







Stronger Foundations

Massachusetts affiliates annual newsletter

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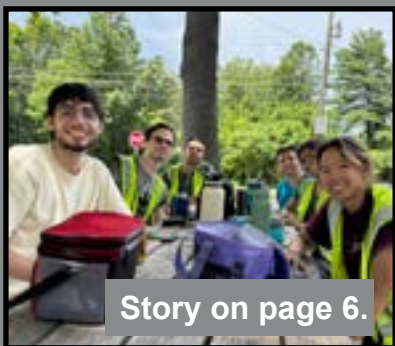


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Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit that helps families build strength, stability, and self-reliance through affordable housing. By partnering with people with limited incomes, Habitat makes it possible for them to build or improve a place to call home. Through programs like homeownership opportunities, critical repairs, and financial education, we help families take control of their futures.

They say “it takes a village to raise a child,” and in our case, it takes a village to help families change their living situations. That’s why we team up with local agencies, community partners, and volunteers—because working together is the best way to make a real, lasting impact.

Across Massachusetts, 16 Habitat for Humanity affiliates are creating change every day—building and repairing homes, strengthening neighborhoods, and offering hope to families who need it most. Each affiliate serves a specific region, but together, we’re part of a powerful statewide network working toward one shared goal: making sure everyone has a decent, affordable place to live.



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Metal Ramps, Big Impact: Buzzards Bay Habitat Builds Momentum

Buzzards Bay Area Habitat for Humanity's Brush with Kindness volunteer team poses on a newly installed metal wheelchair ramp for a local family who said they are now able to easily take their 92-year-old mother outside for fresh air and to her doctor appointments.

Buzzards Bay Area Habitat for Humanity (BBAHFH) has "ramped up" its Brush with Kindness program. In 2024, the affiliate introduced a new component: a ramp donation program.

Last year, Buzzards Bay Area Habitat installed eight reusable metal ramps for limited-income individuals and their families, free of cost. So far this year, affiliate volunteers set up 17 ramps.

"Our ramp recipients are thrilled to receive a ramp as it can make such a huge difference in their quality of life. A ramp gives some recipients the ability to leave their home again," said BBAHFH Executive Director Christine Lacourse. "One woman's first trip outside was to go get an ice cream cone."

The program began when Buzzards Bay Area Habitat received a phone call from someone wanting to donate a metal ramp. Christine said she accepted the donation knowing when a ramp is requested, the intended recipient – who is often elderly, disabled, or both – may not have the time to wait for construction of a wooden ramp.

Without a ramp, some homeowners must vacate and live elsewhere, including nursing homes. In 2024, according to the American Council on Aging website, the average monthly cost of

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Building a Better Future: Greater Lowell Embraces ICF Foundations

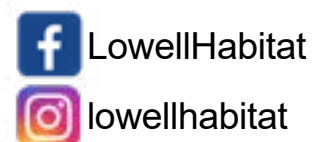
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Lowell (HFHGL) is laying the groundwork for tomorrow – literally – in its upcoming Concord homes.

The affiliate has embraced insulated concrete forms (ICF) foundations, an innovation that will produce more efficient and durable homes. Two-inch thick foam panels are separated by spacers and have built-in fasteners designed to secure the blocks to the formwork. The blocks are assembled much like children's plastic building bricks. Once amassed, concrete is poured between the foam panels. The 6-inch concrete core, along with the foam panels, creates super insulation. The affiliate will utilize fiberglass rebar and introduce volunteers to handle staging, rebar, and block placement.

"This is major step forward in our ongoing efforts to build more sustainable, energy-efficient homes," said Kate Maslowski, HFHGL Development director. "It's all part of our commitment to building top-quality homes that are healthier, more affordable to maintain, and better for the environment."



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Habitat for Humanity of Greater Lowell
Insulated Concrete Form (ICF) delivery day arrived at Habitat for
Humanity of Greater Lowell. Big things are ahead at the Concord build site.

