

22-year-old with disabilities lands own apartment

by *Randy Krause,*
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I am so very pleased to be able to say that our son has his own apartment. He is living independently while managing severe, multiple disabilities.

Our son is carefully, thoughtfully, supported in his independent living by our local community mental health agency, Hiawatha Behavioral Health. His new home is a supported living apartment in a building managed by a Community Action Agency in Sault Ste Marie. He has friendly, supportive personnel and good neighbors. The apartment is adapted for our son's use of a wheelchair.

My husband and I are relieved to know that our son will be OK with or without us. Coming to this wasn't easy. We had to let go of the idea that we were the only people in the world that understood our son and his needs. We had to be proactive in finding the place and in working with agencies to provide services. It didn't happen overnight. It took months of planning, before and after the move.

Our son is developing a social life, independent from us. He is becoming more secure in himself and his own abilities. As parents, we now enjoy our own independence. But the real payoff is our son's profound pride in himself. How important it is for all of us to have a sense of independence. How important it is that we can make decisions for ourselves, that we are in control of our own lives. It is important to know we can take care of ourselves, even though supported by others.

My husband and I always have tried to provide the best care for our son: driving thousands of miles to the best doctors and hospitals; campaigning for the best programs; etc. Yet, this latest step is the most meaningful one we could take ... for him and for ourselves: a home of his own.

Community Action Agencies offer varied support

Housing is one area in which Community Action Agencies (CAAs) help low-income persons become self-sufficient. Many CAAs offer supportive senior housing complexes as well as affordable supportive housing for persons with disabilities or families of children with disabilities.

Michigan has 30 CAAs that cover all of Michigan's counties. They are listed at www.mcaa.org. Or, phone the CAA Association at (517) 321-7500 to find one near you. Each one has its own menu of services.

In my son's case, we filled out an application, went through an interview, and confirmed his income and that he did not own his own home. He was approved for housing. He may sign up for meals on wheels for \$5/day.

Another housing support option is the section 8 program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. That federal program includes special "housing choice vouchers" for persons with disabilities. Read about them online at www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/pwd/index.cfm. Or, phone HUD's office in Detroit (313-226-7900), Flint (810-766-5112) or Grand Rapids (616-456-2100).

Still other agencies offer caregivers, aides, medical transportation and other supports to persons with disabilities. Agencies to check include community mental health, FIA and the local Center for Independent Living.