Our Roots

The story began in a small nursing home in New York. Dr. Bill Thomas, a geriatrician and cofounder of The Eden Alternative® will never forget the words of an Elder or the beautiful blue eyes that stared up at him, as she reached up to draw him near and whispered,

“Doctor, I am so lonely.”

Dr. Thomas searched his medical texts and found nothing to heal loneliness. This inspired him to watch and listen to life in the nursing home where he worked. Over time, he witnessed that the institutional model of care breeds three deadly plagues of the human spirit: loneliness, helplessness and boredom.

Working with his wife, Judith Meyers-Thomas, they created The Eden Alternative, a principle-centered philosophy that infuses growth and life into traditional nursing homes. The Ten Principles of The Eden Alternative are based on the core belief that aging should be a continued stage of development and growth, rather than a period of decline.

“What comes next must represent a clear break with the past. A massive shift toward the deinstitutionalization of older people is called for, and the foundation for such a shift is being laid right now.”

- Dr. Bill Thomas, “What Are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World”
Building on the success of The Eden Alternative, Dr. Thomas took his dream a step farther. THE GREEN HOUSE ® Project is a radically new approach to aging and long-term care. The opportunity here is to transform the dream of a warm, loving, nurturing sanctuary into a specific innovation that can change how we age (Thomas, 2004).

Dr. Thomas created The Green House model, as that sanctuary where Elders thrive and find meaning in late life. Deeply rooted in The Eden Alternative, The Green House model is a transformation of the traditional nursing home philosophy, organizational structure and environment. This transformation addresses the most profound problems facing Elders today—loneliness, helplessness and boredom.
The Green House Journey

The sturdy trunk of this transformation is the comprehensive implementation process that empowers teams with resources and knowledge for success. By supporting areas such as finance, regulations, design and education, The Green House Project partners with organizations to create deep and sustainable change.

The Eden Alternative

The Ten Principles of The Eden Alternative are the roots of The Green House model. Those living and working in long-term care environments are better served, and indeed thrive, in an Elder-centered community.

The Green House Values

This values-based model creates a revolutionary transformation that flourishes like leaves of a tree. Real change occurs through the simultaneous development of real home, meaningful life and empowered staff.
Introduction

The Green House Values

The Green House model is based on three fundamental core values that embody The Eden Alternative: Meaningful Life, Empowered Staff and Real Home. These values play an important role in successfully implementing and sustaining the integrity of The Green House model, as evidenced by:

- Consistent care delivery and shared goals among Green House adopters
- The most comprehensive approach to holistic culture change grounded in elder-centered values and essential practices
- Standards that protect the integrity of The Green House brand and investment of organizations who have committed to the model
- On-going opportunities for Green House peer support and accountability
- Impact on a national scale with emphasis on research and growth of the model

The Green House Essential Practices

Research and the collective experience of Green House homes have identified essential practices to achieve The Green House values. Many of these practices support more than one value. Recognizing no two Green House homes are alike, the practices provide consistency in the values, yet reflect the unique culture of each community. Although the model is dynamic and will continue to grow and evolve, it will always remain true to the underlying values of Meaningful Life, Empowered Staff and Real Home.
Green House Value: 
A Meaningful Life

A meaningful life is determined by each person. Choice, control, autonomy and close relationships are just a few of the conditions needed to support meaningful lives. The Green House model is rooted in a philosophy of Elder-directed, relationship-based care. It embraces Elderhood as an opportunity for continued growth and development. Individual needs are met in a Green House home because each person is deeply-known, provided opportunities to give, and valued for his or her creativity and resourcefulness.

“The Green House [philosophy] is based on a different self-reinforcing cycle. It begins with the belief that Elderhood exists. It presumes a right to late-life development that is an essential component of the human life cycle. Such growth, while undoubtedly difficult can also be understood to have worth and meaning. Those who live in, work in, and care about a Green House [home] share the duty to foster the emergence of late-life development within the daily life they create together.”

- Dr. Bill Thomas, “What Are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World.”
Essential Practices for Meaningful Life

**Autonomy and Control:**

- Elders have control over the rhythms of the day (such as waking, sleeping, meals and meaningful engagement, including alone time and self-care)
- Elders have informed choices and participate in formal and informal house decision-making through venues such as House Council meetings
- Elders have direct involvement in their own care plan
- Construct the home with ceiling lifts or the ability to accommodate ceiling lifts

**Purposeful Living:**

- Elders have formal and informal opportunities for engagement inside and outside of the home
- Elders engage in a full life where spontaneity and risk are supported by capitalizing on an Elder’s abilities (e.g., physical, cognitive, social and spiritual)
- Elders have access to the broader community through meaningful programs and opportunities
- Elders enjoy individualized rituals and celebrations
- Elders have opportunities for reciprocity based on their choice and preferences
- Elders engage in deeply knowing relationships that are supported through a holistic understanding of their history and preferences
- Family involvement is valued in care planning and life events
- The end of life process is inclusive and reflects palliative and hospice care principles
Green House Value: 
**Empowered Staff**

In The Green House model, an empowered workforce is possible because beliefs and behaviors change at the leadership level and are shared throughout an organization. One fundamental belief is that direct care workers possess vital information about Elders that only a close-relationship can engender. Thus, the organization must be structured to ensure Elders and their care partners have a pivotal role in deciding how care is provided.

