



# Fertile Ground

Journal of Peace House, the Kalamazoo Quaker/Catholic Worker

Issue 21

December 2019

## House Notes

By Jen DeWaele

It has been a year since we've been able to send you our news through a newsletter. We have been completely immersed in the work and joys of the lives we have committed to and created here on Phelps Avenue. The day to day of our after school program, hosting 20-25 kids here Monday through Thursday for a healthy snack, outside playing, and homework, is thriving. From this comes the community that is built between each other—the volunteers who are steady in their support, here every week to hear the stories of the day from the kids, get big hugs, and steadily encourage everyone in the math and writing of the day.

Peace House kids have a strong community with each other, steady working on celebrating the fun, working on getting along and aspiring to become Junior Youth Advisory and Youth Advisory Board (YAB) members

Our Junior YAB are Peace House middle school students who meet once a month to talk about life and their goals, build community with each other, and practice social skills that serve us all well as we walk through life. Last week I had the chance to witness this in action, as I was touring with a volunteer new to Peace House and seventh grader Natavia came up to introduce herself. She was very proud to showcase her skills and threw her shoulders back, looked them right in the eye, stuck out her hand, and introduced herself, welcoming him to Peace House.

Our Youth Advisory Board consists of high

school students who have come to Peace House for years, some since elementary school. This crew continues to strengthen their skills, and again support kids in ways we never would be able to. Their relationships with each other and with the younger kids, their calm and steady support of them through homework, conflict, and good times will stay with us all, youngest and oldest, forever. This year they had an additional celebration in sending the first Youth Advisory member away to college. We are glad to report

that Amaya is doing well at Central Michigan University, and is prevailing over the regular struggles of the first few months of being away at college. We are forever grateful to the Youth Advisory Board for the time they give us at Peace House.

For many homes, the refrigerator is the central point of family news, photos, reminders and schedules. For us it is no different; the fridge in our house is full of our family pictures, as well as Peace House kids. Returning to the story of the new volunteer from above: after seventh grader Zi'Arra introduced herself in a similar way to the new guest, she made sure to show him that she had her picture on our fridge,

cementing herself as part of our family. On our tour we talked about the inspiration for this place, in treating each other, **all of each other**, as if we were all brothers and sisters. What would you do if your brother needed help with his homework? You would sit down at the dining room table and help him. And you definitely would make sure that you put that great picture of your sister on your fridge! The kids know and feel this way about Peace House, and make sure that their



*Amaya, Kalamazoo Central Class of 2019; and Bahiyyah, Phoenix High School Class of 2019*

*(Continued on page 4)*

# In Gratitude

*Greeting friends and supporters across the country!*

*In this season of Thanksgiving, we are overwhelmed with gratitude for your generosity over the years in small and big ways, for always believing in the work alongside us, and making sure that we are always in a position to keep committing to it day after day, year after year.*

*The power in small acts of love and kindness has consumed me lately. In this time of increased connectivity via the powers of the internet, we can be overwhelmed by the stories from all corners of the world of violence, extreme and daily. In Kalamazoo, the reminders of the strength of the empire of violence and its inequities show themselves in the first 20 minutes of my work day at Woodward Elementary School: folks who spent the night in the woods are making their way across the bridge to the Marathon station and then on to the day shelter. A friend is living in a tent (even in 6 inches of snow), and has pulled an industrial garbage container up next to their tent. Arriving at school, seeing every student really so glad to be there, because of the community that is built every day with each teacher and staff member. Many times happy in very deep ways, because of the consistent love and safety they find there. Because school is the place where they will get three meals a day, and someone who has the time to sit and listen to their stories and hopes.*



*Anthony and Shar, doing what they do, which is look good*

*At Peace House we focus so much on the small, and we believe so fiercely in it, that it is hard to remember sometimes that it is some of the most powerful work out there. Volunteers returning week after week, remembering your favorite book, or asking how the teacher liked that essay you turned in last week. Your friends whom you've grown up with, and are now working together with as Youth Advisory Board members-and still cracking jokes about something unforgotten that happened in fourth grade. The everlasting UNO game, while sharing*

*about what happened at school that day. A computer to use for a resume, and eventually support for that new new apartment, or baby and family you are welcoming into the world, or first year at college. Small moments change lives and strengthen our commitment to each other in the day to day life we share here. All of these small moments strung together add up to a life and culture shared and believed in.*

