

Friendship, fun and a restoration of faith

Beech Brook mentors help kids learn to trust that there are people who care.

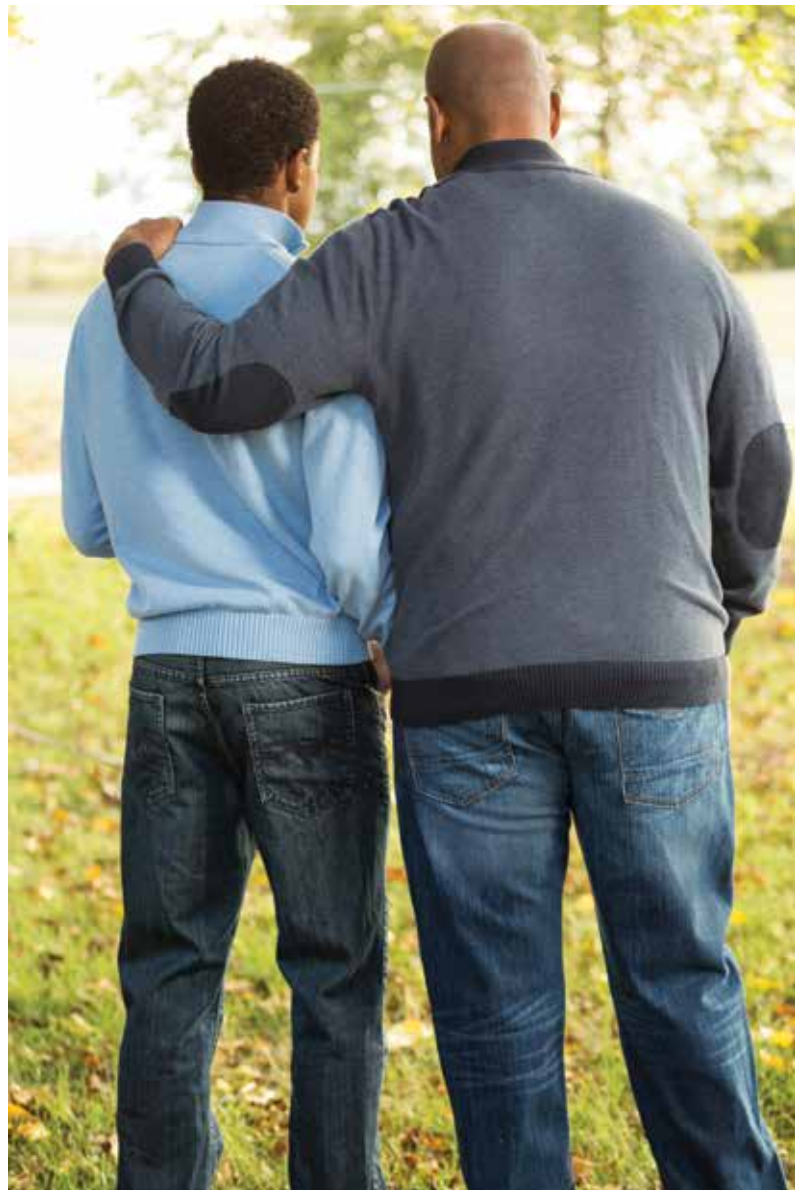
Andrew's mom never helped him with his math homework but he learned plenty about grams, ounces and kilos from the drug dealers who were a constant presence in his childhood.

"We were talking about numbers one day, and I was intrigued by how much he knew," says James Ringfield, lead mentor for Beech Brook's STRIDE program. "He said, 'I learned it by being around drugs and being able to put together packages of 10s and 20s.' He told me whenever he got stuck in math, he would put it in terms of drug selling to help him solve the problem."

At 13, after a childhood spent moving from place to place amid drug dealing, neglect and violence, he landed in foster care, defiant and distrustful. Like many kids in the child welfare system, he covered his fear and feelings of abandonment with anger and behavior so unpredictable that his foster parents feared to take him out. Within six months, Andrew had been through three foster homes and a stay in residential treatment. His placements changed so fast that at one point his clothes and few possessions didn't even catch up with him for six weeks. Every change felt like another betrayal.

