

step 3

creating a place to call **home**

A house is made
of bricks and mortar,
but a home is made
by the people who
live there.

M.K. SONIA

Safe and Secure

My life depends on your love and devotion to me.

I need the strength of many to make it happen.

I strive for independence in my life to do for myself.

My needs outweigh my resources.

I cannot always make my body do

what my mind says I need to do.

So you surround me with a strong home.

This home is not just brick and wood:

it is the people inside.

I need the structure of the building:

I also need the strong supports within.

My life depends upon these safety features

and (my dog) Yukon is the anchor of it all.

There's a lock on my door

but this only keeps me safe if I choose to stay

and where else would I want to be?

My home, my hope:

My safe and secure place.

ANDREW BLOOMFIELD

Written March 24, 2018

Quoted by permission

step 3

Creating a Place to Call Home

A home of one's own. A home is a cherished dream that resonates deeply with many of us. It represents not just a physical space, but a sanctuary filled with warmth and welcome. The essence of home offers a profound comfort, evoking a sigh of relief and joy each time you step through the front door after a long day, thinking, "Ah, I'm home!" This feeling embodies the heart of what makes home so special, and it's a beautiful aspiration we all share.

A house is made
of walls and beams;
a home is built with
love and dreams.

UNKNOWN

In Al Etmanski's book, *A Good Life* (2004), he writes about the essence of home having nothing to do with wood, nails, bricks, and mortar.

Rather, it's about sweat and laughter, bruises and tears, stains and cobwebs, flowers and open doors, failures and promises, kisses and fingerprints. Home is where we can just be, where we become, where we belong. Home is not a program or a service; it is a haven and sanctuary whether it be owned or rented.

The word "home" comes from a Sanskrit root meaning a safe place to lie down; a separation of outside from inside, defined by a threshold. Isn't that the kind of place we want for our friends and family members with disabilities? A place that provides continuity and security. A place that ensures privacy and reflects the personality of those who live there.

Shattering the myth

It is important to ground ourselves in the housing reality in the province of Ontario. Here are some truths that are meant to motivate and provide the inspiration to begin planning for your family member's future home:

- Housing is expensive – there is a need to be creative in finding a housing solution.
- **The developmental services system provides support but is NOT responsible for housing for your family member who has a disability.** Access to housing with support is only possible by accepting a vacancy in a group home.

Things to be aware of:

- The number of people waiting for support is far higher than the capacity within the system.
- Your family member, who is eligible for support in the province of Ontario, only becomes a priority for service when you/your family can no longer care for them.
- If your family member is offered a vacancy off the waitlist, they cannot choose the location, the support or housemates.

We encourage people to identify their family members' needs on their local Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) waitlist, with awareness of what a group home might mean for a person and their family. This should be done when your family member turns 18, but you can contact them and apply when your family member is 17 years old.

What is the DSO?

Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) is the access point for adult developmental services funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) in Ontario. There are nine (9) DSO locations across the province.

When your family members turns 18, their children's developmental services such as Special Services at Home, Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities, and services through the Ontario Autism Program all end. This means that you must apply through DSO to see if they are eligible to receive adult MCCSS-funded supports available in their community.

Connect with your area DSO and they will help:

- understand and complete the application process
- determine the kind of services and supports required and what is offered
- get access to MCCSS-funded services and supports that needed when a spot is available (like housing)
- find information in your local community

Please look up Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) on the internet for more information.

Individualized housing supports relies on a partnership with the family member supported, their family, Circle of Support and chosen service providers, who would be contracted to provide the preferred supports and services. To assess the readiness for individualized housing, we recommend that the person supported, with assistance from their family and Circle of Support, submit a summary of their housing plan to the local Developmental Services Ontario (DSO). This summary should include a request for Individualized Housing Supports.

The plan should include items like:

- Where would the supported person live?
- Who would support them?
- What does a good day look like?
- How much would the support cost?
- How would this plan be sustainable over time?

Some families access the support of an outside professional like a facilitator, as mentioned in Step 2, to help with their housing plan.

Something your family can do now, regardless of a housing plan:

Ontario Disability Support Program - known as ODSP:

ODSP is the financial assistance that your family member who has a disability receives from the provincial government once they apply for it when they turn 18 years old. The financial assistance is used for items like rent and food. ODSP also provides supplementary benefits such as medical, dental, and special diet allowances. You can learn more when you look up your local ODSP office on the internet.

Regardless of what type of housing your family member is looking for in the community, a first step is to add the name of the supported person seeking housing on the subsidized housing waitlist in their region. Remember, housing is separate from support services and the responsibility of a different ministry in the province of Ontario. Therefore, this step can be done before knowing a housing plan. The waitlist in each region is based on first come first serve and funding is allocated regionally, based on local housing priorities. So, the sooner your family member who has a disability is eligible for funding and is added to the waitlist, the more prepared everyone can be for opportunities that might arise. Housing programs are always evolving to reflect the local needs, provincial climate and federal priorities. A person on ODSP is eligible for subsidies and can be added to this waitlist with the hope that something suitable, whether it is portable housing (subsidy that follows the person and is added to their ODSP cheque) or a subsidized housing option. The regional housing program also provides access and information regarding additional options that support people eligible for subsidized housing, like utility subsidies that are meant to assist people in paying their electricity bills.

TIP: Key Internet Search terms to find the local housing authority are “subsidized housing or market rent housing” with the region, county, or town your family members lives in.

We share all this information so that people and their families can be informed about the reality and begin planning alongside the system, rather than depending on the system. **This step is about inspiring your family to create a home through planning and innovation. Please know this task can be daunting and connecting with others who have been through the process or are going through it can be very helpful.**

Making a house a home

Families the world over rank a stable and hospitable living environment as a high priority. A house, however, doesn't become a home by accident. It requires thoughtfulness and care. It starts by understanding the meaning of home to your family member. What are they used to? What works in their current home? What can work better? How can your family make sure the home aligns with everyone's vision of a good life?

If mealtime is a renewable resource, then food is a social lubricant that can keep the machinery of involvement and interaction running between people with and without disabilities.

KAREN MELBERG
SCHWIER
AND
ERIN SCHWIER
STEWART

Start Planning: There are tools that have been created by the DSO to help begin thinking about your family member's home in a more intentional way. The worksheets, stories, and tips in the DSO tool kit will help identify what is important to your family member, within their space and their community, along with the Worksheets at the end of this section. These combined resources will help with developing your family's housing plan. Furthermore, the local housing DSO navigator can offer your family resources related to planning, connections with local families who are also planning, and updates on new housing initiatives in their area.

