Alternative Housing Options for Individuals with Disabilities

A Guide for Forming and Implementing Community Partnerships

The **Coleman**
F O U N D A T I O N

A project of Center for Independent Futures, Evanston, IL

Center
For **Independent**
Futures®

In collaboration with families and communities

Purpose

Currently, in Illinois and beyond, housing for individuals with disabilities is chosen, designed, owned, and supported by traditional social service agencies that rely primarily on state and federal funds. This is limiting. The need to expand funding sources and housing stock is critical.

Center for Independent Futures (CIF) has over twelve years of experience working with family groups to develop diverse, community-based housing. CIF is committed to training and guiding individuals with disabilities, their families, and their communities in a process to reach their goals for full lives.

This guide is meant to assist individuals, their families, and social service organizations in the convening and formation of community partnerships for the purpose of creating affordable, sustainable alternative housing options for individuals with disabilities. Each alternative housing project will look differently based on the community of origin, desired support, contributions of the community partners, the geographic area, and/or public and private funds available. The guide can help determine individual and organizational readiness, as well as serve as a template through a facilitated process. The hope is that this guide is a starting point in that process and offers some alternative thinking and critical questions to be considered in the transition to independent living.

Acknowledgements

Through the generous support of the Coleman Foundation, Center for Independent Futures was able to work with four family groups throughout the Chicagoland area in developing a process that engages community partners in the development of alternative housing. This guide represents the collaborative efforts of many. A special thanks to the following:

- Paul Arntson, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at Northwestern University
- Abbie Belford, B.A., Housing Intern, Community Choices
- Nick Connell, Regional Leader, L'Arche USA
- Jane Doyle, Ph.D., Co-Founder, Center for Independent Futures
- Jackie Eddy, M.B.A., Communications Manager, Center for Independent Futures
- Rebecca Kaplan, B.S., Executive Assistant, Center for Independent Futures
- Jennifer Knapp, M.A., Executive Director, Community Choices
- Richard Koenig, Ph.D., Executive Director, Housing Opportunity Development Corp.
- Ann Sickon, J.D., Executive Director, Center for Independent Futures
- John Voit, President/CEO, UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago
- Andrew Werth, J.D., Attorney, Central Law Group

Table of Contents

> *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*
>
> *– Margaret Mead*

Introduction: Is this the right move?

There are 54 million people with disabilities in the United States. They all need a place to live and most need some supportive services. The question is: How do we meet these needs?

In Illinois, as in most states, we have been meeting these needs through government funding. However, just looking to the government for support has created two problems. First, there is not enough funding to meet the needs, and second, relying solely on the government makes people with disabilities a dependent class, separate from the rest of the population.

We believe we need to bring more people to the conversation and supplement government resources. Instead of simply being consumers of government services and advocates for people with disabilities, the time is right to become co-creators of a different housing system. In this way, people with disabilities can rise above the stereotype of dependence and become vital community members, renters, homeowners, and neighbors.

Creating sustainable, inclusive, alternative housing models for individuals with disabilities must begin at the local level, and families are often the best place to start. Throughout this guide, when we refer to "families," we are including parents, siblings, friends, and others who care about a person with a disability. Families living with members who have disabilities have unique knowledge of what kinds of supports, spaces, and environments are necessary to ensure a happy, productive, and healthy living arrangement. Housing appropriate for one person with disabilities may be completely unacceptable for another. One individual may be able to live independently while another requires 24-hour support. What's most important is matching housing and living arrangements with the needs and desires of the person with disabilities.

As a single family unit, it can be difficult to meet all the needs of a child with disabilities. Together, groups of families have more resources (time, money, energy, talents, networks) to contribute to meeting the housing needs of their family members. By connecting with other families, parents can find roommates for their son/daughter, expand their thinking, meet friends for mutual support, and discover a network of people similar to themselves.

For this alternative housing model to be sustainable, families must tap into additional resources available in their own communities, such as churches, disability service providers, city departments, charitable foundations, and social service organizations. Developing these "Community Partnerships" can bring together individuals with disabilities, their families, and community partners, building networks that support developing housing options and the daily support needed to ensure full lives in the community.

If you are beginning to think about the housing options for your son/daughter with disabilities, this guide can help you understand the innovative housing solutions emerging in communities and the power of Community Partnerships as connected systems of resources.

Reasons for joining a Community Partnership

The Community Partnership model offers a new way of developing housing options for individuals with disabilities. The following are reasons this model is gaining traction:

1. **GOVERNMENT IS AT CAPACITY:** Funding is not increasing. In fact, there are cuts being made. We need to expand our options. If we don't, people will not be able to have rich, healthy lives and risk ending up in the penal system, in hospitals or nursing homes, in large state institutions, or homeless.

2. **MAKES FINANCIAL SENSE:** Expanding the scope of available resources means that more people will have their needs met. When individuals, their families, and community partners are engaged, they can both give and receive.

3. **FLEXIBILITY AND CONTROL:** Many families want the needs and desires of their loved one to define his or her lifestyle, not agency rules that are the same for everyone. Community Partnership models offer greater choice and flexibility.