*We, the four of us, have so much hope in them— all of them; moments, interactions, and individuals. Everyone who passes our doorstep is on their own journey of growth: we who are lucky enough to live here; the kids who make us Peace House by attending daily; the volunteers who support us weekly; and YOU, our generous donors from across the country who send us whatever you can spare to keep our doors open and our space thriving.*

*In these times of division, it is the smallest things that matter. Dive into them with us. Commit yourself with us to spreading kindness, taking the time for each other, and promising to each other, to the Earth and the kids (all of us), who deserve it- We CAN do better by each other, and WE WILL- one day at time. We of the small moments ask you and challenge you to find your own small moments to commit to in your own lives and alongside ours.*

*Please consider sharing your extra with Peace House this winter. We are completely funded by your donations, and we run on a very small budget in order to make sure we make the most of your generous gifts.*

***In gratitude, Jen DeWaele, for all at Peace House***

# Continue: a poem

By Maya Angelou

My wish for you  
Is that you continue

*Continue*

To be who and how you are  
To astonish a mean world  
With your acts of kindness

*Continue*

To allow humor to lighten the burden  
Of your tender heart

*Continue*

In a society dark with cruelty  
To let the people hear the grandeur  
Of God in the peals of your laughter

*Continue*

To let your eloquence  
Elevate the people to heights  
They had only imagined

*Continue*

To remind the people that  
Each is as good as the other  
And that no one is beneath  
Nor above you

*Continue*

To remember your own young years  
And look with favor upon the lost  
And the least and the lonely

*Continue*

To put the mantel of your protection  
Around the bodies of  
The young and defenseless

*Continue*

To take the hand of the despised  
And diseased and walk proudly with them  
In the high street  
Some might see you and  
Be encouraged to do likewise

*Continue*

To plant a public kiss of concern  
On the cheek of the sick  
And the aged and infirm  
And count that as a  
Natural action to be expected

*Continue*

To let gratitude be the pillow  
Upon which you kneel to  
Say your nightly prayer  
And let faith be the bridge  
You build to overcome evil  
And welcome good

*Continue*

To ignore no vision  
Which comes to enlarge your range  
And increase your spirit

*Continue*

To dare to love deeply  
And risk everything  
For the good thing

*Continue*

To float  
Happily in the sea of infinite substance  
Which set aside riches for you  
Before you had a name

*Continue*

And by doing so  
You and your work  
Will be able to continue  
Eternally

(Continued from page 1)

picture makes it onto our fridge.

In January we finally were able to pull together the dream of having an additional space for Peace House. Jerry and his carpentry crew spent weeks rehabbing the garage between the two houses, turning it into a lovely space that hosts many diverse activities. We have been able to use it for dancing, crafts, snack spot, reading groups, Open Roads bike program, and in the fall and winter, adding additional spots for homework. In opening up the new space, we embraced the idea of the Peace House family fridge, and went through all of our old pictures to make sure the fridge was full of pics of kids throughout the years. There are pictures of kids at age four who are now sophomores in high school, and there are pics of our kids as babies— we are all growing up through this work and place. There are countless moments of relationship and hope that happen here; the fridge is a small and powerful reminder of that.

This fall we are experimenting with a different format for the after school program. Over the years we have pulled kids in when they are ready to do homework, but have struggled with having too many kids at once and the constant traffic on the homes. Our new system (still in evolution with Peace House kids and volunteers), hosts kids for games and outside play for an hour, with a snack all together. The second hour is kept for kids who have brought homework or who are working one on one with a volunteer to read or practice a skill they want to hone, so that we are all focused on something at the same time. The community that is built with each other, through the one on one adult attention has

been really positive, while also being much less adversarial (“**it is time to do your homework!**”) Everyone gets to celebrate at the end with stamps towards prizes, which is always a great thing.

Personally, for our friends who we don’t get to see from across the country, we nine are all doing great. We’ll start with the youngest, which is our birthday cake rule—Leah and Alice are taking on fourth grade in style and gusto, at their public Montessori school, with new teachers for their fourth/fifth grade years, and in different classrooms. Clara and Jonah are in seventh grade and enjoying soccer and cross country, as well as a very challenging writing class this year. Amos is rocking sophomore year at K Central- his confidence (which has been his blessing since birth) is doing well for

him, and he is a very positive part of the Youth Advisory Board here. Westley continues to be the loving dog part of our lives, renewing his commitment to over welcome our guests daily.

