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Housing That's Home for People With (or Without) Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The "integrated supportive housing" framework helps meet the need for safe, affordable and accessible places to live

By Amy Lennard Goehner with Melissa Stanton



A young man celebrates moving into his own apartment.

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

The United States is in need of nearly 7 million more affordable housing units, reports the [Pew Research Center](#). That shortage is particularly dire for the nearly 7 million adults who have [intellectual and developmental disabilities](#) (abbreviated as I/DD), whose added housing challenges range from a lack of financial and daily living supports to acceptance by neighbors.

In 2021, AARP Livable Communities published an [award-winning article series](#) about the worries of – and options available to – older adults whose grown children require ongoing care and parental involvement due to intellectual and developmental disabilities. The articles focused on the efforts of families to create housing options where their adult children can be cared for, thrive and live safely for the rest of their lives.

The motivation of parents to take the lead in developing housing solutions stems from the shared, inevitable and heartbreaking question that haunts every parent of a person with special needs: “What will happen to my child when I’m gone?”

In Connecticut, an innovative housing strategy referred to as “supportive housing” or “integrated supportive housing” (ISH) is creating apartment complexes in which a percentage of the units are set aside for adults who have I/DD. When needed, on-site, around-the-clock staff are available to help a resident in person or by using smart technology. The majority of the apartments in the development might be rented at market rates or at rates that are affordable for tenants with low incomes.

The replicable housing model – the result of partnerships between state social service agencies, nonprofit organizations and private developers – helps people with I/DD safely thrive in an accessible, community setting. It provides housing for small households as well as individuals. Local leaders implementing integrated supportive housing in Connecticut want to help others do the same in and beyond the state.

Relief for Parents, Independence for Their Adult Children



An artist's rendering shows an integrated supportive housing apartment complex to be built in Farmington, Connecticut. The property will provide around-the-clock support to residents living in one- or two-bedroom apartments.

COURTESY SAGER DEVELOPMENT

“The goal of supportive housing is to create an apartment community where people with and without intellectual disabilities can live in community together,” says Stephen Morris, executive director of [Favarh](#) (pronounced FAY-var), which is the Farmington Valley, Connecticut, chapter of [The Arc](#), the nation's largest community-based organization serving people who have I/DD.

The chapter's foray into supportive housing for people with I/DD began in 2007 in the town of Avon. “It was Connecticut's first supportive housing model, although we didn't call it by that name at the time,” says Morris. “Replication was a challenge because of the limited availability of vacant units in the same apartment complex.”

In 2015, Morris met Ken Regan, a real estate developer who has multiple sclerosis. With guidance from the [National Multiple Sclerosis Society](#), Regan's firm was creating specialty housing for people with cognitive and physical disabilities stemming from the central nervous system disease.

“Ken's project sparked the idea that Favarh could do something similar for people with I/DD,” Morris explains. In 2018, the pair proposed I/DD-specific, community-integrated specialty housing to the [Connecticut Department of Developmental Services](#).

What began as a demonstration project took off. In addition to the six apartment complexes where Favarh is or will be the service provider for I/DD tenants, 11 developments managed by other providers have been built or are slated to be built in the state.

Housing That's Safe, Affordable and Accessible



One- and two-bedroom floor plans for the Bear Woods Apartments, in Canton, Connecticut. The 40-unit housing community offers below-market rents for eligible tenants and integrated supportive services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

BEARWOODSAPARTMENTS.COM

Most of the residents at the Favarh-affiliated housing developments are in their early 30s. The one- and two-bedroom apartments are designed to meet [Americans With Disabilities Act](#) standards. Some of the units have reinforced ceilings in order to accommodate lift systems, such as those that help a person get out of bed and into a wheelchair. Shared spaces in the complex are used for social gatherings and programmed activities.

Since the entire apartment complex is designated as an affordable housing option due to its below-market rents, all tenants must meet state income limits.

The residents who have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities typically receive [Supplemental Security Income](#) benefits (with a maximum of \$967 a month in 2025), [Medicaid Waiver](#) funding, [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP) benefits and, for many, some employment income. Since [rental assistance program](#) (RAP) certificates require that each resident spend no more than 30 percent of their adjusted gross income on rent and utilities, the RAP pays the difference between that number and the listed rent, enabling residents to use their remaining income for food and personal expenses.

The families of qualifying residents are not required to contribute financially, although many do. The apartment complexes are typically located in places that are either walkable to nearby amenities or close to public transit; if they are not, transportation services are provided to the residents with I/DD.

Supports delivered by service providers approved by Connecticut's Department of Developmental Services are based on each tenant's level of need for tasks that can include cleaning, cooking, laundry, bill-paying, shopping and transportation to appointments and work.