Even as an experienced mentor, Ringfield knew this was going to be a tough case. "Andrew was the most guarded kid I've ever worked with. The system had let him down and overwhelmed him. He didn't believe in the people who were supposed to care for him. With this kid, I knew I had to show him that I wouldn't give up on him.

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*"Someone else just gave up on me,"
Andrew told Ringfield one day.
"I'm just waiting for you to move on."*

Debra Rex retires as President/CEO

After 26 years of service, many of them at the helm of the organization, Beech Brook President/CEO Debra Rex retired on November 17.

Rex joined the organization in 1991 and served in a number of leadership capacities since then, becoming CEO in 2005 and adding the responsibility of president in 2013.

“During her time at Beech Brook, Debra, in partnership with Mario Tonti during many of those years, guided the agency’s transition from a residential treatment provider to a community-based organization that offers a wide range of prevention and early intervention programs that protect children and strengthen families,” said Brandon Miller, chairman of the board. “She has also been a tireless advocate for our society’s most vulnerable children and families, ensuring that Beech Brook’s voice was heard at every level of government whenever the well-being of children and families was at stake. Although it was her heart and passion for helping children that led her into this field, it has been her tremendous talent for strategic thinking and planning, change management, and developing a culture of continuous learning and high performance that has allowed Beech Brook to navigate the changing and challenging world of behavioral health care. She will be greatly missed.”

Beech Brook Executive Vice President Thomas P. Royer, MPA, assumed the role of president/CEO, effective November 20. Royer has served the organization in many capacities since joining the staff in 1991, beginning in direct service positions with children and families and moving up through a number of leadership roles. Most recently, he has overseen all programs and services and represented Beech Brook externally with many groups and collaborators.

“As board members, we have great confidence in Tom’s ability to continue in Debra’s footsteps and guide this organization into the future. His range of experience and knowledge about all aspects of Beech Brook’s services and operations will make this a seamless transition of leadership,” said Miller.

Following her retirement, Rex will continue as an executive advisor to the organization.

Message from Debra Rex, President/CEO

On moving forward...and leaving behind



*Debra Rex, M.A., M.Ed.
President and CEO*

As I gaze out of my office window, I am facing a lovely view of the trees in mid-autumn. Many leaves have fallen; some are still green, and others, like those on the tree right outside my window, are the most vivid red and yellow imaginable. They are in various stages of “letting go.”

As my days as CEO at Beech Brook come to an end, I find myself experiencing many feelings as I ready myself to “let go.”

- **Gratitude!** For the opportunity to lead an organization with such a powerful mission and to feel a sense of satisfaction that everything I did, every day, was in the service of helping children and families.
- **Gratitude!** (Yes, again.) For the community of staff, board members, donors and colleagues that I’ve had the opportunity both to help create and reap the benefits of. There simply could not be a better community with such a rich, tightly woven tapestry, where each person wants to make a positive difference. And together we do!
- **Joy!** For the opportunities that lie ahead for Beech Brook. My leaving allows a new generation of leadership to step up and take its place in the historic, flowing tradition of Beech Brook. Already I see people growing, stepping up to infuse the organization with new energy, new creativity and new levels of dedication. These will be needed in this time of great change in our field – to capture the opportunities and to strategically address the threats. I feel a sense of generativity as I see persons I have helped to develop now taking on significant roles. It is the way things should be.
- **Joy!** (Yes, again.) For the way our new mission is pulling Beech Brook forward, motivating us, guiding our thinking. “*Helping Children and Families THRIVE*” is powerful! Already I see us embracing helping children develop in a normal way and getting them back on track when they have fallen behind. I see us committing even more deeply to helping strengthen the resiliency of children and families – helping them to overcome the adversity of poverty, trauma and other challenges. And I see the powerful and growing commitment to working with families – as partners – to help them maintain or develop health and stability. The power of our new mission and direction lifts us up and guides the way forward in turbulent times.
- **Pride!** In all that has been accomplished in my time here: in all the positive impact on the thousands and thousands of children who have had their lives enriched by our services and in our success at impacting public policy to support children, youth and families – most recently to support emancipating foster kids in moving successfully toward independent living.
- **Hope!** In the future of Beech Brook and in the future of the children and families we serve and will serve. We have a 165-year history of strong partnership and commitment between board, donors and professional staff working together to help vulnerable children in northeast Ohio. I have great hope that as we adjust our course and shift leadership that we will emerge even stronger in our ability to accomplish this powerful work in this new period in our history.