4. **FOCUS ON CONTRIBUTIONS:** Individuals and their families are the experts in their lives and know what they need for a full life. The Community Partnership approach focuses on the gifts and talents of individuals with disabilities and their families.
   a. Individuals – build capacity, hold responsibility, and become their own problem-solvers, rather than being dependent.
   b. Families – share their gifts, talents, and connections to the community, rather than being an untapped resource.

5. **BUILDING COMMUNITY:** By coming together, we are creating a community and personal network for individuals with disabilities that can outlast formal organizations. We strive to facilitate sustainable networks for each individual.

6. **CREATIVE THINKING:** We don't always have capacity within the industry to create totally new solutions. We need leaders from other sectors to help us identify new and creative funding mechanisms and support structures.
   a. We need to expand beyond the current "take care of" model to a model of education and independence, focusing on growth and development leading to greater independence.
   b. We need to add perspectives and leadership outside of the Developmental Disability system and emphasize housing, community engagement, support, and employment – not just programs.

7. **LEGACY:** Community Partnerships represent a new way of thinking that can characterize a new generation of supports for people with disabilities. As we develop new processes, we leave a legacy for others to follow.

Challenges of Community Partnerships

While there are many reasons to create Community Partnerships, the task presents several difficulties. Here are some challenges that emerge:

1. *NEW MINDSET:* There is a difference between simply pursuing the goal of "getting people housed" and learning how to work as a cohesive group. We must change from advocates to co-creators and adopt leadership styles that are collaborative, rather than directive.

2. *STEEP LEARNING CURVE:* The services systems are complicated, and families need to understand how they work and decide how they want to engage with these systems.

3. *TIME AND ENERGY:* It takes a lot of time and effort to create housing options. Many families are tired from supporting their loved one and do not have the time and energy to develop something new.

4. *DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PARTNERS:* Partnerships are built on relationships. Many individuals with disabilities and their families feel isolated from their communities and lack experience in developing partnerships with community members.

5. *FINDING RESOURCES:* Developing new options means tapping into resources that are currently unused. People will need to be convinced that it is worthwhile to use their resources in new ways.

6. *RESISTANCE:* Moving to a Community Partnership model requires a shift in control of resources and decisions, and some people in decision-making positions may resist change. The current system breeds competition rather than collaboration, and some established organizations will work against a community partnership model.

7. *SYSTEM CHANGE IS DIFFICULT:* The present funding stream is not supportive of multiple stakeholders and sources of income. Incorporating multiple stakeholders requires a shift in thinking and will result in more responsibility and accountability for families.

> *"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."*
>
> *– Goethe*

A place to start: Is this right for my family?

If you are beginning to think about the housing options for your son/daughter with disabilities, this guide can help you understand the innovative housing solutions emerging in communities and the power of Community Partnerships.

For families considering the housing options discussed in this guide, it is important that they ask themselves these questions before starting:

1. Does the housing arrangement that my son/daughter wants already exist? Is it available? If not, am I willing to help create a housing solution that will meet his/her needs and desires?

2. Am I willing to take steps to get my son/daughter ready for more independent living?

3. Can the supports my son/daughter requires be met in an alternative living model?

4. Am I willing and able to commit financial resources to creating a new housing arrangement?

5. Am I willing and able to commit time and expertise to creating this new housing arrangement?

6. Am I willing and able to reach out to personal networks and/or associations for support of alternative housing arrangements?

7. Do I want to work in community with families and partners to create solutions not just for my son/daughter, but for many other individuals with disabilities?

8. Do I know other families that I want to work alongside?

If you have answered yes to these questions,
then this guide is for you – keep reading!

Forming the family group: Can we work together?

How to get together:

Think about who you know. Do you talk to the other moms or dads who also pick up their sons or daughters from special recreation programs? Are you part of a support group for parents with children with disabilities? Does your son or daughter have friends from school or transition programs who are getting ready to move away from home?

Start conversations with people from different groups that you belong to, whether it's the PTA or a book club. Likely there are individuals just like you in your social circles who are searching for alternative living arrangements for their son or daughter. If you don't ask, you'll never know, so start those conversations!

Tips for getting together:

Be familiar: It is often beneficial if you have an existing personal relationship with the members of the family group. Understanding their son/daughter's story and trusting them to contribute to the group's mission will create a good foundation for your group.

Start small: Eventually you will need a core group of six to eight families who are invested in creating alternative housing solutions. At the beginning of this process, start by talking to one or two people you know. If you end up with a very large group of interested families, great! Each family's commitment level will differ. Assemble the core working group at the start of the process and keep other families informed and interested.

Be open: It is important to consider families of individuals of all abilities. People with different abilities bring different gifts, and this variety contributes to more robust interaction and complimentary support. Be open to suggestions of different places and partners, as well.

Change perspectives: As a parent of a son/daughter with a disability, you are often in "advocacy mode." You look out for the best interests of your child, making sure that they feel comfortable, are accepted, and have the services they need to thrive. Developing a successful family group requires a change in perspective from being an advocate to being a co-creator of something new and different from the status quo.

Get organized: Forming the group will take organization and persistence. Send a few emails or make a few phone calls. Find a place that's easy to locate in your community and hold a preliminary "Call to Action" meeting to gauge interest. Identify a convener and communicator to maintain momentum as the group gets started.

Building Community and Trust

Community is based on a philosophy of shared commitment. A distinguishing characteristic of community is that everyone has a voice, and in turn, shares responsibility, gifts and talents, accountability, and celebration.

