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A Home of One's Own

Integrated supportive housing enables adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live on their own – with help when needed

By Amy Lennard Goehner with Melissa Stanton



Lauren and Scott on their wedding day. Future apartment mates Megan and Kristin. Erin dining in her apartment.

FAMILY-PROVIDED COURTESY PHOTOS

An inevitable and heartbreaking question haunts every parent of a person with special needs: "What will happen to my child when I'm gone?"

"You have a child with a disability and for a long time you're in the cloistered world of the school system," explains Francis, whose daughter Lauren (pictured above) has intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). "But then your child turns 21, and the school system services end. Reality sets in."

This article, which is a companion to the article [“Housing That's Home for People With \(or Without\) Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities,”](#) shares the story of three families.

Lauren and Scott

When Lauren moved into an integrated supportive housing apartment complex in Connecticut in 2021, she did so with her boyfriend, Scott, who also has I/DD. Both are in their early 30s.

Supportive Housing

The housing model is replicable, and those implementing it in Connecticut want to help that happen in and beyond the state. [Learn More](#)



A young man with I/DD celebrates moving into his own apartment.

FROM THE VIDEO 'NEW BEGINNINGS' (CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES)

“Whenever they're leaving, they tell staff where they're going, when they'll be back and who they're going with,” says Francis, Lauren's dad. “They don't need a lot of intense support, but staff keep an eye on them, provide transportation and help out as needed.” Prior to moving into the apartment, Lauren and Scott each lived at home and depended on their parents for everything. “There's no way I can overstate what it's been like to watch Lauren become her own person,” adds Francis. “I sleep well at night knowing that she's got great support. She's going to find her way.”

Before moving to the apartment, Lauren says, “I was very scared. I didn't know what living on my own was going to be like. But after a few weeks, I started lightening up. Scott showed me the confidence.” Adds Scott: “I'm pretty quick and smart at knowing what to do. I can adjust on the fly. Being an athlete, I have that mentality.”

Scott and Lauren are Special Olympians (each plays softball and basketball). The pair married in 2022.

Erin

Erin, 44, lived at home until 2022, when she moved into the same apartment complex where Scott and Lauren live.

“Erin moving to an apartment was probably the most difficult decision I've ever made,” says her mom, Peggy. “At the time, I thought no one could care for Erin better than I could. But it was the right decision. She's become more independent, and she loves her roommates.”

During the week, Erin does volunteer work at a local nonprofit organization. She returns to her parents' home most weekends. Peggy and Dave joke that they have “shared custody” with the staff at the apartment complex.

Erin's housing situation also benefits the couple's son. “He's married and has got a full plate with his own children,” says Dave. “He's a great brother to Erin, but we feel better knowing that it's not going to all fall on him when we pass.”

Peggy and Dave served on the board of [Favarh](#) (pronounced FAY-var), the Farmington Valley, Connecticut, chapter of [The Arc](#), which is the nation's largest community-based organization serving people who have I/DD. To parents seeking a residence for their adult child with I/DD, Peggy and Dave recommend connecting with a local agency, public or private, because they'll understand the applicable laws, regulations and options.

“It's a relief to know Erin is safe and that the staff love her and vice versa,” says Dave. “For 40 years, it was rare that Peggy and I could go off on our own. We've been able to do that now. It sounds a little selfish, but that's been good for our marriage.”

When asked to describe how she and her roommates feel about their new apartment, Erin quickly responds: “Pretty nifty. Pretty nifty. Happy campers.”

Megan

Kim and Scott's daughter Megan, 26, has Down syndrome. She has had a tracheostomy tube since infancy so communicates through American Sign Language (ASL).

“People will see someone signing, and they automatically think that person is deaf,” notes Kim. “When someone assumes Megan is deaf, she will indicate that she can hear. People don't need to know how to sign to her, because she can hear. However, knowing ASL does make it easier to understand what she's saying.”

Megan will be moving into an integrated supportive housing complex that's now under construction. When asked what she thinks about soon living on her own, Megan says she's excited about being able to “have an independent life” like her friends do. She has already

connected with her future roommate, Kristin, 28, who is not hearing impaired but knows ASL and is excited to be able to use it.

Megan, Lauren and several residents of a nearby integrated supportive housing complex work at a cafe owned by Megan's family. Megan works the counter, trains new employees and pretty much does anything needed. She was the inspiration for the business, where half of the employees have I/DD.

The establishment's motto: Everyone Belongs.

Related Articles from AARP

- [Parents Are Creating Communities for Their Grown Children Who Have Special Needs](#)
- [How to Create a Residential Community for Adults With I/DD](#)
- [Designing Housing for People With I/DD](#)
- [Finding a 'Forever Home' for My Adult Son With Autism](#)
- [Housing That's Home for People With \(or Without\) Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)

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More About Supportive Housing

The following videos, articles and websites are recommended by the experts and families interviewed for this article:

- [Infographic: People with I/DD in the United States](#)
- [Video: New Beginnings](#)
- [Website: American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [Website: National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making](#)
- [Video Series: Fourth Tuesday Forums on Innovative Options: Success Stories for Individuals, Families and Providers](#)
- [Video: Supportive Housing: Independent Living With Individualized Support](#)

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