Highlights from the year were our Youth Advisory Board trip to Saugatuck (Thank you Jordan and Cathie Schau!), many many fun times during our summer program, thanks to Becky



*Maddie shows off her beautiful handmade quilt*



*A screech owl (brought by the Kalamazoo Nature Center) takes a good look at Jaleah*

Edmonds and her quilting crew, Felicia Thomas our basketball coach, the Jeter's Leaders, who are here in numbers, always ready to play, many field trips to Kik Pool, and our growing relationship with the Kalamazoo Nature Center (*"is that snake lady here today?!"*). This summer we were blessed to have Jilia Johnson from K College's Civic Engagement Center join us for her internship. She quickly became close with the kids, and helped us lead another strong summer here. Her steady and reliable energy was evident immediately to the kids, and they loved every second they had with her.

For the four of us who live here, our work is our commitment to the kids and families in this neighborhood, as well as a commitment to working daily against a culture that is systemically and intrinsically racist and militaristic. We see it everywhere, in the lives of the kids who we know—families moving into a motel after having a year in a house, kids mourning after their friend was killed by gunfire, and parents taken for months on end for a jail sentence. Even though these situations and stories are not a part of every single neighbor kid, it is definitely a close part of their experience and inner dialogue. The evidence in our neighborhood and city is plain as day, and we commit daily to work against it with every grain of our being, while reflecting on our part in it as white folks with immense access to privilege.

Through all of this, the work here keeps us hopeful and rooted in the relationships we nurture and are nurtured by in the day to day. There are so many moments of hope, in the interactions that happen here every day, and Peace House "magic" (as our United Campus Ministry coordinator Kathleen King calls it) immerses each of us in some way. We are grateful to be a part of it, and even more grateful to be surprised by hopeful moments and memories when we least expect them.

## Peace House Youth Advisory Board



From left: Amaya Whitfield, class of 2019; Bahiyyah Daniels, class of 2019; Gary Luckett Jr., class of 2020; Amos Mechtenberg-Berrigan, class of 2022; Qwadri Brashers, class of 2021; Andrena (Sissy) Patterson, class of 2023; Jaleen Johnson, class of 2021; Jermaine (BJ) Williams, class of 2021; and Dylan Howard, class of 2021.

# Peace House S

Youth Advisory Board member Qwadri giving out snow cones at our summer carnival.



Mother and daughter: Zi'Arra and mom Shamika. Zi'Arra, her twin brother Zi'Quan, and older siblings Dontavia, Demetrus and BJ (Youth Advisory Board member) have been coming to Peace House for seven years!



Stacy, Jesús and Juan proudly wearing their new Peace House shirts



Summer basketball coach Felicia (far left) brings it in at the end of the day.



Gabby showing off her amazing face painting job at our summer carnival!



Damyra, Dezeriah and Neveah enjoying frozen s'mores!

# Summer 2019



*A big smile from Jamar!*



*Xavier and Jewell helping serve snack.*

*Youth Advisory Board member Amaya helps Ka'Nahvea with a cooking project: frozen s'mores, a favorite summertime treat.*



*Shar and math porch volunteer Dolores folding origami ninja stars.*



*Jewell helps Greg from the Kalamazoo Nature Center get the turtle lined up for the big race: tortoise vs. hare.*



*Dezeriah and long time volunteer extraordinaire Barb*

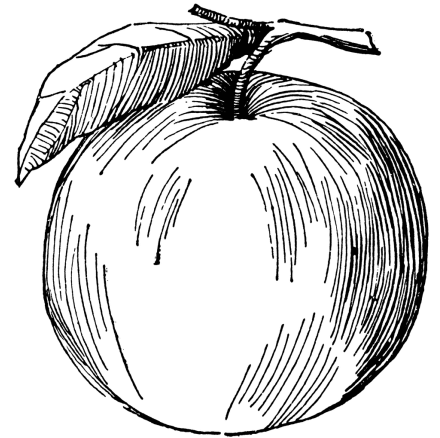
# Returning the Gift

by Robin Wall Kimmerer, syndicated from awakin.org, Sep 02, 2017

In the teachings of my Potawatomi ancestors, responsibilities and gifts are understood as two sides of the same coin. The possession of a gift is coupled with a duty to use it for the benefit of all. A thrush is given the gift of song—and so has a responsibility to greet the day with music. Salmon have the gift of travel, so they accept the duty of carrying food upriver. So when we ask ourselves, what is our responsibility to the Earth, we are also asking, “What is our gift?”