Family groups combine individuals with many different interests and motivations. Getting to know what motivates the people sitting around the table can help the group as a whole see common purposes, trust one another, and recognize the depth of the issue at hand.

> *"Some people think they are in community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness. It is a willingness to extend yourself to encounter and know the other."*
>
> **— David Spangler**

Community is not built in an empty room, but rather around a table brimming with lively conversation, laughter, and mutual understanding. Community building activities and processes can help create an environment conducive to working cooperatively. Building trust is a key element of community building and working in a group. In a trusting setting, problem-solving and decision-making will be more efficient.

Tips for building trust:

- Keep your commitment and be reliable
- Be honest and open
- Volunteer information and share concerns
- Agree to disagree
- Maintain consistency in your actions
- Avoid gossip and exclusion
- Be personal

Tips for leading change:

- Establish a team committed to change
- Create and communicate a vision
- Identify obstacles
- Build capacity, skills, and tools to support the vision
- Empower Action

Insights from William Bridges, Peter Sange, and John Kotter

Tips for building community:

1. *Participate in team-building activities:* Team-building activities are an initial step that supports working together as a group. These activities allow individuals to get to know each other better. Team building can highlight interest, experiences, skills and passions.

    a. *Share Stories: Have each family bring in a photo of their son or daughter. Go around the room and share one success that your child has had and one challenge you see for the future. This activity will bring the individuals with disabilities to the center of the conversation and focus the group on why they are there.*

    b. *Hang out: Don't underestimate how much you can learn about group members and build trust from fun, informal gatherings. Make time for social activities!*

2. *Acknowledge self-interests and differences:* Every family has an idea of what they want for their son/daughter and what their son/daughter wants for him/herself. Begin there. After their self-interests and differences are voiced, see where there are commonalities across the group.

3. *Build consensus:* Most groups consist of many individuals with different ideas and opinions. To make decisions as the group, it is important that the group discusses each idea, notes agreements and disagreements, carefully thinks through the proposed ideas, and then evaluates the different proposals until one seems right for the group. This process allows everyone to participate and work together toward solutions that may not be the first preference for any one individual, but will be an agreed-upon decision that reflects the shared vision of the group.

    While the process of consensus building is more time-consuming than a voting process, it is important to recognize its benefits. The process:

    a. *Increases the quality of solutions developed by the group*
    b. *Guarantees that all group members' interests will be protected*
    c. *Increases participation, so the process enhances acceptance of the solution and willingness to implement it*
    d. *Encourages difference of opinion as natural and expected*
    e. *Depersonalizes the discussion and decision*
    f. *Eliminates the feeling that some group members "lose" and others "win"*
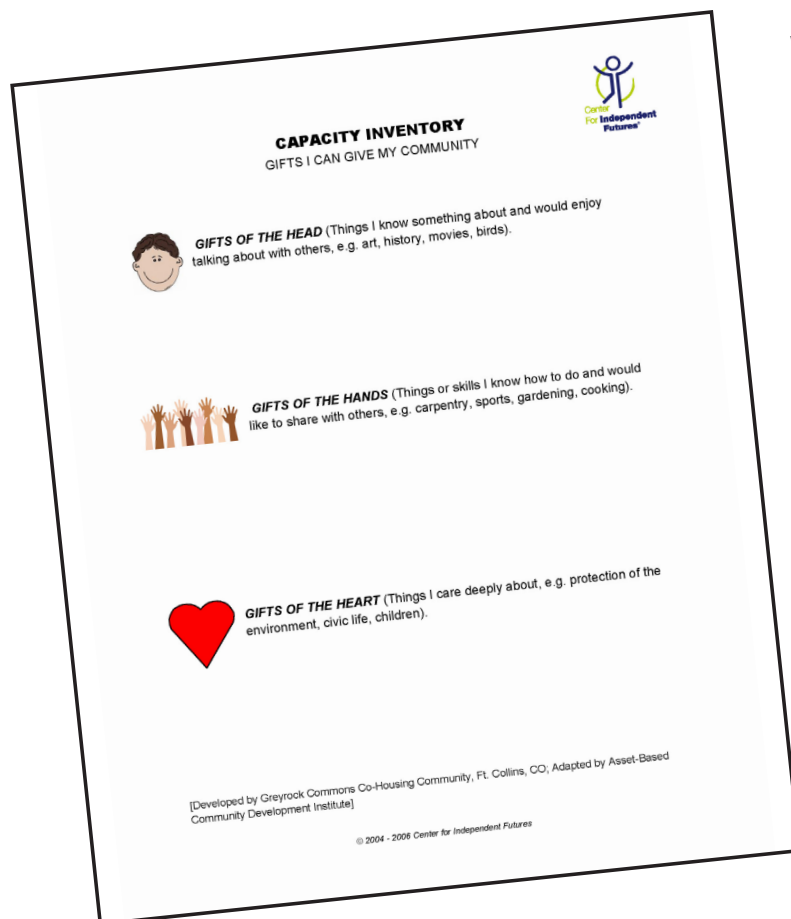
Assessing individual gifts and talents

Each one of you has individual gifts and talents to contribute to the cause of finding and developing alternative housing models. If you're thinking, "I don't really have any talents," think again. Your talent for making people feel comfortable, your passion for working with youth with disabilities, or your gardening skills may all be useful when working toward creating Community Partnerships with new organizations, helping people with disabilities transition to a new housing arrangement, or fixing up the physical appearance of the property's grounds.

