who is retired on disability from the Army. He and his wife have seven grown children, he said, and they moved here because of "our love of kids."

Hope Meadows is not untroubled. The children come with substantial emotional and behavioral problems. But the adults say it is gratifying to observe the healing power of consistent care.

"One of the 2-year-olds came up to me when he first got here and climbed into my lap. I was expecting a hug, but he bit me," Biederman said. "Now, a few weeks have gone by, and that same kid wants to be with me all the time."

Hope Meadows resident Marlene Lankford, 56, and her husband Garland, 72, had no children and were delighted to have the opportunity to retire to a neighborhood teeming with them, they said.

"One of the boys called me 'grandma' one day, and it made tears come to my eyes," Lankford said. "Nobody had ever called me that before."

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS 4 MAPPHOTO (color): Debbie Calhoun hugs one of the Hope Meadows kids in her care.; PHOTOS (color): Exemplary of the founder's hope, a foster child (left) and a friend walk home from school near Hope Meadows at the old Chanute air base. In one of the converted military houses, Debbie Calhoun sends her charges off to bed with a kiss. At bottom, retired teacher and volunteer Irene Bohn works with a child. Tribune photos by Paula Bronstein.; MAP: Former Chanute Air Force Base. Rantoul, ILLINOIS.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: February 16, 1996