Some people want to have their own place. Other people may want to live with their chosen housemate. Some may need very little staff support. Others might require intensive staff support. The support level needed for a person should be considered before securing the space. For example, if your family member requires intensive support, they may need a secondary suite for a live-in support staff or a friendly housemate. Live-in models are more economically feasible and can provide more consistent and reliable support.

Once this sense of home has been clarified, along with the type of support a person requires to be safe and secure, your family can begin to explore options based on a housing budget. **It is very important to remember that housing costs are the responsibility of the person being supported and their family.** Therefore, a plan must be made within existing family resources. There are ways to lessen the costs, such as tax credits for secondary suites, applying for housing subsidies, partnerships with other families and financial planning.

Safeguards to consider for a home

Home can exist wherever your family members lives and regardless of who owns or manages the building, house, apartment or room. **The key to creating a home is:**

- **Location:** Make sure the home is close to the spaces, places, and relationships that matter to the person supported.
- **Ownership or tenancy:** Make sure the person supported is named is on the agreement/lease/title. This ensures choice and control of the environment.
- **Design:** Make sure the space reflects the person's needs and personality.
- **People:** Make sure the person supported is involved with choosing their housemates (peers) and supports.

In Ontario some people have funded residential placements though DSO, like a group home or supported independent living, which meets both their housing & support needs. In this book, we are suggesting families consider more individualized solutions for reasons already started. It would be important in an individualized solution that the housing is kept separate from the personal support needs. You would not want to be renting from the same place as you hire staff.

Regardless of where people live, we want them to have choice. We want people to live in a place that respects their choices. A home is a place where they decide how they live, who supports them and what they do throughout their day. Separating someone's home from their support helps give people greater choice.

Working within housing budgets

Many of us cannot afford to assist our family member in purchasing their own home. There are alternatives to traditional home ownership, however, that will provide the same long-term stability. Housing cooperatives, and multi-generational homes with joint ownership for example, allow some families to move towards home ownership.

A myth in this sector has been that the government will pay for homes for people requiring support. It is important to remember that capital assets (a home) are not paid for by the government (provincial or federal). There are tax credits and subsidies that may help with some of the costs. In addition, over the past several years, several not-for profit organizations have been developed to support people in thinking differently about financing home ownership.

If, after reviewing all the options, it is determined that ownership is not a realistic option, then consider renting. Rental accommodation, particularly rent to own, can allow people to establish a sense of their own place and to maintain control of their living environment. It may not be for everyone but being a tenant provides people with the flexibility to try different living arrangements, particularly when they are at the beginning of this journey.

Practicing in Place is a term that describes the early stages of planning for one's home of their own. What this means is that your family member can trial a space, with chosen supports and roommates (if any) prior to committing. For example, a short-term rental through Airbnb in the building being considered as a rental contract or a purchase, allows someone the chance to determine if that place and space is the right fit for them and their lifestyle. Or have your family member stay at home with their chosen supports to practise what has been planned. This provides family members who would typically be at home, with a chance for some self-care as well.

Some of the advantages of practicing in place includes:

- Identifying if the location really works.
- Determining if the community is welcoming.
- Allows your family member to become more comfortable and confident in their skills to live more independently.
- Validate your family member's support needs through trial and error, to create a more realistic budget.
- Increasing family readiness families: Families also need to practice getting out of the way of the family member supported, allowing them to take risks with safeguards in place.

Prior to any decisions, it is important for families to determine the lifestyle cost of the family member who has a disability. This is done by looking at the real costs every month, such as groceries, meals in the community, activities, and personal needs, along with forecasting any future housing costs. This information will allow the family to make decisions regarding a realistic housing budget. The gap between what your family has (assets and revenues) and what is needed (expenses) will help identify if changes are required to the type of housing that is planned as well as determine if your family needs to consider other ways to support the plan, such as a roommate to share the cost of the home.

The image below will help you consider the various costs that are part of most people's personal budget as well as those areas that might be unique to your family member.

PERSONAL BUDGET COMMON ELEMENTS			
			
HOUSING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mortgage or rent• Phone bill• Internet/cable• Electricity• Gas• Water• Housing maintenance	TRANSPORT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vehicle payments• Bus fare/pass/Taxi/Uber• Vehicle insurance• Licensing costs• Gas• Maintenance (oil changes, other costs)	FOOD <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Groceries (including other household items)• Dining out• Delivery• Non-prescription supplements and vitamins	PERSONAL CARE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prescriptions/medical costs• Hair/nails• Clothing• Laundry• Gym/fitness• Specialized services
			
ENTERTAINMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subscriptions (movie, music, games etc.)• Concerts/live events• Sporting events• Recreational programs• Camps, vacation• Hobby related purchases	RISKS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Life insurance• Home insurance• Health/dental insurance• Savings• Investments	PETS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medical/veterinary care• Grooming• Toys/accessories	MISC <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student loans• Loans (student/credit card)• Gifts• Charitable contributions

Beyond these expenses, you will also need to have some understanding of your loved one's income. A person's income will vary and may include ODSP, employment income, any tax rebates, and might include money from trusts, savings or an RDSP.

Housing costs which may include a mortgage or rent as well as other associated costs like maintenance or utilities are obviously a big piece a personal lifestyle budget. Thinking about the lifestyle of your family member, consider all types of homes. Each one has a different price point and operational budget. Here are some housing options families should consider when developing their budget:

- Single family
- Multi-generational
- Condominium or row housing
- Housing cooperative unit
- Co-housing
- Apartment
- Mobile home or tiny home
- Renovation of existing house (secondary suite or coach house)
- Purpose-built housing designed for your family member's needs;
For example, shared kitchen, dining, and lounge areas.

Did you know there are various amounts of ODSP?

ODSP offers:

- Money to help a person (and eligible family members) with living expenses, including food and rent
- Health benefits, including prescription drugs, dental and vision care
- Employment support to help find and keep employment.

Income support also gets adjusted each year in July based on inflation. When eligible for ODSP, the amount of money a person gets depends on their specific situation. This means that everyone's ODSP amount could be different and will impact a person's budget in different ways. For instance, if a person lives in Northern Ontario, they may receive additional funds or if they have a special diet, this may increase their monthly amount.

Another important factor is whether a person is considered to be in a board and lodging situation or not. Consider these scenarios:

#1 Your family member lives with you. You provide them a home. You plan and prepare all their food. This is what ODSP calls "board and lodging".