"Hide not your talents. They for use were made. What's a sundial in the shade?"

— Benjamin Franklin

Your son/daughter also has gifts, talents, and expertise to contribute to a new housing arrangement. For example, maybe your son knows all the bus routes in town. Maybe another family's son knows how to cook. If these men live together, they can share their expertise and both develop new skills. You don't always need a "professional" to learn new things. If each person relies on the knowledge of the others in the group, everyone benefits with minimal cost!

CAPACITY INVENTORY
GIFTS I CAN GIVE MY COMMUNITY

Center For Independent Futures'

GIFTS OF THE HEAD (Things I know something about and would enjoy talking about with others, e.g. art, history, movies, birds).

GIFTS OF THE HANDS (Things or skills I know how to do and would like to share with others, e.g. carpentry, sports, gardening, cooking).

GIFTS OF THE HEART (Things I care deeply about, e.g. protection of the environment, civic life, children).

[Developed by Greyrock Commons Co-Housing Community, Ft. Collins, CO, Adapted by Asset-Based Community Development Institute]

© 2004 - 2006 Center for Independent Futures

When each person involved in the family group shares his/her experiences with one another, the group develops a sense of mutual responsibility. Instead of dependence on government entitlements, disability service providers, and health professionals, family groups can build an interdependence focused on individuals' capacities. Instead of static and inflexible supports found in professional/government settings, family groups can build dynamic and flexible or responsive support systems as individuals grow, change, and mature.

Developing the vision: What do we want?

Decide on housing and support criteria:

Moving out of the family home is one of the most important milestones in a person's life. As you are co-creating a future housing arrangement, the group needs to create housing and support criteria for moving forward. Engage with your son/daughter throughout the process.

Each family's visions will be informed by their sons'/daughters' expectations for their own futures. Families ask, "How will I know when my child is ready?" "How do I begin the discussion?" There is not one time or one way to begin the conversation about moving away from home. Each individual is unique, so trust yourself in knowing when and how to begin the conversation. Remember that change is hard for everyone and that change is a process. So begin the conversation, continue the conversation, repeat the conversation, and explore and create as a family what the future will look like.

Possible ways to initiate the conversation about moving away from home:

1. Identify others (peers, siblings, neighbors) who have moved away from home and visit them.

2. Expand your son's/daughter's connections in the community both to people and places.

3. Engage your son/daughter in household chores.

Once the core group has formed, built trust and personal relationships with one another, and shared gifts and talents, it's time to move on to developing the vision for the housing arrangement. Each family might have different ideas about where the housing should be located, how many bedrooms are necessary, what the structure should be like, what is affordable, what support means, etc. In order to move forward in the process, the group will need to come to a consensus about these issues.

You may have already started this process in discussions about what sort of supports your son/daughter needs in a living arrangement, the kind of community you imagine will help your son/daughter thrive, the daily supports needed, and the physical structure that could best fit his/her needs. Now is the time to find the commonalities between families and form a list of criteria for the physical environment. What are the "must-have" elements that are non-negotiable? What are some elements that "would be nice" but are not necessary for the group to move forward with a housing decision? Families should brainstorm their individual visions and then practice consensus-building techniques to determine what is best for the group as a whole.

Determine the type of housing and supports desired:

After deciding the critical elements that the physical environment must have, the group can begin thinking about the type of housing and the support systems desired for their sons/daughters. This can be a challenging endeavor since there are a vast range of considerations when deciding on community living options. In order to simplify the options, we have divided them into six main categories including housing type, ownership type, funder of property, level of services, service provider, and service funder. The first three categories relate to the physical structure, while the latter three deal with supports. The best decisions are informed decisions, so let's take a closer look at the options you will need to consider.

Community Living Options Matrix

The matrix can be a resource that succinctly explains the housing and support options. A useful activity might be to give each family a Community Living Option Matrix, explain the categories, using the descriptions below, and then have the families circle their preferred choices and cross out the undesired options.

Once each family has determined what they are interested in, see what overlap exists within the group. Are there shared desires? Do people fit into one group or multiple groups? As you discuss the various elements of the matrix, the goal is for the group to narrow down their vision for housing and support to a few options. These will be the options that you research in Step 3.

Your group may have difficulty coming to a consensus on exactly what type of housing and supports you want. Don't get discouraged. Remember that it is probable that not all the individuals will end up living together. With that in mind, choose a few options in the matrix and start researching the availability or development possibilities in your desired locations. After the first Community Living Option gets underway, the group can begin looking into other housing and support options that will fit the needs of other individuals.

(See the following pages for the matrix, descriptions, and questions to guide the discussion.)