The organizational structure in The Green House model challenges traditional nursing home hierarchy. The typical nursing home hierarchy is flattened to create a circular organizational chart with the Elders at the center. Shahbazim, the direct care staff who work within self-managed work teams (SMWT), have primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of the Elders and the smooth functioning of Green House homes. They work in partnership with Nurses and other Clinical Support Team (CST) members to meet the needs of Elders. This versatile role allows for more meaningful interactions in the home, which leads to higher satisfaction and improved clinical outcomes.

“Bureaucratic hierarchy obstructs the work of caring, as it is rightly understood. Human caring is founded on a knowing, empathetic, resourceful response to the needs of another. For those seeking to sustain human warmth, a flat organization is better.”

- Dr. Bill Thomas, “What Are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World.”
Essential Practices for Empowered Staff

Green House Organizational Chart and Reporting Structure:

- Versatile direct care (Shahbaz)
  - Self-managed work team (SMWT) of Shahbazim
    - Responsible for managing aspects of work (e.g., self-scheduling, ordering, budgeting, cooking, rhythms of the day, etc.)
- Clinical Support Team (CST) members work in partnership with SMWT
- Shahbazim report to a coaching leader ("Guide")
- Guide is not the DON or a nurse practicing within the Nursing Department of the organization
- A Sage is a volunteer position that serves as an advisor to the SMWT

Model Integrity:

- Leadership serves as a champion for The Green House model and is vigilant in recognizing institutional creep
- The Guide supports continued growth and learning of the team by providing resources and ongoing educational opportunities
- Utilize skills learned in Green House education (Green House Core Team Education, Coaching Approach to Leading Change, Coaching Supervision, etc.)
  - Examples:
    - Critical thinking model and clinical communication which respond quickly to change of condition
    - Consensus building process
    - Co-creating Code of Ethics and holding each other accountable
    - Balance support and accountability

Systems and Process:

- Create person-centered, timely performance feedback to team and individuals that shows belief in the talent, competencies and commitment of Green House staff
- Hold regular team meetings to facilitate participative decision-making and maintain a safe place and process for timely and meaningful peer feedback
- Technology that supports communication and autonomy
- Strong relationships through consistent staffing (such as four hours of Shahbaz time per Elder/day)
Green House Value: *Real Home*

The physical environment of a Green House home is designed to transform the institutional nursing facility into a residential environment that is home to ten Elders. Each home is reflective of those in the surrounding community and is characterized by elements that are “warm, smart, and green”.

A *warm* home is a welcoming place of comfort, safety and refuge. The interior materials, colors, and furnishings project a sense of warmth for those living and working in the home. The Elders’ private bedrooms allow ample sunlight and are clustered around a shared living room with a hearth, an open kitchen and dining area.

*Smart* technology is used in The Green House model, to create a comfortable and safe environment. As opposed to technology that focuses on staff and organizational efficiency, smart technology is used to foster the well-being of Elders and those who work with Elders.

A *green* environment refers to one which supports growth through meaningful interactions with life enhancing natural resources, such as plants, natural light, and therapeutic outdoor spaces.

“In order to be well, people need to have access to more than the wind, the moon, and the sun. People need to feel safe-to understand their place in the world and be able to participate with others in meaningful rituals. A truly green sanctuary for Elderhood must participate in the realm of myth and spirit. It must be part of a new story we can tell ourselves about our longevity and those who live and work with Elders.”

- Dr. Bill Thomas, “What Are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World.”
**Essential Practices for Real Home**

**Natural Surroundings:**
- Each Green House home is small in scale, serving 10 Elders (12 with financial hardship exception)
- Green House homes are self-contained and self-sufficient
- Accessible and easy to navigate design
- Reflective of the predominant residential type in immediate community
- Residential (eliminate institutional cues to the greatest extent possible; e.g., signage, call lights, alarms, bibs, scrubs, med carts)
- Evidence-based for aging design elements

**Elements of Real Home:**
- Direct and open access to all areas of home, both inside and outside
- Private bedroom and full bath to support full expression of personal rhythms
- Hearth area with open kitchen, dining and living areas centered around a fireplace
- Shahbazim cook meals in the home and Elders have 24-hour access to food
- One dining table creates a sense of belonging and community with everyone, including Shahbazim, family and guests joining together to share convivium
- Spa area with a residential design

**Home for Life:**
- An Elder will remain in his or her home and bedroom until the end of life
- Elder-directed living
- Pets encouraged and accommodated
- Intentional community in the home and the broader neighborhood