#2 Alternatively, your family member rents an apartment or lives in their own home paying a mortgage payment. They also prepare their own food. In this case, they would receive from ODSP both the "basic needs" amount to cover some costs of food, clothing and other necessities and the "shelter" amount to contribute to their rent or mortgage cost. Some people refer to this as the "tenant" amount.

The amount ODSP provides in each of these scenarios is fairly set and likely does not fully cover the actual costs of either living arrangement for your family member. In the 2nd scenario however, the total amount a person receives (the tenant amount) is higher than the board and lodging amount.

Some families may consider a 3rd scenario. This is where your family member is paying you rent, perhaps in a basement apartment of your home, and is preparing their own food even with the assistance of hired supports. In this case, even though it might be within your home, the clear distinction that your family member is paying rent with a rental agreement in place and that they are responsible to plan and prepare their own food is what makes them eligible to receive the higher amount of the basic needs and shelter amounts. When families are considering this option, sometimes the additional expense of hiring a support worker for the purpose of working with your family member to plan and prepare simple meals is offset by the greater amount they receive from ODSP. It also may be a way to intentionally practice independent skills for living in a future home of one's own while still in a familiar setting.

Again, each situation is unique, and families should look to the details of the ODSP amounts and regulations on the Government of Ontario website. Understanding your family member's current or future living situation and the corresponding amount of ODSP they might receive will help you to build a more accurate budget.

Before finalizing housing type: Consider the support needs

For people that require support to live their best lives, the home choice is not only based on the community, their interests and lifestyle, it is also based on their support model.

A support model is the way that a person likes to receive support. Some people like and need to have onsite support. Their onsite support can be in their home, or within the same dwelling, such as a secondary suite or the apartment next door. Others like to have support based on their scheduled needs. For example, a support coming in the morning to get their day started and another in the evening to support with meal preparation and talk about their day. Still other people need ongoing support throughout the day.

The identified support needs of the person will influence the type of housing for the person. A way to determine the support needs is to identify when and how people use supports each hour of their 24-hour day. Break it down. Consider every task and what level of support is required to complete it.

For family members that do not require intensive support, there are some things that could be optimized. Optimizing allows support to be "re-allocated" to the times of day where the person needs or wants to be supported. The three ways to optimize the support model are by using:

- Technology
- Skill Development
- Partnership

Technology can be used to support someone through their day by prompting them, providing safeguards or acting as a virtual assistant. It is important to note that not all people like or have the capacity for technology and therefore, this is not a universal solution. Technology can also be used

to support staff. For example, it can guide the support staff through the schedule or even let support staff know when a person needs supports by using sensors or wearable devices.

Tips on choosing technology

Each person who is eligible for supports in the province of Ontario completes a Support Intensity Scale (SIS) when they are 18 years old. Within that report, respondents or their families identify the “intensity and frequency” of support required for the person to be successful. When supports are less intense, for example, require a verbal prompt or reminder, these support areas are possibilities for technology. A solution might be to use Alexa to remind a person of a routine or task. Another example is when a person requires oversight or check-ins for safety. Alexa’s “drop-in” feature can be used, in combination with a sensor to notify the person providing oversight of open doors, flooding water, etc. Alexa drop is like an intercom that can allow people to connect to another location, speak to them and then they can respond, even if you are in another part of the country/world.

Skill development can also reduce the supports needed for some people. Life skills include making simple meals or spending time alone at home for 15 minutes at a time with technology as a safeguard.

STEPS to independence

STEPS To Independence is a guidebook that provides a thorough opportunity for people with an intellectual disability to determine how prepared they are for semi-independent living. This guidebook is a great way to determine the skills of a person, as well as identify areas that can be developed further. The tool can be used several ways:

- 1) Completing this early on and using the areas as a roadmap to skill development.
- 2) To inform support workers about a person's abilities, ensuring they do not provide excessive support and underestimate their capabilities.
- 3) By the schools, when the person is in their last 3 years, to support a team approach to skill development using practical areas of need.

You can obtain a pdf of this guidebook by looking it up on the internet or on the ConnectABILITY website.

Partnership is a final area that families should consider optimizing efficiencies in support. Partnerships may be with other families. For example: The rental of a 3-bedroom apartment/home for 2 peers and a live-in support. This partnership would result in a reduction in housing costs (rent) and staffing costs.

When entering partnerships, it is important to safeguard the person-directed model by only sharing supports during common times of the day like morning routines, suppertime, evening routines, bedtime and overnight support. Too much sharing is not suggested, as people need to live their own lives, based on their own goals. However, sharing overnight support and common time supports might make sense. One way to stay on track with protecting the person-directed model is to develop the person's housing plan before finding the partners and developing the support model.

Jenna's Story:

The Power of Technology

Jenna and her family moved to a small community in the northern area of the province to be closer to the activities and lifestyle that matter to all family members. In the winter of 2023, Jenna was eager and ready to move into her own setting with the right supports at the right time.

THE HOME:

The family was able to purchase a small townhome within their budget. The home is 800sq.ft. providing sufficient space for Jenna and her supports plus it allows her to welcome her community for visits and activities. Jenna uses her ODSP to support her lifestyle needs, such as utilities, clothing and her food. The family were able to take on the remaining lifestyle costs, as it is recognized that ODSP would not be sufficient to meet her needs.

SUPPORT:

Because Jenna does better when she has her own living space, the family chose not to consider a housemate or a live-in Caregiver. Although Jenna likes time on her own, this is only successful if her day is very structured. As a result, the family chose to focus on supports during the daytime hours.

ALLY AGENCY:

Jenna's family approached a local transfer payment agency to provide a coordinated staffing solution. Jenna and her family are involved with coordinating the specialized

training for hired supports. This provides an element of sustainability to the staffing model.

TECHNOLOGY: For the other hours (overnight) Jenna's family implemented technology. This safeguard would mitigate the risk to Jenna in situations where she may need to problem-solve or in emergency situations.

The technology supports Jenna with identifying movement in the home, as overnight movement might indicate a need. It also provides on demand response for any emergency or need. This on-demand response is accessed through 4 buttons scattered throughout the home that connects to the ally agency on-call staff support. The alarm system and sensors are integrated with local fire and emergency response.

Alexa prompts Jenna in her routines and, when/if needed, provides Jenna with immediate on-demand access to the overnight off-site staff provided by the agency and family. The video calling feature is Jenna's preferred way to request on-demand support.