Community Living Option Matrix

HOUSING			SUPPORTS			
Housing Type	**Ownership Type**	**Funder of Property**	**Level of Services**	**Service Provider**	**Service Funder**	
A home	Single Owner	Individual	Call-in	Family	Individual	
Condo	Condo	Family	Weekly	Roommate	Family	
Apartment	Cooperative	Agency/ Organization	Part-time daily	Neighbor	Agency/ Organization	
Room	Joint ownership	Grantors	Full-time daily	Volunteers	Grantors	
Dormitory	Agency/ Organization	Financial Institution	Live-in overnight	Personal Support	Government	
	Government	Government	24 hour daily	Agency/ Organization		
				Government		

Community Living Option Matrix – Housing

Housing Type	Ownership Type	Funder of Property
A home	Single Owner	Individual
Condo	Condo	Family
Apartment	Cooperative	Agency/Organization
Room	Joint ownership	Grantors
Dormitory	Agency/Organization	Financial Institution
	Government	Government

Housing Type: What kind of physical structure is desired?
- A Home: A single-family, free-standing residential dwelling
- Condo: A unit in a multi-family dwelling that is owned, not rented
- Apartment: A unit in a multi-family dwelling that is rented, not owned
- Room: An individual room occupied by one or two people in a multi-tenant building (such as Single Room Occupancy hotels)
- Dormitory: An arrangement with individual or shared bedrooms and shared common spaces

Ownership Type: Who will own the property/asset?
- Single Owner: An individual owner
- Condo: Individual ownership of units; Association oversees condo building
- Cooperative: Families buy shares into the cooperative and jointly own the property. Involves cooperative decision-making
- Joint ownership: i.e. Limited Liability Company (LLC)—partners (possibly unconnected to the families) invest in the property and have greater protection of assets and flexibility to withdraw from the investment
- Agency/Organization: A non-profit owner; Advantage—potentially exempt from property taxes; Disadvantage—the property is not an asset for contributors, but rather a donation
- Government: Government-owned public housing or institution

Funder of Property: Who will pay for the property?
- Individual: Individual with disabilities through Special Needs Trust or their own assets
- Family: The family or loved ones of the individual with disabilities
- Agency/Organization: Agency or organization funds (whether through fundraising, capital campaigns, assets they own, or other monies)
- Grantors: A grant provided by organizations such as United Way, Rotary, or private foundations
- Financial Institution: A mortgage
- Government: ex. HUD (Illinois Housing Development Authority) could fund the building or property development

Decide on housing and support criteria:

As you consider your housing criteria, the following questions may be helpful:

- When will your loved one be ready to move out?
- How many individuals will live together?
- Is there designated space for support staff?
- What is the financial capacity of the group?
- Should the living space be integrated (disability, age, location)?
- Is there available communal space?
- Is the residence accessible (for visitors? for residents?)?
- What transportation is available?
- What is within walking distance of the residence (library, grocery store, etc.)?
- What renovations and safety provisions need to be made to the property?
- Where is the residence (geographic parameters)?

NOTE: In all of these Community Living Options, residents are responsible for rent and utilities, as well as any additional living expenses (food, clothing, etc.). Individual, family, community, or government resources can be used to cover these costs.

Community Living Option Matrix – Supports

Level of Services	Service Provider	Service Funder
Call-in	Family	Individual
Weekly	Roommate	Family
Part-time daily	Neighbor	Agency/Organization
Full-time daily	Volunteers	Grantors
Live-in overnight	Personal Support	Government
24 hour daily	Agency/Organization	
	Government	

Level of Services: What level of support will be necessary at the residence?
- Call-in: Someone checking in periodically
- Weekly: A person who visits weekly to assist with budgeting, grocery shopping, etc.
- Part-time daily: Support provided up to 4 hours per day
- Full-time daily: Support provided 8-12 hours per day
- Live-in overnight: A roommate who is present but sleeping overnight; Acts as an emergency contact; Often combined with part or full-time support
- 24 hour daily: Awake staff 24 hours per day

Service Provider: Who will provide the support services at the home?
- Family (or friends, guardian, etc.)
- Roommate
- Neighbor: Often a call-in situation
- Volunteers: Unpaid workers who help occasionally (i.e. social events), but not usually for daily care
- Personal Support: Workers employed by the individual or family
- Agency/Organization: Agency coordinates, schedules, and employs workers
- Government: Government employs workers at a state-run facility

Service Funder: Who is paying for the services provided?
- Individual: The individual, usually out of Social Security or personal wages
- Family: Private pay
- Agency/Organization: Programs fund services for members/clients of the agency/ organization
- Grantors: Specific grants for services or programs
- Government: Division of Developmental Disabilities Home and Community-Based Waiver (Home-based or CILA)

Decide on housing and support criteria:

As you consider support, the following questions may help guide the discussion:

o   How will support be structured?

o   How is support customized to meet individuals' needs?

o   What routines are established?

o   What problem-solving process is utilized?

o   How is interdependence/peer support facilitated?

o   How is community-building facilitated among the residents?

o   How are skills developed?

o   How are individuals involved in the community?

o   What role do individuals, families, and staff play in decision-making?

o   How is readiness determined?

o   What characteristics are you looking for in staff?

o   Who hires staff?

o   What community partners are engaged in support?

As families think about support criteria, considering a support philosophy may also be helpful.

SUPPORT PHILOSOPHY	
System Centered	**Person Centered**
Client/Customer/Patient	Participant/Community Member
Pre-determined Choice	Multiple Choice
Dependence	Interdependence
Top-down Decision Making	Decision Making by Consensus
Needs/Deficits Based	Gifts and Strengths Based
Initiated by Staff	Initiated by Individual

Creating a shared vision

Before you move on to Step 3, it is good to step back and articulate the vision of the group. A vision statement describes the world as it should be—a possible future we keep creating. A vision requires a stretch of expectations, aspirations, and performance. It explains the purpose of the group and gives everyone a united focus.