• **Gratitude!** (Yes, again, one more time.)
That I will be able to continue to lend my passion, skill, and commitment as executive advisor, consultant, donor, mentor and friend to Beech Brook and its board and staff leadership. I am so fortunate to have had the opportunities to serve, and I am so fortunate to still be in a position to help children and families thrive through my relationship with Beech Brook.

The beautiful leaves will soon all have fallen, allowing for the natural cycle of renewal and growth to continue. And I will be letting go to move forward in my journey too, with the assurance that all is well for Beech Brook's future and for mine, too!

Thanks – truly – to each of you for all the ways you help children and families by supporting our work. The challenges of helping vulnerable children have never been greater during my career. But Beech Brook's long history and our forward-thinking positioning will serve us. Thank you again for your support during my tenure and in the future as we move forward under the leadership of Tom Royer.

For children,

Debra

Farewell Reception to Honor Debra Rex

Beech Brook will host a reception in January to honor Debra for her service.

Watch for more information about the date and time!



Our Mission

Helping children and families thrive by promoting healthy child development, strengthening the ability to overcome adversity, and enhancing family health and stability.



Continued from cover

He told me every man who comes into his life walks out. “

In spite of his many placements, Ringfield kept track of Andrew, wading through all the red tape of various systems, determined to show him there was someone he could trust. And when Andrew was discharged from a residential stay, Ringfield was there waiting. “Do you think I care now?” he asked Andrew. “I guess you do,” the boy admitted.



James Ringfield, lead mentor

Slowly, steadily, the barriers began to come down. A breakthrough moment came when the two of them spent several hours at a Cavs’ watch party – a highlight of Andrew’s life.

“Seeing him just being a kid really touched my heart,” Ringfield said. “He just wants to be a normal kid.”

Afterward Andrew told him, “I’ve never had anyone spend time with me or take me out to something like this. You did something a dad would have done. I know I’m missing out on life.”

“A kid doesn’t care how much I know until they know how much I care.”

JAMES RINGFIELD

As the lead mentor for Beech Brook, Ringfield oversees the other mentors in addition to handling his own cases. Currently there are 18 mentors, male and female, handling about 50 cases. Usually the duration of their cases is about six months.

When it’s time for a case to be discharged, Ringfield’s goal is to leave them with the understanding that there are people out there in the world who care and who want to help

Why mentors matter

There are many studies about the difference a mentor can make in a young person’s life. Here are just a few statistics from www.mentor.org.

At-risk youth who have mentors are

- 55% more likely to enroll in college.
- 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37% less likely to skip a class.
- 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and 27% less likely to start drinking.
- 81% more likely to participate regularly in sports or extracurricular activities than those who do not.

out but that they have to be willing to accept that help. “I tell them, ‘we all have struggles but it’s how we express our feelings that matters.’ I really worked with Andrew to help him express his feelings in words.”

A welcome respite for families, too

“The mentors are working with kids in families that are stressed,” says Anna Pawlikowski, STRIDE program director.

“The workers also need to put the parents at ease so they can help the kids grow and stretch, getting them out of their neighborhoods and showing them new environments, but also connecting them to resources in their own communities...maybe things they never knew about or lost their connection to.”

While some kids referred for mentoring come from foster care, others are living with biological parents or adoptive families. The cases vary from kids who are struggling with serious mental health problems, conflict at home, social isolation, or involvement with high-risk people and behaviors.

Whatever the situation, the bottom line is giving kids the experience that someone is there for them.