Because of Jenna's Prader Willi diagnosis, her food must be secure. Sensors are used to unlock snacks and meals at specific times of the day. This lock box system is also used to dispense medication.

The alarm for medication prompts Jenna to take her medication and notifies staff when the box has been opened and maintains the necessary medication management records virtually.

In addition to the basic alarm system, the following options were integrated:

- Cameras are also at the front and back of the home exterior, as safeguards.
- A doorbell camera is installed to support entrance and exit and notify Jenna of who is at the door.
- An electronic deadbolt that locks after 10 seconds, in case she has forgotten. It unlocks in cases of emergency (fire, flood, etc.).
- Sensors on the stove and microwave disconnect the power when the smoke detector is activated.
- Artificial Intelligence-driven notification system for any emergency, change of routine (sensors), etc.

COST: The technology hardware and installation cost was \$7,000 and the ongoing monthly subscription for all the features is \$50/month. This keeps her overall budget reasonable by saving 12 hours of support per day.

This allows your family to go back to the person's vision of a good life and evaluate how the vision is being affected by the support model and partnership. If a person's vision is to live with a peer and they enjoy being with others, socializing and dream of sharing space- a partnership may enhance their vision.

Tips on choosing a compatible roommate

There is no scientific approach to choosing a roommate. Some people are easy to get along with and others are not. Often this is something your family member won't know until they try. Practicing in place with a potential roommate is a great way to determine if it will work. Another option is to live independently and then seek a roommate to rent a room. It is important to ensure that the contracts put in place when making these arrangements protect your family member and their living arrangement.

Roommate wanted ad

SAMIR IS LOOKING FOR 1 MALE ROOMMATE - ARE YOU LOOKING TO MOVE OUT?

Samir is a young adult male who is looking for a male roommate who is close in age and values.

He is very close to his family, who live nearby, and he spends his weekends with them at their family home. He keeps busy during the week by volunteering and spending time in the community with his own support workers. He likes to watch Pixar movies and loves music.



- Located near Gainsbury St. & Jubilee Dr.
- Not fully accessible (no wheelchairs)
- Private bedroom for each housemate
- Shared bathroom with tub & shower
- Home is pet-free due to allergies



- You are male, in your 30's
- You do not require 24/7 support
- You are friendly, verbal, social and have supportive family near by



- Personal Supporter will provide support during days for meals & skill building.
- I have a Personal Support for overnight and cannot share this with others.
- I go bowling on Tuesday nights and to Choir on Saturday mornings.



- Rent is \$1,250 each and includes Netflix and internet
- Can share some morning / evening Support Worker costs to reduce our support costs (1/2 each) if it makes sense for both of us.



If interested, please email:

- Abdul Parthan: name@gmail.com
- Fatima Parthan: name@gmail.com

Source: ConnectABILITY. Some details have been revised for privacy purposes.

Partnership can also be with a service providers through an agency or private provider. For example, a group of families who live in the same neighbourhood, but not the same dwelling, may want to hire human resource staff to support recruitment, training and scheduling of direct supports.

We want to emphasize this is not about sharing direct support staff or physical space, but about out-sourcing shared administrative time.

A team of staff in the same neighborhood would allow people to access consistent, reliable and trained direct support staff for a person's self-directed needs. Again, this is not about sharing staff, but about sharing the efficiencies around recruitment, training, supervision and coordination of supports. This geographic cluster model approach results in increased staff retention due to the availability of flexible hours and available work for the hired supports and a reduction of effort from each family to find, train and onboard staff.

Tips on selecting compatible support staff

Home is
where you feel
at home
and are
treated well.

DALAI LAMA

It is important to find a staff that is both comfortable working in a private home, as well as respectful. Although it is the place of their employment, it is primarily someone's home. We suggest spending the time to clarify in writing, the values that must be upheld in the home. Some people make "House Rules" that they share with their staff and others.

When hiring supports, whether it is private, through a staffing agency, in a cluster with other parents or through a developmental service provider, your family needs to get a sense of their values through an interview process. The family member who is going to be receiving the support needs to be included in the hiring process, including being part of interviews. Their input and reactions need to be included and considered. Get references by meeting other people in-person if possible, who receive services from them. Talk to other families. It is essential to have employment contracts in place. This will allow your family to let staff go, if it appears they are not compatible.

Rebecca's rules- being a good housemate

- If I'm not home and the door is closed, please don't come in
- Please knock and ask if you can come in
- If you need space or are upset, please step away from where I am
- If one of us is upset, we will ask our staff to help us
- If I am busy on the computer or the phone or my own activities, I like my privacy and time alone
- When I am having a private conversation with staff, please respect our privacy until the conversation is finished
- When I have visitors or guests or cousins or friends, please ask before joining us
- In my apartment please
 - ▶ Be nice
 - ▶ Don't sit on my bed -you can sit on my couch or my chair
 - ▶ Don't touch my things
 - ▶ You can look at my fishtank but please do not feed my fish or touch the tank without asking me
- I will ...
 - ▶ Ask before I come into your room
 - ▶ Respect if you say you need your space, I will let you have it
 - ▶ Ask staff for help if I am upset
- If you are frustrated or feeling angry, please take it out onto the porch
- If I am in a hurry or getting ready to meet my Wheeltrans please give me space
- I like to go on walks to calm down
- Sometimes I don't like to answer too many questions
- My medications and my health are private

Types of housing

Once a supported person has determined their housing vision (Lifestyle, Community and Supports) and identified their lifestyle budget (use the Worksheets provided at the back of this step), they can now begin exploring different innovative housing options. This area is meant to provide your family member with options, ideas and solutions. We will begin with the first decision: Rental or Home Ownership.

Renting a home

As discussed earlier, most families are not in the position to own a home, and in some cases, it does not make sense to own a home.

There are many types of rentals, including:

- Townhomes
- Apartments
- Single Family Homes
- Secondary Suites: Basement, Coach house, etc.
- Community Housing Corporations

Things to know:

Market rent programs exist in almost all areas of the province. Speak to the local housing navigator at the DSO or local housing authority to get the list of market rent options in your family member's area. Internet Search Terms for Market Rent options are "Market Rent" and the name of your city, town, region or county.

Remember to start by identifying the community based on what is important to the person supported, their vision and support needs.

For example:

- Cost: how much can the person afford and still have money left for food, fun and utilities?
- Location close to the people, places and spaces that matter to the person
- Parking and Public transportation: parking for supports and services and public transportation for both the person and staff
- Lifestyle: accessibility in the home, as well as layout in the home
- Safety: is it a safe and familiar neighbourhood?
- Availability: are rentals available in the community?