There are various resources available online to guide the group through creating a vision statement. The key is to make sure that everyone in the group shares their input and is content with the final statement.

__By the end of Step 2, your group should have developed:__

1. Criteria for housing

2. Criteria for support

3. Housing and support options based on the matrix

4. A shared vision statement

*"Vision without action is merely a dream;
Action without vision just passes the time;
Vision with action can change the world."*

– Joel Arthur Barker

Researching the options: How do we make our vision a reality?

Learn from experiences of other family groups:

Talk to families that have created housing for their loved ones and visit residences if possible. Whether you see something you like or something you dislike, visiting existing options will help families envision the possibilities and continue articulating their own vision for housing.

A group of families in the west suburbs of Chicago partnered with their community church to create a home for four men and a community builder. The five-bedroom, single story home is located in a residential neighborhood. The home is owned by the church and services are provided both by paid staff and volunteers through a non-profit organization affiliated with the church. Residents enjoy participating fully in church activities and keeping busy with work or volunteer opportunities during the day.

In a northern suburb of Chicago, a group of families purchased individual condominiums for their loved ones in a larger condominium building. The families used city funds, state housing funds, and federal housing funds to finance the purchases. Supportive services are provided by a community builder that lives in one of the condominiums and by a local service provider. The building is located in downtown Evanston, with easy access to transportation, shops, and activities.

A group of families just outside of Chicago came together to form an LLC to purchase an urban apartment building. Most of the members of the LLC are not related to individuals living in the building but participated as a social investment. The building has six apartments and commercial space at street level. Six individuals with disabilities and a community builder live in the building, with support provided by a local service provider. Residents are near to public transportation and within walking distance of restaurants and stores.

In central Illinois, a group of families formed a support organization for their loved ones. In consultation with potential residents, one family purchased a four-bedroom house for three adults with disabilities and a community builder in a residential neighborhood. The community builder serves as an emergency presence and assists the other residents with problem-solving. A grant was obtained from the county for support in community living, which is offered by a local service provider.

Engage a "professional team" to further define the vision:

When the family group has a more established housing criteria and an overall vision for the alternative housing options they want to invest in, it is time to get professional opinions and assistance. Professionals will have a better understanding of local rules and regulations, available resources, and needed expertise. Here are a few examples of members you may want on your "professional team":

- Real estate agent
- Real estate attorney
- Financial lender
- Insurance agent
- Architect
- General contractor
- Building inspector
- Building manager
- Housing Developer
- Affordable housing specialist
- Environmental inspector
- City planner / zoning commission

"The strong individual is one who asks for help when he needs it."

— Rona Barrett

The final team you assemble will be based on the type of housing you desire, whether it currently exists or must be constructed, and what financial structure will be utilized.

Develop questions for doing research:

> *"Who questions much shall learn much and retain much."*
>
> *— Francis Bacon*

After you have come to a consensus about the housing criteria and type of housing desired, it is time to start brainstorming questions to solidify the vision and then dig around for the answers.

The first step for the group could include coming up with questions that can be answered by the families themselves. You may have already thought about some of these questions, but you should be ready to make decisions about them by the end of this step. The following are a few examples:

- What investments of time and energy are you willing to make?
- What financial investments are you committed to undertaking?
- What communities will be the primary target areas?
- How many people do you envision living together?
- How integrated do you want the housing option to be within the community? Do you want it to be just people with disabilities living there or do you want people with disabilities to be living with other members of the community?
- Does what you want exist already in the community? Does the structure exist but need renovation to make it exactly what you want? Or will the structure need to be developed from the ground up?

Also, begin coming up with questions that can be answered through conversations with professionals, Internet or library research, and time spent exploring neighborhoods. The following are a few examples:

- What are the housing prices in the area?
- Which cities/developers are currently interested in developing housing and/or affordable housing?
- What relationships already exist between urban planners/developers/non-profits/housing authorities?
- Are there any grants available that would apply to this type of housing development/arrangement?
- What affordable housing options does this community support?
- What other funding structures might be possible for the type of development desired?

Answering questions will breed more questions, so be prepared for this step of the process to be quite time-consuming.

Research available housing stock and support services:

Once the questions have been identified, you will need to explore possibilities. One of the most important ways to get information is to tour residences that already exist. This will help your group to get ideas about what you like and what you don't like.

Groups should look at options that are offered by current providers as well as alternatives created by family groups. This stage would also be a good time to talk with service providers about what they offer so you can learn what is currently available versus what you want to create. Talk with individuals with disabilities and their families who already live in the community to learn what is going well and what they would change about their situation.

Identify community assets and resources:

Think about your community. Maybe you live next door to the city manager or you are friends with a member of the Rotary. Maybe you donate to Habitat for Humanity or you have a contact on the city council.

Tips for community asset mapping:

Most people have friends in the community who are in some way connected to housing, disability services, non-profit organizations, or charities.

1. Have families think about people they know and how they could potentially contribute toward the housing process, support needs, or community engagement.