Being there can mean many things, depending on what each child needs.

That could be support in school or with homework; encouraging participation in positive activities and sports; supporting a pregnant teen; helping a youth with autism feel safe in public places; easing the transition into adoptive families; and much more. Mentors and mentees might be found hiking or biking, visiting museums, attending sports events, developing a hobby, shopping or eating out together.

“The time comes when the cases must be closed, so whatever we are leaving them with must be done in the context of the relationship the mentors develop with the youth and family; otherwise that work’s not going to succeed when we’re gone,” Pawlikowski explains.

Ringfield recalls another teen with autism who had limited verbal skills, aggressive behavior and extreme anxiety about leaving the house. At the time they met, this boy hadn’t been to school or out of the house for six months. By the time the case closed, he was ready to go back to school and had conquered his fear of public places. Although he couldn’t verbalize his feelings well, he told James “Big guy – trust you.” The grateful family still keeps in touch.

After two years as a mentor and 27 years working with kids, Ringfield’s philosophy is clear. “This is not a job. It’s a journey of life. I’m passionate about this.”

Thanks to everyone who supported our 5K Race and Walk!

The day dawned bright and beautiful for Beech Brook's 7th event on October 22. We appreciate all the runners, walkers and sponsors who turned out to support the children and families we serve! Thanks, too, to our partner Fleet Feet Sports.

Special thanks to our Sponsors!

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Katie and Jeremy Clark, Tyler Clark, Kathy and Jim Pender, and Susan and Tom Shrewsberry



Tom Seifert, Kristen Tull, Terry and Edda Owen, and Larry Borodkin

The Legacy of Samuel Clemens

In 1869, Samuel Clemens, known best to the world as Mark Twain, came to Cleveland to visit friends and make an appearance benefitting the Cleveland Orphan Asylum on the 17th anniversary of its founding in 1852. He closed the lecture with an impassioned appeal to his audience to support the organization as generously as they could, and records show that he donated the entire proceeds of his lecture, \$594, to the orphanage.

The **Samuel Clemens Society** was created to recognize the individuals, foundations and organizations that, like Samuel Clemens, support Beech Brook's work by giving at a leadership level.

On November 2, Beech Brook honored this year's members with a reception and program led by Rick Rule-Hoffman, art therapist. And guests did more than listen! Each person had an assignment, ranging from painting, clay, drawing and more to help them understand the work done with children in art therapy. It's clear from the photos that everyone took their work seriously!

We are so grateful to our 125 generous leadership donors and to everyone who makes a gift to support Beech Brook's work with children and families.



Ames Coney and Sandra Russ



Debra Rex



Rick Rule-Hoffman (standing) with Jim Pender and Cindy Crotty



Dick Michel, Cheryl Groner, Mark Groner and Bob Plona

Welcome to our new Board members and Life Directors!

Welcomed to the Board of Directors at this year's annual meeting were Terry Owen and Jennifer Pinkerton, both longtime supporters of Beech Brook. Nancy Klein was also named to the Honorary Board in recognition of her many years on the board.

In recognition of their decades of leadership and service, Kathy Pender and Harry Holmes were each awarded the special designation of Life Directors.

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(as of 11/20/17)

Thomas P. Royer

EXECUTIVE ADVISOR

Debra Rex

PRESIDENT EMERITUS

Mario Tonti



Jim and Kathy Pender



Sandy and Harry Holmes

As we honor Kathy Pender and Harry Holmes with the designation of Life Directors, we also greatly appreciate the longtime support of Sandy Holmes and Jim Pender for their commitment to Beech Brook's mission and to the well-being of children and families.



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Beech Brook's Mission

Helping children and families thrive by promoting healthy child development, strengthening the ability to overcome adversity, and enhancing family health and stability.

216.831.2255

www.beechbrook.org

Beech Brook is a contract agency of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE
Beech Ball

Friday, April 27, 2018

Thank you to this year's Co-Chairs:

Tracy and David Crandall
Jennifer and Doug Pinkerton

Tracy and Tom Seifert

Watch for more details!