As human people, most recently evolved here, we lack the gifts of our companion species, of nitrogen fixation, pollination, and 3000-mile migrations under magnetic guidance. We can’t even photosynthesize. But we carry gifts of our own, which the Earth urgently needs. Among the most potent of these is gratitude.

Gratitude may seem like weak tea given the desperate challenges that lie before us, but it is powerful medicine, much more than a simple thank you. Giving thanks implies recognition not only of the gift, but of the giver. When I eat an apple, my gratitude is directed to that wide-armed tree whose tart offspring are now in my mouth, whose life has become my own. Gratitude is founded on the deep knowing that our very existence relies on the gifts of beings who can in fact photosynthesize. Gratitude propels the recognition of the personhood of all beings and challenges the fallacy of human exceptionalism—the idea that we are somehow better, more deserving of the wealth and services of the Earth than other species.



**Practicing contentment is a radical act in a consumption-driven society.**

The evolutionary advantage for cultures of gratitude is compelling. This human emotion has adaptive value, because it engenders practical outcomes for sustainability. The practice of gratitude can, in a very real way, lead to the practice of self-restraint, of taking only what we need. Acknowledging the gifts that surround us creates a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of enough-ness which is an antidote to the societal messages that drill into our spirits telling us we must have more. Practicing contentment is a radical act in a consumption-driven society.

Indigenous story traditions are full of cautionary tales about the failure of gratitude. When people forget to honor the gift, the consequences are always material as well as spiritual. The spring dries up, the corn doesn’t grow, the animals do not return, and the legions of offended plants and animals and rivers rise up against the ones who neglected gratitude. The Western storytelling tradition is strangely silent on this matter, and so we find ourselves in an era when we are rightly afraid of the climate we have created.

We human people have protocols for gratitude; we apply them formally to one another. We say thank you. We understand that receiving a gift incurs a responsibility to give a gift in return. The next step in our cultural evolution, if we are to persist as a species on this beautiful planet, is to expand our protocols for gratitude to the living Earth. Gratitude is most powerful as a response to the Earth because it provides an opening to reciprocity, to the act of giving back.





## A space for staying warm (YES!) But also for LAUGHING and HOPING and IMAGINING

In the spring of 2018 we spent time discussing our concern about winter programming at Peace House. Our homes did not have the carrying capacity for the number of kids who were coming to do homework. Despite our constant offering of hats and gloves, kids playing outside were cold and asking to come inside. We recognized a serious need for an additional heated, indoor space. After considering many ideas, we realized the solution was sitting right in between our two homes in the form of a two car garage full of tools, bikes, scooters, rakes, shovels, and everything else a garage holds. A plan emerged.

In the late summer/fall of 2018 we cleaned out the garage. This involved getting rid of stuff, moving tools and large equipment to Jerry's workshop, and finding temporary storage space for everything else. The longer-term goal is to build a storage shed for yard tools and other equipment.

In the fall/winter of 2018-19, Jerry and a small crew dove into this significant project. Windows were installed, walls were framed and insulated, new lighting and outlets were put in. Beautiful cabinets were made. Drywall, painting and finishing details were completed just before our grand opening celebration on May 10, 2019.

We are **extremely grateful** for this new space. It offers a whole new dimension to our year round programming and gives us an additional warm space for homework and hanging out during the cold months. This project would not have been possible without the financial support of many people and businesses. We are especially grateful to *This is a Bookstore/Bookbug* and the *Kalamazoo People's Food Coop* for "round up" programs in which customers were offered the option to round up and donate the extra cents to Peace House. These programs raised funds to complete the space and fill it with many good books.

Thank you to all who made this project possible!

### When I'm Older.....

(This poem was written by Jaleah, 9th grader at Kalamazoo Central High School, as part of an activity during our Wednesday middle and high school Peace House program.)

