

## **Horizons for Homeless Children reinstalls Sage House playspace**

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FRAMINGHAM — Horizons for Homeless Children, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of young homeless children by ensuring they have access to early education and opportunities to play, recently reinstalled a playspace at Sage House in Framingham. Shelter residents, children and shelter staff were present for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Horizons first partnered with Sage House and installed the original playspace in May 2004. As part of the reinstallation, the playspace received a new design, along with new furniture, toys, materials and books.

“The partnership with Horizons for Homeless Children is much more than a partnership — it is more like they are part of the Sage House Team,” said Jesse R. Mellor, program clinical director at Sage House. “The support and services they provide to our families is invaluable, from role modeling nurturing parenting skills that support healthy development to giving parents a ‘break’ to allow them to attend meetings or just to have a few minutes of personal time. Not to mention the playspace itself — from the design to furnishings — provides a safe and stimulating environment for growth and learning for the children.”

“We’re grateful to partner with groups like Sage House to make our statewide Playspace Program a reality for homeless children and families,” said Kate Barrand, president and CEO of Horizons. “Our playspaces give children opportunities to just be kids, while their parents are able to take steps toward getting their families on a path to success. Sage House has been a great partner in this work.”

Playspaces are child-friendly rooms in shelters that are created by Horizons and staffed by dedicated, trained volunteers called Playspace Activity Leaders. This network of 1,200 volunteers donates two hours of their time each week to provide high-quality, trauma-informed play for the children.

# 5 for Good: Volunteers help homeless children through trauma-informed playspace program

Horizons for Homeless Children runs program to provide creative play for children in shelters



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## **BOSTON —**

Volunteers across Massachusetts are helping young children living in shelters grow and develop. The [Playspace Program](#) run by [Horizons for Homeless Children](#) creates trauma-informed play areas to serve children up to age 6.

Nicole LaValley volunteers at one of these spaces inside a shelter in Brighton. She has developed special relationships with the kids there.

She described one toddler, whom she met nine months ago, saying she was initially very shy.

"Now, she's the one taking charge, asking the other kids what they want to do, communicating her needs, as well," LaValley said.

Stephen Croke oversees the program for Horizons for Homeless Children and said that outcome is often what they see.

"What we do is we go into family homeless shelters throughout Massachusetts and we bring in children's toys and art supplies and games and books," Croke said.

Joanea Spencer, the director of residential and community services at the shelter where LaValley volunteers, said the program supports kids in a critical way.

"A lot of our children have had some traumas in the past, and so it gives them an opportunity to work with professional child care providers that can help them work through those stages of trauma," Spencer said.

There are over 1,000 volunteers like LaValley giving their time in more than 90 playspaces across the commonwealth.

"The volunteers are absolutely amazing," Croke said. "They come in for a two-hour shift each week, and they go to the same shelter at the same time each week."

"It's great consistency for the kids," LaValley said. "I love the fact that I've been able to see so many of them grow and develop."

Volunteers are asked to make at least a six-month commitment. Horizons for Homeless Children depends on its volunteers and the generosity of donors for this program.