

A community effort from the very beginning

Throughout Sharon Moulton's life she was at the forefront of community engagement and volunteer work. Before her involvement at Habitat, she was an active member at Edwards Church through their outreach committee, where she worked closely with other members to determine the greatest areas of need within the larger community. She realized that food insecurity was a large problem in the area, and saw that the Amherst Survival Center was completely overwhelmed (as the only Survival Center in the area at the time). So, she joined the efforts of others in the local religious community to organize and open a Survival Center for the Northampton and Easthampton communities.

Sharon didn't stop there! During the church's "Beyond the Band-Aid" campaign, a year-long celebration that promoted helping those in need and formulating substantive change in the area, she attended a workshop where she was exposed to the national Habitat for Humanity. She also learned that previous efforts in the area to start a local chapter had failed. Moved by the cause, she used her position as chair of the outreach committee at Edward's Church to guarantee that around 1988/1989 they would donate more than half of the money necessary to start a chapter in the region. Through the collaboration of Edwards Church, South Congregational Church in Amherst, First Congregational Church in Amherst, First Churches in Northampton, College Church, and others, Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity was created.

"I'll always remember [Habitat for Humanity founder] Millard Fuller coming all the way from Georgia to Amherst, to our ceremony where we were accepted as an affiliate. It was so moving to meet him."

When the affiliate began, Sharon's role was primarily in the fundraising committee, where she would create fundraising events and was responsible for donor appreciation projects. She explained that there were many difficulties in starting a Habitat affiliate in the beginning, especially in terms of fundraising for projects. Despite the hardships, the community took in Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity with open arms and they were able to successfully establish a basis for the well-developed Pioneer Valley Habitat that we know today. When she thinks back to a pivotal moment for the organization she credits the largest shift to the hiring of MJ Adams, the first Executive Director who fundamentally changed the organization and helped the founders establish legitimacy and professionalism within the affiliate.