When I'm older I will be operating on people's bodies as a surgeon

When I'm older I will have graduated and will be a surgeon

When I'm older I will still be helping people

When I'm older I will not hurt people for anything

When I'm older I will have helped so many people that they will start paying it back

When I'm older I will be wearing jogging pants and a hoodie

When I'm older I will look like a person who is sleep deprived

When I'm older my family and friends will be important to me

When I'm older my home is going to have a big room

When I'm older I want all the kids at Peace House to know to always pay forward kindness because it adds up

# Reflections from a Summer Intern

*By Jilia Johnson*

Since being a student at Kalamazoo College since Fall 2016, I knew that I had found a love and joy in working with children. After having a few jobs in Kalamazoo working with them, I knew I needed to take my passion forward. When I was looking at the list of Community Building Internships, I knew that Peace House was my #1 choice. After interviewing and hearing back from them through email and a phone call, I was beyond happy because I knew that it was the perfect placement for me. Overall, I was very humbled and grateful to have been given the opportunity.



Since Peace House informed me that they'd be opening in July, I spent my time leading up to the date just worrying about if I wouldn't get close with some of the children and thinking about how I might not live up to the same standards as previous interns. When the first day came along, July 8th, I pulled up to the houses and I sat in my car thinking "Today is going to be great, I'm going to be great", and indeed it was, my first week was amazing. I took pictures with some of the kids, they learned my name, and they even came to me when they were having a conflict. Ever since the first week, I knew that Peace House was where I belonged for the summer.

Considering that my job title was the "Youth Leadership Intern," I spent time planning activities, collecting supplies for crafts, cleaning various spaces, and organizing ticket counts. When I planned activities, I was told to think of activities where the kids could bond with one another, or come up with a craft that was more mellow that would let their imaginations come into play. As time went by, I began going on field trips to the Kik Pool & Kalamazoo Nature Center, and because of these experiences, I built relationships with those same kids I didn't feel like I'd get close to. At our weekly meetings that we used to plan the week, my supervisors always made me feel welcomed and encouraged me to voice my opinion on various topics. I appreciate the fact that I was given leadership roles throughout the summer such as: leading a girls workshop on Monday nights from 7-8pm and planning and guiding a craft or activity on multiple days of the week. I feel that my formal job was to make sure everyone feels safe and having fun at Peace House, but now I hope to be someone that can listen to them and hopefully guide them in a positive direction.

Now that the summer is over, I've had some time to truly reflect on the time I spent at Peace House over the last seven weeks. One thing I'm grateful for is the opportunity to witness just how genuine Jen, Mike, Jerry and Molly are as they run this program both during the summer and academic school year. I had a chance to see a passionate, loving, supportive, and comforting side of them that I never would have thought I'd be able to see. Another thing I realized this summer was that these children, every single one of them, has a story, and sometimes they just need someone to listen to them. Before this internship or any other job I've had with children, I would have gotten on them about their bad attitude or behavior, but I learned to ask them: how their day is going, how they are feeling and what can I do to help them because they need to be heard too. I learned that I have an immense amount of patience for children which is something so surprising to me, and I think what I've learned will definitely help me to be there for my little brother as he grows up.

Peace House grew on me over time and will always have a special place in my heart and so do all of the children, staff, and volunteers I met throughout the course of the summer. In all, I appreciate being given this opportunity to intern at Peace House, and I wish nothing but happiness, positivity, and "goodness" to everyone I interacted with. I love you all, and I will be back soon :)

# Art Wins

By Jerry Berrigan

On August 6th my sisters and I traveled to Brunswick, GA for a court proceeding of the Kings Bay Plowshares (<https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/>). The group, which includes our mother, Elizabeth McAlister, initiated a radical act of protest against nuclear weapons and war on the morning of April 4, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. By entering and participating in symbolic disarmament at the King's Bay Naval Station, home to the Atlantic fleet of Trident submarines, the 7 uttered a cry of alarm regarding the threat of nuclear war and referenced Dr. King's critique of the "Giant Triplets" of racism, militarism, and extreme materialism so active in American life in his day and in ours. For her role in this action, our Mom, who just recently turned 80, had sat in the Glynn County Detention Center for seventeen months.