2. Have families document any pertinent information, including contact details.

3. If professional contacts are sparse, have the group consider organizations and individuals with whom they could begin building relationships and contacts.

What are the connections you have with community leaders, businesses, institutions, city officials, affordable housing advocates, non-profit organizations, charities, etc.?

How could those connections be helpful during this stage of research or in further stages when the community partners assist with funding, construction, renovation, service provision, etc.?

T *Together*
E *Everyone*
A *Achieves*
M *More*
         – Author Unknown

Writing the housing concept paper: How can we present our vision?

Once you're at this step in the process, it's time to put your vision into words. If you were to tell someone in two paragraphs what you're trying to accomplish , what would you write? Getting this vision on paper will be challenging, but once you do it, you can use your description of the project to reach out to the community and engage partners.

Use the list you developed for the housing and support criteria and the most popular options from the matrix for ownership models, funder(s) of property, level of services, service provider(s), and service funder(s). Then think about what the group will need to ask for from potential community partners.

Your concept paper will have three basic parts: 1) vision statement, 2) plan for housing and support, and 3) criteria for partners.

1. *Vision statement*

Review the vision statement you created in Step 2 and make revisions as needed. This statement will be the first piece of your proposal.

2. *Plan for housing and support*

Use the list you developed for the housing and support criteria and the most popular options from the options matrix for ownership models, funder(s) of property, level of services, service provider(s), and service funder(s).

3. *Criteria for community partners*

Particularly when it comes to a service partner, your group will want to identify what you are looking for. Do you want an organization that is open to working with family groups? What kinds of services should they already be providing? Do they need to have connections in the community? What kinds of involvement does your group want to have with the partner?

(See the following page for an example of a concept paper.)

Family Group Proposal

Our Mission Statement:

To provide individuals with developmental disabilities the choice and the opportunity to live, work and play as fully participating members of their community. We envision their lives being enriched by an inclusive, integrated community that offers an array of supports and services designed to create and maintain a safe environment that promotes independent living, employment, and recreational activities.

Plan for housing and support:

- Housing and support criteria
  - Activities within walking distance
  - Public transportation available
  - Exposure to opportunities (education, activities, job-volunteer)
  - Own room
  - Live-in support person
  - Not "special"—just another residence
  - Inclusive community
- Timeline: 3-5 years
- Size: no more than 3 in an apartment or 4 in a house
- Type of housing: house or apartment (flexible)
- Ownership model: Family ownership

What we are looking for in community partners:

- Open to partnership with family group
- Agreement with family group vision for housing
- Employment opportunities, not workshop environment
- Inclusive recreation/leisure activities
- Integration with the community
- Provider has established local connections
- Family control over housing specifics (i.e. roommates, location, live-in staff)

Developing the Community Partnerships: What resources of time, expertise, networks, and funds do we need?

Estimated Timeline 3-4 months

Brainstorm potential partners:

At this stage in the process, you have developed your concept paper that includes your vision, plan for housing and support, and criteria for partners. It is time to begin working on building relationships with partners (individuals, non-profit organizations, private companies, associations, service providers, etc.) that can work with the group to help the project flourish and support the individuals to live full lives in their new housing environment.

Using the Community Asset Map you completed in Step 3, brainstorm lists of potential partners in each of the following categories:

1. **Housing**
   Partnering with a housing specialist—the local housing authority, a non-profit developer, the neighborhood services city department, or an architecture firm—will be crucial for the family group. People with extensive knowledge of housing structures, building codes, financing systems, and neighborhood regulations can be key resources to either call up at a moment's notice for information or assistance or to meet with on a regular basis as the project progresses.

   Examples: Affordable housing advocates, city planning offices, neighborhood services departments, neighborhood associations, architectural/engineering/planning firms

2. **Services**
   Support services will be a vital arm of the community partnership—arguably, the most important part. Quality services, not just the physical housing structure your son/daughter lives in, will determine his/her quality of life. Even if the family group decides it will provide its own support services or use volunteers, a service provider could be a helpful community partner. Their depth of knowledge and connections in the community will be invaluable.

3. **Community life**
   Relationships are developed and maintained through social activities and events, employment, and educational opportunities. It is key to engage with partners that will help create and facilitate opportunities for your son/daughter to interact with other people in the community and live a full life surrounded by caring individuals.

   Examples: YMCA, United Way, faith communities (ex. churches, synagogues), employment services

Engage working partners:

Recruiting the right people and creating the right type of partnerships will require a commitment of time, energy, persistence, creativity, and careful planning.

First, look at your list of potential partners and compare them with your criteria. Is there an obvious match? If so, you may want to invite them to your next meeting. If you don't know if there is a match, you may want to divide into teams and meet with the potential partners.

Questions should be specific to the type of partner and the resources they might be able to bring to the table. Some general questions to ask providers are:
- What is their interest in partnering?
- What commitment are they willing to make to the partnership?
- Who would be the contact person?
- What are the resources/assets they could bring to the partnership?

Depending on the type of partner, there might also be more specific questions you will ask. Below is a list of questions to ask potential support service partners:

Housing questions:
- What are ownership options? Is family ownership a possibility? Are you open to different structures?
- Who takes care of the property, i.e. maintenance, roof, landscaping?
- Do you have properties that aren't being used to the fullest potential? In what areas?
- If families put in money for property, what ongoing costs are involved?
- What expenses are families expected to cover?