"Volunteers benefit too. This is a chance to work with cutting-edge materials, and see firsthand how energy-smart building is done. Everyone involved walks away with new skills and the pride of helping create a high-performance home," Kate said.

Embracing ICF is just HFHGL's latest strategy in its goal of creating affordable homes that are built to last. Other approaches, that are already in place, include net-zero ready homes, which produce as much energy as they consume; solar-ready infrastructure technology; energy recovery ventilators, which filter out stale indoor air with fresh outdoor air without wasting energy; high-efficiency heat pumps, and 2-inch foam exterior insulation.

Advancements, including ICF, aren't without struggles and learning curves. One logistical challenge the affiliate will

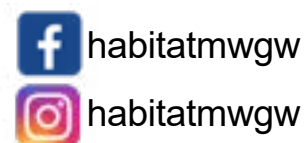
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Operation Playhouse: Habitat MW/GW Delivers Smiles to Military Families



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Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester Volunteers from North Brookfield Savings Bank pose by a playhouse the crew built for a military family.

Habitat for Humanity of MetroWest/Greater Worcester (HFHMWGW) is giving children of military families a place to laugh, play, and thrive, by providing them with a safe, custom-built playhouse.

To date, HFHMWGW has built more than 560 playhouses for children of military families residing in New England. Honoring military families is only one facet of the program. It also benefits sponsors and partners who fund and build the children's playhouses.

"We are ecstatic each time a family receives a free playhouse," said Debby Huegel, vice president of Philanthropy at HFHMWGW. "The children's faces light up with surprise, excitement, and happiness. The joy we witness on their faces lasts a lifetime."

Habitat MetroWest/Greater Worcester introduced "Operation Playhouse" in 2014 after being inspired by the work San Diego Habitat for Humanity and Habitat for Humanity Greater San Francisco were doing at the time.

Each playhouse is \$3,000, which covers the cost of materials,

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Serving Those Who Served: Habitat NCM Steps Up for Veterans



Habitat for Humanity North Central Massachusetts Local veterans pose in front of a banner at the site where they're volunteering and making a difference.

Habitat for Humanity North Central Massachusetts (HFHNCM) knows actions speak louder than words and have made it their mission to do more for veterans. In mid-2024, the affiliate expanded their veteran repair initiative.

The affiliate understands many veterans, particularly those choosing to age in place, are living in homes that aren't safe, weatherized, or accessible. HFHNCM is accepting projects that replaces roofs, siding, windows and doors; fixes heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, and installs ramps.

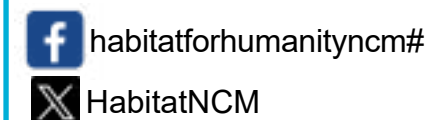
"We believe safe housing is a matter of dignity, especially for those who've served our country. This program is more than a repair, it's a 'thank you' and a chance to uplift those who've given so much," said Diana Sinkus, HFHNCM Community Outreach coordinator.

Diana said the opportunity to extend the veteran repair initiative came from The Home Depot Foundation and Repair Corps, which invited the affiliate to apply for funding. Many of the repairs come at little or no cost to veterans, since much of it is covered by the grant funds. Despite the good that can be done, Diana said finding eligible candidates is a challenge.

"Many either don't know about us or assume they won't qualify," she said.



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New Hope in Holyoke: Partners Build Affordable Home

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity
Students from the University of Massachusetts DesignBuild program help construct the modular home that will be delivered to the Holyoke build site.

Construction is underway and a Holyoke couple is one step closer to purchasing an affordable home from Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH).

Greater Springfield Habitat is working closely with Holyoke Housing Authority (HHA) and the University of Massachusetts DesignBuild program to make this opportunity possible for Pedro and Damaris. HHA donated the plot of land on Chestnut Street. UMass DesignBuild professors and students designed the modular home, are constructing it, and will oversee its delivery to the Holyoke site. Upon its arrival, GSHFH, which prepared the site and built the foundation, will complete utility connections, landscaping, and install appliances.