There are times when renting should be considered as a first resort, regardless of the available budget. These times include:

- When moving into an unfamiliar neighborhood for the first time.
- When housing prices are out of reach and partnerships still need to be formed with other families, organizations or the private sector.
- When “practicing in place” and want the opportunity to truly learn what works and what is needed before purchasing a space.

Before moving ahead with any rental, be aware of all rights as a tenant and be protected by signing a tenant agreement. The province has support in this area: Look up [renting-ontario-your right](#) on the internet.

Karen's Story:

Family/agency Collaboration + Optimizing Formal/informal Resources

Background:

Irwin was interested in having his daughter move closer to the family, while he could still be active in the planning. Irwin was in his mid 80's and Karen was in her late 50's. Karen had been living in Montreal in a funded group home in the 1980's and did not move with the family when they moved to Ontario. The drive to visit Karen was becoming more and more difficult for Irwin, and with the encouragement of Karen's siblings, the family began planning to bring Karen to Toronto.

What was important to Karen and

her family: Being together, within the same province

What they had in place:

- A planner to navigate the transition from Quebec to Toronto
- ODSP
- Passport Funding
- A fee for service Day Program
- A Henson Trust

What they did to make it happen:

- Developed their vision and support model based on their assets and financial situation
- Entered into a tenant agreement for a market rent 3-bedroom apartment.

- Hired a live-in Caregiver with an employment contract developed by a lawyer.
- Made a referred to LIGHTS: a local agency that supports families in implementing their residential vision and provides start-up funding to support the financial shortfall for up to 5 years.
- Matched with a peer Housemate through LIGHTS.

Support Model:

- Shared live-in Caregiver during the week for morning, evening and overnight.
- Fee for service day program Monday through Friday
- Weekend informal support with siblings (rotating between 2 siblings and father)

Features:

- Rental agreement can be transferrable to allow for sustainable housing if Housemate leaves.
- LIGHTS support worked with both families to problem-solve issues as they arose.

For Karen and her family, a rental was not only more economical, but also the most logical solution because of her age. Karen was 59 years old and her father was in his 80's and not prepared to take on a mortgage, so this was a transitional housing solution (short-term plan). Because Karen required 24/7 support and enjoyed the company of others, the family looked for a market rent option close to her activities of choice and her natural supports. A 3-bedroom rental allowed for them to hire a live-in support from Monday through Friday, while the extra bedroom allowed for a space for a future housemate. There is a bit of a chicken and egg effect, where caregivers need to determine if they want to hire the staff in their own home to practice in place, or rent an apartment to then attract the right live-in person. For Karen and her family, they chose to find the apartment first. This also allowed them to prepare Karen for the transition by furnishing the common spaces and Karen's bedroom.

The cost of this plan:

Housing:

Karen had ODSP funding. The roommate paid the other half of the rent and utilities. Any balance was paid by family and was pre-calculated by carefully looking at their budget in detail.

Paid Support:

- ▶ **Live-in:** The live-in support provided shared support in the morning, evening and overnight. Karen and her roommate were each responsible for half of a live-in staff. Live-in staff are less expensive than hourly staff and provide more consistency, as well as overnight support. The family paid for this support out of pocket but recuperated some of the cost through claiming the Disability Tax Credit and submitting the receipt for caregiving under the medical expanses attendant care portion of their annual federal taxes. This can provide up to a 35% recuperation for out-of-pocket costs for supports.
- ▶ **Daily Interest based support:** Karen and her roommate had very separate lives during the day. Each person used their Passport funding to pay for activities and supports through the days.

Being an Employer:

Remember that there is a need to enter formal contracts to ensure clarity and protect both the employee rights and the risk of employer. A Microboard™ is an option to support this contractual agreement, while ensuring that the person remains at the center of all decisions. There is more information about Microboards in step 4 of this book.

Informal Support:

On the weekends, Karen spent time with her family. This allowed the live-in support to take time off every weekend and stay alone in the apartment. Karen had two sisters and a father who shared the weekend support in one of their homes. This allowed for each to spend time with Karen.

Other possible funding sources:

Karen was eligible for Personal Support through the Ministry of Health. She could have secured hours for support through a service, allowing her caregiver time off. She also could have requested Family Managed Home Care to pay for the portion of the live-in time spent providing personal care.

Home ownership

The ache
for home
lives in
all of us.

MAYA ANGELOU

Home ownership, for some people, is the fulfillment of a dream, even if people will have a large mortgage and are borrowing money from a financial institution. Home ownership may be a good investment and provide financial stability in times of inflation.

Many of us hope to own a home at some point in our lives. In the past, this had not been the case for people with disabilities, due to limitations of assets within the ODSP rules. As our family members become more self-sufficient and as our plans to secure the future become more focused, home ownership for people with disabilities is a viable option. In fact, it is an option that more parents are exploring, more financial institutions are supporting, and governments are welcoming.

Whether the home is owned directly by the family member who has a disability, or owned jointly with them and others, or owned by a trust,

the main benefit of home ownership is choice and stability. It offers a choice in where a person lives, whom they live with, and in the staff that they hire. As one mother put it, “Roommates will come and go, support services will change, that’s a given. But whether I am around or not, I know that the house—or I should say the home—will be there for my daughter.”

TYPES OF HOME OWNERSHIP

There are several types of home ownership in the province of Ontario. These are the more common ones:

- ▶ **Registered ownership:** The person is the owner and on the title. In this case, the persons should be capable of understanding and protecting themselves against title theft and financial abuse.
- ▶ **In-trust ownership** is a legal arrangement where a trustee owns the legal title of the property for the benefit of the person. The trustee is responsible for managing the property according to the terms of the trust agreement, which may include managing the property for the beneficiary’s benefit, investing funds and distributing income or capital to the beneficiary. A trust can be established when the parent is alive, or through estate planning. This is a good option when the person may not be capable of understanding the risks of title theft, how to manage a property (tax and maintenance) or be at risk of financial abuse.

When families need to be a little more creative but still want to own an asset. They can consider:

- ▶ **Partnership agreement** is a legal document that sets the legal expectations, obligations, and rights of those involved in the real estate partnership. The document reflects the specific agreement between the owners for the purchase and management of the property and provides for any potential disputes that may arise.
- ▶ **Co-ownership** is when several persons agree to purchase a property together. The co-ownership can be formal (a co-operative) or informal (when friends or family enter into a legal agreement to own a single property) to form a joint tenancy or tenant in common.