Support questions:
- What kind of supports does your organization provide in the home? Who provides the support? What is the structure? What is the back-up system?
- How does control over roommates, house make up, and community builders work? Who decides? What is the process?
- How do you handle transportation (vans, public transit, etc.)?
- What kind of life skills training opportunities exist for individuals? Can that be addressed in the house?
- How many people per bedroom? How many rooms per house? Is there any parent input?

Engage working partners:

Staff questions:
- What staffing do you use for external supports? Whom do you recommend?
- How can we learn about the quality of services?
- How do you screen staff? Is there any family or individual control over this?
- What is your staff turnover rate?

Once you have gathered information about the potential partners, the group needs to make a decision about whom they want to work with. Review notes from meetings with potential partners and pull out important information that relates to your housing and support criteria. It may be helpful to organize this information in a table, so that you can easily compare different potential partners to decide which organization would be the best fit with your group.

Once partners are identified and engaged, consider creating a "Partnership Council" in which all partners gather at regular intervals during the project development and implementation phases in order to share ideas, act as mutual resources, and form professional friendships. Meet at a central location with a meeting agenda that allows plenty of time for input from various partners.

Create memorandum of understanding with partners:

Once a partnership has been formed, it is important for all parties to be clear on their commitments by creating a partnership agreement. Each partnership agreement will differ based on the different roles, but the skeleton structure of the agreement can remain the same. The partnership agreement will set the terms by which the parties relate to each other, identify the approximate term length of the partnership, and detail what each party is expected to contribute.

(See the following page for an example of a memorandum of understanding.)

Memorandum of Understanding Example

<div align="center">

Memorandum of Understanding

Family Group
And
Partnering Organization

</div>

I. Introduction

This Memorandum of Understanding establishes an agreement between *your family group* and *partnering organization*. This agreement focuses on *purpose of collaboration* and will seek to *describe efforts the partnership will promote.*

II. Responsibilities

Each party will appoint a person to serve as the official contact and coordinate the activities of each organization in carrying out this agreement. The initial appointees of each organization are:

List contact persons with email and telephone information.

The organizations agree to the following responsibilities for this partnership agreement:

Your family group and *partnering organization* will:
* *List shared tasks as bullet points*

Your family group will:
* *List tasks of the family group as bullet points*

Partnering Organization will:
* *List tasks of the partnering organization as bullet points*

III. Terms of Understanding

The term of this agreement is for a period of *insert length of agreement* and may be extended upon mutual agreement.

The signing of this partnership agreement is not a formal undertaking. It implies that the signatories will strive to reach, to the best of their ability, the objectives stated in the agreement.

On behalf of the organization I represent, I wish to sign this agreement and contribute to its further development.

Name   Date
Title
Organization

_____

Name   Date
Title
Organization

Writing the implementation plan: What's next?

The following outline may provide a helpful way to gather all of the information and decisions discussed in the previous five steps. This overview may be useful in applying for funding from grantors, presenting to key stakeholders, and other community organizing activities.

Think of the outline as a way to organize all of the work you have done up to this point, a formalization of the work of step four (concept paper), and a tool to identify decisions still to be made. This outline is intended as a guide. You may decide to include other useful information, pertinent to your specific group.

Implementation Plan Outline

ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

1. Explanation of Community Partnership

2. Type of organization (501c3 nonprofit, Limited Liability Corporation, affiliate of existing organization, cooperative)

3. Governance (Board of Directors; memorandum of understanding; advisory committee)

4. Commitments/responsibilities of the partners
   a. Individuals
   b. Families
   c. Working partners

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. Need

2. Goals or objectives

3. Mission/vision

4. Target population (age, disability, geographic area)

> *"A goal without a plan is just a wish."*
>
> *– Larry Elder*

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1. Purpose statement
   a. Explain the overall purpose of the project

2. Housing
   a. Explain the type of housing, how it will be acquired, how it will be financed, and what will need to be done to make the property ready

3. Support Services
   a. Explain the support structure and how support will be paid for

4. Community life
   a. Explain how you will ensure that participants have full lives as active citizens in the community

5. Responsible parties
   a. List who will make the project happen

6. Outcomes and evaluation
   a. What will success look like and how will you measure it?

TIMELINE

BUDGET

"Alone we can do so little; Together we can do so much."

– Helen Keller

Conclusion

The purpose of this guide is to help you understand the process of developing alternative housing options for individuals with disabilities through the engagement of community partnerships. It is our hope that you see that it is possible to create the future that individuals with disabilities and their communities desire.

We hope this guide helped you to gain an understanding of the scope of this endeavor and the work involved. This guide is just a beginning. If you are interested in receiving training and facilitation to create alternative housing options, please contact Center for Independent Futures.

Rebecca Kaplan
Email: center@independentfutures.com
Phone: 847-328-2044

"The future is not something we enter.
The future is something we create."

– Leonard Sweet

Resources

Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.* Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

Krouk-Gordon, D. & Jackins, B. D. (2013). *Moving out: A family guide to residential planning for adults with disabilities.* Bethesda, Maryland: Woodbine House, Inc.

Koenig, R. (2012). *Supportive housing for persons with disabilities: An alternative model.* Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.