"This is a great collaboration to give the students practical, hands-on experience, and for Habitat to provide a home to a family that might not have qualified for one of our traditionally built homes," said Aimee Giroux, GSHFH executive director. "Family size is one of many factors taken into consideration when building our homes and partnering with the future buyer. There is a need for affordable housing to benefit a variety of family sizes; not everyone needs three or four bedrooms. This project helps us to be able to make that happen."

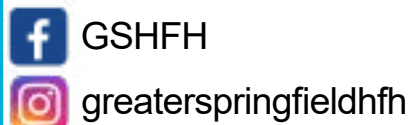
The design of the 575-square-foot modular home emphasizes

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GSHFH

greaterpringfieldhfh

Buzzards Bay Builds Momentum

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a shared room in Massachusetts was \$475 per day. Medicaid normally pays for shared rooms, not private rooms.

When the ramp request inevitably came, Christine and her team of volunteers were ready and the portable metal accessway was quickly installed. Despite the victory, Christine said she knew a greater need and challenge were on the horizon. Ramps are costly, with some exceeding \$10,000, according to Lifeway Mobility, an accessibility solutions company with locations in Massachusetts.

"We put out word for other ramp donations and received more. We continued to solicit for ramp donations, as well as searched online for used metal ramps for sale," Christine said. "We always need volunteers to help and funds to purchase ramps to keep up with the need of the growing program."

The affiliate created a partnership with a company that sells ramps to BBAHFH at a discounted rate. In addition to ramps of various sizes, the program also needs materials and hardware to assemble them. Buzzards Bay Area Habitat also collaborates with other local agencies, including the Council on Aging, Veteran Service Officers, health service groups, churches, and elderly service organizations, which provide ramps, refer clients, or help with funding.

"We get calls every week from individuals looking for a ramp. Several times we've been told that they have not left their home in over a year because they have no way to traverse their outside stairs," Christine said. "One woman calls the fire department when she has a doctor's appointment to see if the firefighters can carry her up and down her stairs. Doctor appointments are the only time she is able to leave the house."

To learn more about the ramp donation program, call (508) 758-4517 or email buzzardsbayareahabitat@yahoo.com



Buzzards Bay Area Habitat for Humanity Jean, pictured outside in his motorized wheelchair, said the ramp that Buzzards Bay Area Habitat for Humanity volunteers installed at his home has given him independence.



Habitat for Humanity of Greater Lowell
A rendering of what's ahead for the Concord build site.

Greater Lowell Embraces ICF

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soon face is the delivery of ICF blocks. The foam panels are transported via a 52-foot trailer that needs space to maneuver, and plenty of volunteers to help unload.

"We've been impressed by the integrated features of ICF blocks, like the built-in nailers that eliminate the need for framing," Kate said. "These little innovations go a long way in simplifying the build. We're committed to building smarter and greener, for the planet, our families, and for the future."

Habitat MW/GW Delivers Smiles

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staff time to oversee the build, and marketing to get word out to benefit more military families. Construction is year-round, with outside assemblies happening, weather permitting, April through October. Playhouse volunteers prepare build kits by cutting wood wall panels, doors, windows, and other pieces, priming, and wrapping, and loading finished pieces for transportation.

A team of eight to 10 people from a Habitat partner or sponsor will spend a day, at a site of their choosing, working together to assemble the playhouse from its kit, paint it in the theme chosen by the family, and decorate it. They often add their own decorations or customizations based on the children's interests. Children accepting the playhouse are as old as 12 and have previously chosen the theme – log cabin, firehouse, ice cream stand, cozy cottage, castle, or patriotic – of their individual playhouse. Guidance from HFHMWGW staff and volunteers is available. At the end of the day, the finished product is presented to the family selected to receive the playhouse.

