

Eden Alternative™ Testimony  
Presented By Rolling Fields, Inc.  
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Rolling Fields is a 181 bed skilled nursing home located in Conneautville, a very small, rural town in the northwest corner of the state. My sister, Kim Moody and I, Cindy Godfrey are second generation nursing home owner/operator/administrators and have been in the business ourselves for over 25 years. Our parents purchased our original home in 1968 and then built our existing building in 1979. When our father passed away in 1983, our mother became the administrator and Kim came to work as a social worker. I joined the business in 1987 as the receptionist. Mom has been retired for 15 years now and Kim and I, both licensed administrators, have taken turns through the years serving as the active administrator or co administrators.

Although we have always operated differently than many for-profit homes by being actively involved in the daily care of our Elders, we still felt "prisoners" of the system by constantly worrying about our annual survey, complaint investigations, staffing challenges, OSHA, UMR and of course, reimbursement. We were at a point where we felt we needed to change the way we were doing things or it was time to sell our little "Mom and Pop" home and move on. We didn't think we could care for our Elders the way in which our parents did when we were continually being monitored by the Department of Health and worrying about how we would be paid.

Then in 2002 while on vacation, I read *A Life Worth Living*, by Dr. William Thomas. Dr. Thomas is a Harvard trained physician who was asked by a small nursing home in his home town to be the medical director. Dr. Thomas reluctantly agreed and found that all his medical knowledge could not change the way the Elders in that home were living. He found what he now calls "The Three Plagues" - Loneliness, Helplessness and Boredom - was rampant in that home, as well as homes across the country and the world.

Dr. Thomas's book literally changed our lives and the lives of those for whom we care and employ. Kim and I became Certified Eden Associates in April of 2002 and spent one full year educating our staff, Elders and their families about our new journey. The total cost for this year of education was approximately \$100,000.00 and was the best way we could ever have spent our money.

The premise of the Eden Alternative™ is to eliminate those three plagues, build a human habitat where Elders continue to grow and thrive and to build friendships and relationships with all who live and work in the home. We combat Loneliness with companionship. Animals, birds, children and staff can all be companions to our Elders. The feeling of Helplessness can be taken away by giving our Elders some reason to get up in the morning. Everyone needs to feel needed and our Elders are no different. We do this by giving them plants to water, birds or animals to feed, daycare children to teach, laundry to fold, a newspaper delivery route, and the list goes on. Boredom is eliminated when we change a routine day into one that is filled with spontaneity. They say that Bingo is the most popular activity in most nursing homes for one reason – because no one knows what's going to happen. With the children, birds, animals, gardens in our homes, we add variety and spontaneity, something that is crucial to everyday life.

At Rolling Fields we have dogs, cats, plants, birds, gardens, a lake for fishing, a licensed child daycare center, a summer camp for the staff's children to attend to name just a few things. Most importantly however, is the relationships that have grown in our home between the Elders and our staff. Rolling Fields has six streets, each with two Eden families. Every Elder and every staff member is in a family. The laundry staff now recognizes our Elders by their face, not the name tag on their clothes. The cook now talks to our Elders instead of reading their preferences on a "tray card". Everyone in our home is a "Caregiver". We all give care to our Elders, to our pets and to each other. Just like in anyone's home, we are all responsible to do the chores and care for each other. Most of our families have a "no Elder left behind" program that our staff

created. One staff member "adopts" one Elder in their family and they celebrate birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries or go on outings or walks together.

Although our journey was progressing, albeit bumpy at times, we felt as if there was something still "institutional" about our home. We believed we were on the edge of something big, but needed to "jump". In January of 2007, Kim figured out what that was. In order to truly make "homeness", we needed to eliminate our meal tray delivery service. Like most nursing homes, all "tasks" revolve around the times that the meals are delivered. Elders have to get up and get washed to be ready for breakfast. Therapy and activities must be completed in time for lunch or dinner. Hair appointments have to be made before or after the scheduled lunch time. It is not Elder centered care. It is us, telling our Elders what their schedule should be. Therefore, we decided to "Jump off the Cliff", or "JOTC" as our staff calls it.

Again we started the education process with our staff. We had small staff meetings to explain our revelation and to get their feedback. Although many were skeptical about making a change that was so drastic, they all agreed that they wouldn't want to be told what time to get up, what time to go to bed, and what to eat. We had 30 staff members volunteer for our "JOTC" task force and through the summer of 2007 they attended hours and hours of planning meetings in order for us to make this happen for our Elders.

On August 22, 2007, we "Jumped" on our pilot street. We set up a temporary kitchen that services 30 Elders from a restaurant type menu. The Elders get up when they want and then order a breakfast of their choice. They scheduled their therapy appointments when they want to go. They have the choice to eat in their room, complete with a room service type set up, with tablecloth, salt and pepper shakers, coffee pot, etc. or go to the Dining Room where they can also order from a more limited menu. Since Elders get up at various times now, everything has changed. The staff do their own schedule because they know when they need the most hands on care. Chores that were typically done by the housekeeping staff are now done by

caregivers. Cleaning supplies are now readily accessible so anyone, including administrative staff, can clean a toilet or mop a floor when it's convenient to do so – just like home.

We are in the final stages of renovating our main kitchen to a restaurant style kitchen, under the guidance of our Executive Chef, who is also creating a menu for the entire home. Soon all of our Elders will order what they want, when they want it 24 hours a day. When our kitchen is completed, we will be more like home than ever.

We have created "guidelines" for our staff, but we no longer tell them how to care for the Elders. It is impossible for anyone to sit in an office and write policy on how to give Elder centered care. The direct caregivers must be empowered to make the decisions that are right for each individual Elder.

The benefits we have seen by adopting culture change following the Eden Alternative™ pathway are numerous. There has been a decrease in antipsychotic drug use, we have no physical restraints and no siderails on our beds. We have no bed or chair alarms. Elders are happier. Staff turnover is down. Family members are happier and instead of family meeting that consist of complaints, the families tell us how happy they are with the care.

We truly believe that every nursing home must change their culture. We should not institutionalize our Elders because they got old. Nursing homes should not be run like prisons, where the occupants are told when to get up, when to bathe, when to eat, when to exercise and when to go to bed. Our Elders deserve better than this. They have served us well in their lifetimes and we must serve them well in their senior years. We must do this because it is the right thing to do.