



Rosanne Haggerty

AMHERST COLLEGE
Class of 1982

Rosanne Haggerty is the founder of Common Ground Community, the largest developer of supportive housing in the United States.

One of eight children, Rosanne grew up in West Hartford, Connecticut, where her mother still lives. Service was modeled in her home from her earliest years; after church each week, Rosanne's family served food at a single room occupancy (SRO) hotel across the street from the church. The residents of that hotel became friends of the family, attending holiday dinners and in other ways becoming a regular part of her life.

Financial aid made it possible for Rosanne to attend Amherst, which she could not otherwise have afforded.

At Amherst, she had a series of experiences that helped shape her future career path. Rosanne went into her senior year assuming that she'd attend law school after college. But while researching her senior thesis—on writer, social critic and Trappist monk Thomas Merton—Rosanne began to think about ways she might use her abilities to more directly effect social change. At the same time, as one of two students serving on the Board of Trustees' honorary degree committee, she met one of the leaders of Covenant House, a large, privately funded agency that provides shelter and service to homeless and runaway youth.

Inspired by these experiences, Rosanne realized that her Amherst education carried with it a sense of responsibility, an obligation to apply what she had learned for the benefit of others. She decided that she could afford to take some risks with her first job after graduation, so she worked at Covenant House for a year. She spent the next seven years developing housing for the poor and homeless with Brooklyn Catholic Charities.

In 1991, Rosanne established Common Ground Community, a nonprofit organization that has become the preeminent supportive housing provider in the country and an innovative developer of strategic solutions for the problem of homelessness. The organization's work is imitated throughout the United States and worldwide.

Common Ground has transformed derelict buildings in Times Square and other neighborhoods into supportive housing residences, where formerly homeless tenants are helped to rebuild their lives with links to employment, healthcare and the support of a community. The organization's view that homeless is solvable rests on a strategy of moving long-term homeless people from the streets and shelters directly into housing, and on preventing homelessness by assisting vulnerable people to secure stable housing at moments of crisis.

Common Ground is now developing or advising in the creation of solutions to homelessness in London, Tokyo, Toronto, South Australia, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Connecticut and New York's Hudson Valley. In 2001, Rosanne received a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation "genius award," in recognition of her work.

In addition to her role as president of Common Ground, Rosanne serves as a Life Trustee of Amherst College and the Folger Shakespeare Library and as a director of the Times Square Alliance, Center for Urban Community Services and Quest Diagnostics.