Mom has always been loving and flinty and resolute. It remains her conviction that nuclear weapons are the scourge of the earth; upon this belief she was willing to stake everything. All our lives we have witnessed our parents dramatically confront the National Security State and "pay up" in courts and prisons. And here we were again.

Our day began with a 15-minute visit at the jail, clean and modern and cold in the dripping Georgia heat. Conditions, we knew, are incredibly repressive in this facility. The food is industrial; books are restricted; time outside is nearly nonexistent; the only mail permitted is 3"x5" prestamped postcards. Because Mom received so much mail, she aroused the indignation of vindictive officials, who routinely returned mail to senders for minor infractions of form. Over the course of her incarceration all of Mom's grandkids, for example, had mail returned as "undeliverable" for adding artwork or other embellishments to their postcards.

Some weeks later, Mom was released from jail by court order, and in October, all five Mechtenberg-Berrigans traveled to Georgia to support the Plowshares at trial. Somewhere in there, we received a packet from Brendan Walsh and Willa Bickham, long-time friends from the Baltimore Catholic Worker, containing photocopies of half a dozen postcards illustrated by our mutual friend Marilyn O'Connor, a long-time Baltimore peace activist and artist. Somehow, all of the postcards had passed the censors and made it through to Mom.

For me, Marilyn's gift came as a sort of breakthrough, a ray of light piercing a bleak and foreboding landscape. By copying, with pen and ink, great artworks from an art history textbook, Marilyn referenced a joy commonly held with Mom, in the beholding and creating of visual art, and also brought the strength of two millenia of Catholicism into Mom's jail cell. The handwritten marginal annotations were sometimes perfunctory ("c. 1350, Prague, Nat'l Gallery;" "Entering Jerusalem, Byzantine, Palermo") and sometimes exclamatory ("Learning from the Old Masters. There were some women masters too! The COLORS are GLORIOUS! You'll see them someday. Enjoy the picture.") By slipping these works, a half dozen or more, under the cell door, so to speak, Marilyn suggests an agency on the part of the Holy Spirit first referenced in the Acts of the Apostles. For more information on the KBP: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-pope-and-catholic-radicals-come-together-against-nuclear-weapons>; <https://www.thenation.com/article/kings-bay-plowshares-trial/>



# Peace House

321 Phelps Ave.  
Kalamazoo, MI 49048

**Fertile Ground** is sent twice a year to friends and supporters of Peace House. If you would rather not receive this newsletter, please return this page with a note to that effect. If you would like to receive periodic electronic updates from us (no more than twice a month), please visit [peacehousekzoo.org](http://peacehousekzoo.org) and click on "Stay in Touch."

*"The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us."* —Dorothy Day

## Who we are

Peace House, a community in the Catholic Worker movement, is dedicated to fostering peace, justice and relationship in the Eastside neighborhood of Kalamazoo. We believe that the good of each person is bound to the well-being of society as a whole; therefore we advocate taking personal responsibility for creating, in the words of Catholic Worker cofounder Peter Maurin, "a new society within the shell of the old...a place where it is easier for people to be good." We are here to be a resource for our neighbors. We rely on the involvement of a loving, dedicated extended community to do this work. **Please feel free to get in touch.**

**Jen and Mike DeWaele**

**Clara and Alice**

**321 Phelps Ave.**

**Jerry and Molly Mechtenberg-Berrigan**

**Amos, Jonah and Leah**

**313 Phelps Ave.**

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## How you can be a part

**We welcome and celebrate ALL people, regardless of race, religion, political affiliation, nationality, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or ability.**

- ◆ Please consider donating snacks for our afterschool program. We enjoy healthy snacks like fresh fruit, trail mix, crackers, cheese, granola bars, and popcorn (no nuts please). Homemade cookies and other treats are also welcome for our older kids on Wednesdays.
- ◆ We always need prizes (\$1–\$2) for our "prize box." These are small rewards that kids select after they have completed their homework.
- ◆ We often need help with our tutoring program in the winter months when our regular volunteers go out of town. Join our sub list!
- ◆ Join our email list to get regular updates and discover other ways to participate. To do this, go to our website [peacehousekzoo.org](http://peacehousekzoo.org) and click on "Stay in Touch" and then "Join our mailing list."
- ◆ Spread the word! If you know of someone who may be interested, please tell them about Peace House!