Among the many reassurances to parents is that the residents with I/DD can reside in their apartments and receive needed supports throughout their lives.

Comparing ISH and Traditional Group Homes

Integrated supportive housing developments typically have a 75/25 split between units that are available for people without and with disabilities.

"The residents with I/DD get true integration into a larger community," says Regan, who adds that because traditional group home residences are often located far from a town or area's activity hubs, living in one can be isolating.

A benefit to the service provider, local government or (most commonly) a nonprofit organization is the cost efficiency of apartments that are located in a single complex as opposed to housing people in smaller homes in disconnected locations.

"With the apartment complex model, you've got built-in staffing and transportation efficiencies," explains Morris. "In a group home setting, you generally have staff there 24 hours a day. However, there are a lot of residents in those settings that, if they had the proper supports,



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

FAMILY-PROVIDED COURTESY PHOTOS

A Home of One's Own

Three families share their experiences with integrated supportive housing. [Read](#)

wouldn't necessarily have 24-hour needs. The integrated supportive housing model provides the needed staffing in more affordable and efficient ways."

The most important benefit of a supportive housing, apartment-based model may be that it provides people who have I/DD with increased independence.

"Over the past decade, more individuals and their families have sought more independent living solutions to the traditional group home model," says Elba Caraballo, who in 2022 became the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services' first housing director. "My position was created in response to the growing demand for diverse living options. Roles like mine were designed to support and facilitate new choices. With all advances in assistive technology, we are able to ensure safety in the context of expanded independence and autonomy."

While supportive housing doesn't work for every person with I/DD, especially if they require a high level of care, Morris believes that as the model expands and improves, and service providers learn from their experiences, it can work for more and more individuals. Some residents of Favarrh's group homes have successfully transferred into integrated supportive housing apartments.

Sharing and Repeating the ISH Model

By creating more ways to meet the diverse needs of people with I/DD, the integrated supportive housing model helps free up space in group home settings for individuals who require more direct or complex services.

“Housing developments go up everywhere, which creates an opportunity for developers and service providers to partner,” says Caraballo. “Legislative and funding changes have supported the development and expansion of such housing models, making them more feasible and attractive to all the stakeholders involved.”

“The integrated housing model is more than just a good idea for a few apartment projects,” Morris adds. “It’s a new and vital option that more states should implement.”

Caraballo, Morris and Regan cite the numerous benefits of integrated supportive housing:

- Local governments and nonprofit service providers benefit by being able to provide affordable and accessible housing options to people in the community, including people with I/DD.
- People with I/DD benefit from a more community-based and integrated housing option that is available to them much sooner than previous choices, such as group homes.
- Families benefit from knowing that their loved ones have a safe and long-term place to live.
- Developers benefit because their projects often get approved faster when they include people with I/DD. (Developers can apply to the [Low-Income Housing Tax Credit](#) program.)
- Service providers benefit by having more clients live within the community, and at a lower cost, rather than isolated from it. States save money when compared with the costs of operating group homes.
- The creation of ISH apartment complexes help reduce the long waiting lists for affordable and accessible housing.

Everybody Knows Someone

“Everywhere we’ve done this, we’ve encountered a sort of [six degrees of separation](#) situation,” says Regan. “At one of our developments, we told a neighboring property owner, ‘This is what we’re looking to do.’ Instead of the typical NIMBY, ‘*What are you doing in my neighborhood?*’ type response, we got, ‘I know three people who could benefit from something like this. If we can do something to help you make this happen, let us know.’”

“That’s unusual for an affordable housing developer to hear,” Regan continues. “But it happens because everybody knows someone who has a disability. As adults with I/DD start living in integrated community settings, it educates the community. Decades-old, inaccurate, preconceived assumptions begin to change. People with developmental disabilities are so much more capable than many people know.”

Word of the integrated supportive housing model's success in Connecticut has spread. Favarh has been contacted by social service providers in California, Tennessee and New Hampshire seeking advice.

"We're really proud in Connecticut to have taken the lead on something that I do believe is very replicable," says Morris. "We want to share what we know with people in other states. What we're doing is really changing community living in dramatic ways."

Related Articles and More From AARP

- [Parents Are Creating Communities for Their Grown Children Who Have Special Needs](#)
- [How to Create a Residential Community for People With I/DD](#)
- [Designing Housing for People With I/DD](#)
- [Finding a 'Forever Home' for My Adult Son With Autism](#)

[Find more articles about housing by visiting the **AARP Livability Library**](#)

[Find useful information at **AARP Resources for Caregivers and Their Families**](#)

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](#)

Amy Lennard Goehner is a reporter (formerly on staff at Time Inc. Magazines) and the parent of an adult son with autism. Melissa

Stanton (formerly an editor at Time Inc. Magazines) is a senior advisor and editor for AARP Livable Communities.

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