"North Brookfield Savings Bank was proud to sponsor two playhouses through Habitat for Humanity Operation Playhouse," said Audrey Shampine, North Brookfield Savings Bank Marketing manager. "Operation Playhouse not only offered us a fantastic team-building opportunity, but also allowed us to give back to those who have given so much for our country. Supporting our local military families through such a meaningful

initiative was an honor, and we are grateful to have been a part of it."

There are other opportunities to participate in Operation Playhouse, such as the three annual build-a-thons. Multiple partners construct playhouses on the same day – at

the Ashland ReStore, Amvets Post 79 in Natick, and Worcester's Elm Park.

Yet, the moment of truth comes from the children who receive the playhouses.

"Emmalia and Isabella have already spent countless hours playing in the barnyard playhouse, along with the other neighborhood kids. Everyone was blown away with the detail and effort put

into the project," said Dominique, whose family received a playhouse from Nouria, a HFHMWGW sponsor. "Your generosity and thoughtfulness mean the world to us, especially during this time of deployment. This playhouse has brought so much joy and light, and the smiles are priceless. Thank you for making such a positive impact on our family and community as a whole. We are truly grateful."

Rachel, whose family received a playhouse from sponsor FedEx, agreed.

"Berkeley-Grace absolutely loves it and can't seem to get enough of her new little haven," Rachel said. "It has already brought so much joy into our home. Please know how much your efforts and kindness mean to us. We will cherish this gift and the memories it will create."

To learn more, visit habitatmwgw.org/programs/operation-playhouse or email deborah.huegel@habitatmwgw.org

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Your generosity and thoughtfulness mean the world to us, especially during this time of deployment.

- Dominique, whose family received a playhouse

GSHFH Teams Up to Build in Holyoke

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energy efficiency via highly-insulated and air-sealed exterior assemblies, triple-glazed windows, all-electric appliances/utilities, and low-embodied carbon building materials, such as wood fiber, hemp, and straw, said Ben Leinfelder, construction manager of this year's DesignBuild project and an alumnus of the program.

"We are chugging along right now and have our second group of students (the other half of the class) on the build site. It's been great to introduce these eight students to our construction site, the tools of the trade, and to show off what their classmates completed in the first six-week session," Ben said.

The decks and porch roof are framed and students are working on installing exterior trim and siding. Next up is drywall and siding.

"The challenge is keeping an eye on everything when I have pairs of students tackling different parts of the house and/or different kinds of tasks," Ben said. "As this is an educational experience, I try to give the students some space to problem solve on their own – even make mistakes (that we then fix) – but ultimately, we want this to be a high-quality house for Pedro and Damaris."

The house will feature design aspects specific to Pedro and Damaris, including a U-kitchen and interior stairs to the basement.



Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity Students from the University of Massachusetts DesignBuild program take a lunch break.

The couple expressed a desire to one day finish the basement and turn it into a spare bedroom. By having an internal staircase, they have the ability to add more living space to the ground floor. The UMass DesignBuild team also allocated one of the donated windows to the lower level for that specific purpose.

"Every design is a matter of thinking about what would be most valuable within the given constraints," said Naomi Darling, a design studio professor at Mount Holyoke College and the UMass Architecture Department. "We went back and forth between a bar kitchen and a U-kitchen. We ultimately decided on the U-kitchen because we understand both Pedro and Damaris really like to cook."

The house is expected to be finished in autumn. To learn more about Greater Springfield Habitat's homeownership program, visit habitatspringfield.org/how-to-apply

NCM Steps Up for Veterans

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Those who do reach out are often pleased with the results. "One veteran told us that after 20 years of struggling to get his back steps repaired, he finally felt 'seen and supported' by his community," Diana said.

To learn more about this program, go to ncmhhabitat.org; call (978) 348-2749, or email Lisa Garvey at lisagarvey@ncmhhabitat.org