- A co-operative, each party owns a portion of the corporation that owns the property. Their property can be sold and will build equity.
- The more informal option for family and friends who jointly own a single property are further defined as:
 - **Joint Tenancy:** When each party owns an equal part of the property. This type of ownership is common when spouses or partners purchase a property together. The ownership of the house is automatically transferred to the surviving partner when the other one dies, without going through probate.
 - **Tenant in Common:** Can be used when families are sharing ownership. Each owner holds an undivided part of the property and can choose to sell their share, if their situation changes. This type of ownership allows each owner to sell or transfer, without the consent of the others. The ownership interests do not have to be equal, and each owner is responsible for their own taxes and maintenance costs.
- **Renting to Own:** A program for those unable to afford a down payment or mortgage, that can help them purchase a home.

We strongly recommend seeking the advice of a lawyer before entering into any purchase agreement. They may be able to provide additional insight and options, based on your family's specific situation. *The Partners for Planning website has a Professional Services Directory that contains lawyers, financial planners and accountants that have experience working with families that have a family member who has a disability.*

CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF HOME OWNERSHIP

As someone would expect planning for home ownership for your family member can be complicated. The mix between financial and legal matters, health and safety concerns, and social support adds more considerations. It means paying attention to several critical components.

FINANCING THE PURCHASE

The Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) provides families with a means to begin saving for the purchase of a home. The matching Canada Disability Savings Grant, the Disability Savings Bond and compound interest will increase the size of the capital your family member will have available. Details of the RDSP are discussed in Step Five of this book.

Other creative financing ideas:

- **Leverage a current asset:** If your family owns a home, consider re-mortgaging, a reverse mortgage or accessing the equity through a line of credit.
- **Invest together:** Forming a housing co-op with other people to purchase a home and rent it out to cover the mortgage and taxes. When your family is ready, sell your portion to leverage funds towards a downpayment, for your family plan.
- **Partnerships with local developers:** Developers are incentivized by governments to work with groups who may assist with achieving local housing targets. In return, they can receive zoning concessions from municipalities and be fast-tracked for permits.
- **Estate Planning:** Families can plan for a portion of the estate to establish a housing trust exclusively for the purpose of purchasing a home. They can also use financial vehicles like life insurance for the sole purpose of planning for future housing for the person.

Because of the complexity of the interaction between the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and finances, it is important to seek the advice of professionals: lawyers and financial planners.

Jonathan's Story:

Leveraging an existing asset

Background:

Earl and Carol began planning when Jonathan was in his early 30's, to ensure that Jonathan would always have a home of his own. Jonathan likes his own space and did not want to live-in a group environment. A quiet and flexible living environment was important to him. He also did better with predictable day filled with physical movement and meaningful activities.

What was important to Jonathan and his family:

- A 'walkable" community.
- Access to places and spaces of interest (trampoline, swimming, rock climbing)
- Aging in place, as a family
- Working within the existing budget and assets

What they had in place:

- Passport Funding
- ODSP
- RDSP
- Henson Trust (estate planning)
- A home, that could be sold.
- A planner to help with the vision
- A network of Support and Friendship to help with problem solving and brainstorming

What they did to make it happen:

- Developed their vision and support model based on their assets and financial situation
- Worked with an architect who was aware of zoning
- Had conversations with other families, learning from others.
- Sold their primary residence to purchase a less expensive home close to their current community, on a property with space for an additional dwelling unit (ADU) to trails and community interests
- Built an additional dwelling unit for Jonathon's parents with funds from the primary home sale. Jonathon, his Caregiver, and their spouse (housemate) live in the main home.

Support Model:

- Live-in Caregiver for morning, evenings and overnight (this is less than hourly support)
- Passport Funding for day activities of choice
- Family on weekends, including older son.
- Network of Support is available, should the need occur on occasion.

Sustainability Features:

- The rental of the Additional Dwelling and estate funds will cover maintenance, insurance, and taxes. The trustee of the estate will manage the details.
- Additional funding will be available through a Henson Trust and an RDSP, both of which will be managed by a trustee in the estate.
- A Microboard supports with the staffing model (employment contracts and administration of MCCSS funding). It will liaise with the estate for any additional needs should they arise.
- An ally agency is the broker for funding from MCCSS received through a housing initiative and provides case management and system support.

Jonathan has thrived in his new home. He really enjoys his live-in Caregiver and housemate (Caregiver's spouse). His days are filled with activities that are self-directed. He has explored volunteerism over the past few years. With his family right next door, Jonathan often gets to pop in for a meal or enjoy a visit when his brother is visiting.

The Network of Support and Microboard meet at least twice a year to problem-solve issues that might arise and develop processes to support the sustainability model.

An example of leveraging assets is the story of Jonathan. Jonathan wanted to have a home in a familiar community, close to the spaces and places that matter to him like trails, walkable neighbourhoods, recreation facilities. Jonathan and his parents (Earl and Carol) also recognized the need to stay close to their doctors and a large hospital, to support aging in place for the caregivers. Jonathan needs full time support to be safe and it was important to the family to be close by to support the relationship and family unit. Jonathan had never lived with anyone else, and he had no interest in sharing his space with a peer. But it was recognized that he could not live without support.

The solution:

They used the asset of their existing home to purchase a new home, close to the places and spaces that matter to Jonathan and his family. For Jonathan, this meant having his own space with live-in supports and a home share (spouse of live-in support) with a renovated garage that became the parental home on same property.

Technical advice for construction and renovation

Housing and zoning are complex. If your family's plan includes creating a structure or building, we suggest seeking support from the experts in your area. We also suggest spending time with the local town planner and engineering department to ask them for support or resources to support a build. This will ensure that everything is done in compliance with any local bylaws.

In general, it is recommended that your family gets an understanding of all in-home accommodations that might assist your family member. For example, seeking support from an occupational therapist through your local health network might be important.

Designing the space around the things that make independence possible, like induction ovens, slow cookers and technology is important.

We have developed a list of resources that might support your family in this area, including some toolkits developed to support people with diverse needs when thinking of housing.

Programs and grants

There are always opportunities for grants, tax credits and subsidies to support the development and/or renovation of housing in each community. The best way to determine what might be available locally is to use the key internet search terms like:

- National Housing Strategy
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Tax credits for people with disabilities
- Renovation grants for people with disabilities

Within Ontario, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is responsible for affordable housing programs, which are delivered by region, county or municipality. These are the people who know and manage the subsidized housing and supportive housing options, as well as any new grants or programs. To locate a local housing lead, use the key internet terms: Housing Programs in: *insert name of local town, county or region.*

Additionally, the Government of Canada, through CMHC, provides information on Affordable Housing Programs across Canada by province or territory.

