



Cottage Cove

Brent MacDonald was an itinerate minister who spent life on the road before coming with his wife and sons to lead Cottage Cove in 2002. Today, as CEO, he runs every aspect

Brent MacDonald

of this bustling, connected community nonprofit, from directing programming to forging bonds with neighborhood kids who would have nowhere to turn after-school if not for Cottage Cove.

This is a voluntary after-school program, yet you have a remarkable attendance rate. What do you do to inspire the kids to come back day after day?

Brent: We require that kids come three days a week, or we give their spot away. Most come four days a week. Our kids are quite consistent. Many of the kids just want someone who cares, who loves them for who they are. We do that.

How do you stay involved in their academic progress?

Brent: The kids turn their report cards in to us. They get rewards for successes, and this also allows us to sign them up for more help at Cottage Cove in the academic areas where they need it.

This is a highly transient neighborhood. Part of your goal here is to build relationships with the kids you serve.

How do you deal with the transience?

Brent: You just make the most of the time you have because you never know how long they'll be coming. We try to stay connected to our kids even when they move or outgrow our program.

Many of the children you serve are victims of abuse and neglect. What have you learned about making a difference in their lives?

Brent: It just takes time, and people being here to help them and love them.



Children in the Vine Hill community immerse themselves in after-school arts and crafts projects, including jewelry making and woodworking.

From the outside, Cottage Cove looks like a timeworn inner-city chapel.

Behind the humble façade, just blocks from the Tennessee state fairgrounds, is a vibrant operation that cares for 70 at-risk children from kindergarten through high school every semester. Most of the children live across the street in the Vine Hill project. They come to Cottage Cove an average of four afternoons a week for structured help with schoolwork and to enjoy educational enrichment activities in a nurturing environment.



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Contemporary Christian recording artist Tom Shumate, inspired to help the impoverished area's children, the organization founded 15 years ago. Cottage Cove's mission is to share God's love with young people in a community rampant with abuse and neglect, particularly in the face of increased economic hardship.

In 2009, as more families than ever struggled to make ends meet, the organization saw the highest demand in its history for school supplies and Christmas gifts for the children it serves. The Memorial Foundation has literally helped Cottage Cove keep a roof overhead, contributing \$10,000 in 2009 to significant structural repairs so that the children of Vine Hill can continue to thrive under the guidance and care of the staff and volunteers.

protecting

Any given day in Nashville – in coffee shops and movie theaters, school cafeterias and living rooms — Youth Villages volunteer mentors infuse our region's most vulnerable teens with the same seed of hope imparted to children at Cottage Cove. It's an investment of time and concern. It is changing lives.

Youth Villages was founded in Memphis in 1986, and expanded into Middle Tennessee in 1991. In 2009 alone, through outreach programs and group homes, Youth Villages provided a safety net for 4,000 young people in the Nashville area — the majority of them long-term victims of abuse and neglect — with 83% of clients ultimately transitioning out of state custody. The Memorial Foundation contributed \$25,000 to the organization's efforts in 2009.

Among its most popular teen programs is the Governor's Mentoring Initiative, instituted by Gov. Bredesen in 2007. Through the program, which experienced a 20% increase in demand in 2009, Youth Villages volunteers serve as mentors to adolescents in state custody due to legal or family issues. Currently, there are 130 mentor-mentee pairs who spend 4-6 hours per month together.

Teens in state custody get individual attention from caring adults through Youth Villages' mentoring program.



Youth Villages

Tara Brinkley volunteers with Youth Villages through the Governor's Mentoring Initiatives, which pairs youth in state custody due to legal or family issues with adult role models. The program's goal is to nurture relationships between young people and adults, providing troubled young people with guidance, counsel and much-needed friendship.



Tara Brinkley

What inspired you to become a mentor?

Tara: I don't think I could have made the transitions from high school to college and independence without my family and other resources. I wanted to provide that support to someone who otherwise wouldn't have it.

Describe a moment when you knew what you were doing with Youth Villages was making a difference.

Tara: I was helping friends with a yard sale, and my mentee wanted to come. I picked her up before 5 a.m., and we worked until 5 p.m. two days in a row. Both days she was so excited, helping without a single complaint. She even brought her own things to sell. I realized it doesn't matter what we do, she just wants to feel like someone wants to include her.

What impact has this program had on you personally?

Tara: I pick her up, and we will sometimes spend time at the library or go to the mall. We grab a quick bite to eat and I take her home a few hours later. Often she helps me with other service projects. Those are my favorite times.

What impact has this program had on you, personally?

Tara: My mentee has experienced and been exposed to more negative events in her short life than any one person should ever experience. Her attitude and persistence are truly inspiring. I feel very blessed to have her as a part of my life now.