Ongoing costs of home ownership

There is a need to plan for the ongoing costs of home ownership. The following areas are meant to provide insight and options to support the cost of owning a home.

Municipal taxes

There are opportunities for the homeowner to seek a municipal tax exemption for a portion of the property that had been renovated to support the person. This is achieved through contacting the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation. Please seek information in your local municipality.

Maintenance

If purchasing a house, your family needs to consider the costs of home ownership, such as:

- Structural costs that may arise with time, such as replacing windows, the roof, etc.
- Landscaping and snow removal
- Minor maintenance and regular upkeep costs, such as painting, toilets, etc.

While this can be done by your family in the short term, consider contracting with a property management company to provide this service. In the longer term, setting up a housing fund to be managed by a trustee may be explored.

Some of the ways that families have been creative in funding their housing trust to support ongoing maintenance and housing expenses are:

- 1) **Consider a roommate:** Roommates, whether it is a peer who requires support or a person who just needs a home as well, is a great way to get a sustainable revenue to support the ongoing costs incurred by the housing trust, as well as share in utilities.
- 2) **Add a secondary suite, coach house or tiny home to the land:** Renting out a part of the home, which is separate from family member's space, allows for ongoing privacy, provides a monthly revenue to pay for maintenance, taxes and other costs. It also increases the value of the home and provides the potential for a friendly neighbour. In some areas, there are grants and support for building this additional rental accommodation, since it contributes to the housing solution for others.
- 3) **Identify the gap and develop a housing trust through estate planning:** For those families that have the financial ability, a separate housing trust account that generates income through investments is an option. Family members can stabilize this trust by purchasing life insurance to ensure it is ongoing when they are no longer able to contribute to the trust.

Looking to the future

Times are changing. People and families see themselves as part of the solution. This step, ‘Creating a Home’ connects with the other steps in this book. It does not exist in isolation. Without the existence of a network of personal support, your family member may be just as isolated in their own place as anywhere else.

In addition, the next step, Making Sound Decisions, provides an overview on supported decision-making, which is a key component to implementing support with the supported person, rather than for the supported person.

There really is no right or wrong decision. It is more about moving ahead with a decision and being ready to address changing needs based on real life experiences, as your family moves forward. We have provided your family with a decision-making tool. This step is meant to help identify what your family member wants and needs, as well as staffing, support and financial considerations based on these preferences and safeguards.

Patrick's Story: Getting ready for a new life – and home!

Patrick is a 28-year-old man who has a clear vision that he would like to move out of his family home when he is ready and to be more independent. With his Independent Planning Facilitator in Ottawa Ontario, he has started identifying community connections he'd like to nurture and gaining skills that he can transfer to his personal life after he moves out. Patrick also wants to develop a weekly routine before moving out, so that he can continue with the same routine once he is living on his own.

Patrick currently volunteers a few days a week at a museum and goes swimming every few weeks at his local YMCA. Realizing he wanted a hobby in the arts, he recently started private animation classes which he is loving. Patrick is also taking initiative in his family home by doing his own laundry as well as doing some meal preparation independently. In addition, Patrick stepped up when his parents went on a vacation for a week: he decided he would buy his own groceries, cook his own meals and take care of the family home including their dog Bella. Patrick was very proud of this accomplishment and continues to seek opportunities to be more independent. In all of his conversations about moving out, Patrick identified that he would require additional supports in his life, aside from those provided by his mom and dad; he is hoping that he will not have to rely on his parents for everything after he moves out. This concern led to Patrick and his family being introduced to the idea of creating a Lifetime Network – an ideal solution to have in place.

In the meantime, with the help of his Independent Planning Facilitator, Patrick has begun working on getting his vision for his future down on paper. Together they're working on creating a plan of what his ideal living arrangement will be, identifying his support needs after he moves out, and creating a current budget and a projection of what his expenses will look like when he is living on his own.

Patrick's vision for living a good life includes living in a quiet, comfortable and safe one-bedroom apartment with laundry access in his home or in the building. Ideally, he'd like to be in a neighborhood with a grocery store in easy walking distance, with other resources he needs or enjoys accessible by public transport. He is looking forward to feeling responsible for his own space, with a combination of support from his Circle, and hired support.

Patrick has identified his fears and is brainstorming on things he can do in the present to help with those fears. He states, "I'm scared because I have never done it, but I want to try it!" His family will be available to support him; he knows that if he has any struggles along the way, he will have his Circle, in addition to his parents, for support. Ideally Patrick would like to have a therapeutic dog to help with his anxiety as well as having a companion to care for; he feels that having a dog will prevent him from feeling lonely in his own home.

Patrick is looking forward to feeling in control of his life, making his own decisions and being in charge!

Making it last: building in sustainability

We want to leave your family with the most important part of creating any individualized housing model, sustainability. Sustainability is ensuring that the housing model will work independently, meaning when the primary care provider is no longer involved. Below are some important items to consider that may increase sustainability:

- 1) **Facilitation:** A facilitator can help to foster relationships, coordinate support and actively build the supported person's community. Partners for Planning has a list of facilitators on their website.
- 2) **Circle of Support:** A group of informal and formal support people who really care for the family member being supported. A facilitator may be helpful in keeping this group strong and fostering relationships between circle members.
- 3) **Microboard™:** An incorporated entity made up of your family member and informal supporters who have real relationships with them. A Microboard is unbiased, as no one is paid, but are invested in supporting your family member in administrative needs. More detailed information about Microboards can be found in section 4 of this book.
- 4) **Partnerships:** Connecting with like-minded people and organizations can help when trying to go about something differently. When considering a more unique concept for home and the required support for your family member to live there, it may be necessary to reach out to develop partnerships with an organization that holds your values. For instance, if a person were to have some individualized funding, you might look for an organization you could partner with to provide direct support or meet some other need like all the administrative pieces around hiring your own staff. While Ontario hasn't moved to a fully individualized model in terms of developmental services funding, those people who might have large Passport budgets or some private resources may need help managing those funds to help make their plan sustainable. Partnerships and connection can help in other ways too like being part of family network to have peer support, generate ideas, remain grounded in your values, or engage in advocacy together.

The key is, people and connections that are formed through similar values helps with sustainability.

In conclusion

There is nothing
like staying
at home for
real comfort.

JANE AUSTEN

Planning intentionally takes time, dedication and effort. Everyone knows that any plan might have to change and be adjusted over the years, as everyone's life can encounter the unexpected. But the benefit of intentional planning allows the supported person to live their best life, based on their identified preferences, lifestyle, hopes and dreams. In the end, having a home of their own allows your supported family member to make choices and realize their vision by maximizing their resources, including time and energy, as well as utilizing community resources at all levels of government.

Families often express that each step of the way is a step closer to the vision. They mention that the hardest part was identifying the vision and their Circle of Support. But once they had an idea of where they were going and who was on their team, the effort became more of a shared goal. In the end, this effort provides a safe and secure home of their own based on choice, flexibility and the belief of full inclusion.

References:

Etmanski, Al. (2004). A good life: For you and your relative with a disability. Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network.

Helpful Housing Terms:

Individualized Housing Supports: An individualized funding allocation, similar to Community Participation Supports Funding (Passport Funding) that gives people greater choice and control over their housing supports.

Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (Portable Housing Subsidy): The Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) program provides households with a portable housing benefit to assist with rental costs in the private housing market. The benefit is tied to the household and can be used to help pay rent anywhere in Ontario.

Subsidized Housing: is government sponsored economic assistance aimed towards alleviating rental costs for people with low to moderate incomes.

Live-in Support: An employee / paid caregiver that resides in the same dwelling, possibly in a separate unit. They do not work nights but will be compensated, based on the employment standards act, if needed for overnight emergencies. They get 72 hours off every 14 days and other employment benefits, in accordance with the employment standard act.

Homeshare: A homeshare is an unpaid person who lives in the home, pays reduced rent or no rent and pay their own food. They have a separate bedroom and act as a friendly housemate, which means, they do not provide “direct” hands on support but will provide up to 10 hours of home support per week such as maintenance, grocery shopping, lawn care, etc.

Peer: A roommate that also requires a paid support staff and shares the cost of rent, food and staffing.

Intensive Support: When 24/7 support is required to ensure the health and safety of the person supported.

Practicing in Place: A concept developed by planners that allows a person to try-evaluate and commit to support approaches, places, spaces, staff supports and activities, before moving into a “model of support”. It allows for experiences and practice to form our vision, rather than imagination and philosophy. It is based on the knowledge that we all do not know what we want, until we live it.

Geographic Cluster Model: When people who are located near each other (for example a 20km radius), may choose to work together for some parts of their housing model. Examples cluster efficiencies include: Co-hiring a driver to be on call for activities, co-hiring a team of 5 direct support staff available to be scheduled by people individually -as needed, a maintenance crew that might be purchased at a reduced rate for 5 properties, a life skills coach that might work individually for 5 people in one neighbourhood.

Market Rent options help low- and moderate income households with housing costs. Rents for these units are fixed at up to 80 per cent of the average market rent as posted by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Community Housing Corporations are organizations that provide affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households.

To download a copy of all Worksheets, visit safeandsecurebook.ca and click on **Safe & Secure Worksheets**.

Worksheet 7

Welcome mat

These are questions you can discuss with your family member. Have some fun and use a variety of props to facilitate your discussion: perhaps have your family member draw a few pictures or make a collage of cutouts from magazines.

What kind of home would you like to live in? _____

Would you like to live by yourself or with other people? _____

If you live with others, what rooms/space do you need for yourself? _____

Who would you like to help you live in your own home? _____

What would this person help you with? _____

Where do you want to live? _____

Why do you want to live there? _____

What do you want to live close to? (a park, church, recreation centre, bus route, shops, and so on.)

Is the layout important? (a ramp vs. stairs, large bathroom, accessible space and doorways?) _____

What is your favourite room? _____

Do you have a favourite chair? Would you like to have one? Which room would you place it in? _____

Where would you place your favourite things? _____

What kind of furniture will you need for your own place? _____

What furniture from your family home would you like to have in your own home? _____

Would you keep a pet? What kind? _____

Would you like a garden? _____

Do you like to cook? If so, would you like to have a big kitchen? _____

Would you like to have a quiet room? _____

Which room would you like to have music in? _____

Do you like doing dishes? _____

Do you like to clean the house? _____

Do you like to mow the lawn? _____

How would you decorate:

Your living room? _____

Your bedroom? _____

Your entrance? _____

What colour would you paint the outside of your house? _____

How would you welcome visitors to your home? _____

When you came home at the end of the day, what would be the first thing you would do? _____

Explore **planningnetwork.ca** for additional resources on Creating a Home.

You may also be interested in these housing-related resources:

- INNOVATIVE & INDIVIDUALIZED HOUSING OPTIONS for adults with a developmental disability (Facebook)
- BUILDING A GOOD LIFE for people with a disability (Facebook)

Worksheet 8

When is a house a home?

Here are some simple guidelines and questions to help you evaluate the home-like quality of residential services.

Whose house is it?

Are the individuals who live in the house the ones to determine its structure and tone or is the house geared to suit the staff hired to provide service?

Use your home and your own life as yardsticks for comparison. Do not accept, “Well, it’s better than where they were.” Instead, ask yourself, “Is it as good as I have now?” and “Is it as good as I would want for myself?”

Look around

Are there locks where they are not needed; that is, on the refrigerator, on the clothes closets, and so on?

Are there no locks where they are needed; that is, on bathroom doors, bedroom doors, filing cabinets, medicine cabinets, and so on?

Do people have the same amount and variety of possessions and personal articles as other people their age?

What does it feel like?

Are the rooms comfortable? How about the couch? The chairs? Could you relax here? Does the place feel like a home?

Take a moment to listen

Can you go somewhere for a little peace and quiet? Are there conversations among the people who live here?

Smell

Do you get a scent of home made dinner on the stove or dessert in the oven, or do you smell institutional cleaners and odors?

Taste

Would you enjoy the food that is served or would you merely tolerate it?

Ask

What are the rules? Are they excessive or overly restrictive? Do they make sense to you? Who makes the rules? What happens if there is complaint, either from you or towards you, or the staff?

Infer

Do the people who live here experience a home with some added support, programming, and needed supervision? Or do they experience an institutional program with a few home-like qualities?

Analyze

What compromises have been made in the name of budget limitations, programming practices, staff needs, and so on? In what ways do these compromises detract from a home-like atmosphere?

Ask yourself

If an opening came up tomorrow, would I move in?