



# Tip Sheet

## Home!

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Since 2003, Belonging Matters has journey with many people with intellectual disability and Autism to move beyond tradition group home living to imagine and create a home of their own. We have harnessed the wisdom of individuals, families and our many allies locally, nationally and internationally. Following are some tips we have learnt along the way!

- ✔ Without reflection about what it really means to have a “real” home or place of one’s own, we’re likely to view people as needing to be “housed” or “accommodated”, rather than upholding a typical and natural vision of what it means to have one’s own home.
- ✔ “A “real” home is not solely one’s dwelling place, but rather a key crucible in life that helps sustain and uphold much that is deeply personal, private and intimate about ourselves and reflects our deep identity, values and preferences for a good life.” (Michael Kendrick, 2008).
- ✔ “Home is a place to be you, to share one’s life, its joys and pain, with the people you choose to live with and who understand and care about you. Home is a place where you feel comfortable, valued and respected.” (Anita O’Brien, 2015)
- ✔ It’s not necessary for people with disabilities to live together based on diagnosis. People generally choose who they live with based on qualities, interests, love and connection. With an open mind about who a person might live with, we can draw from a larger range of people and move beyond the current service models, for example homeshare.
- ✔ We should not force or pressure people with disabilities to live together in group arrangements based on economic efficiencies. “... typically people in such settings are over-served, made more dependent than they need to be, and there is often little incentive towards frugality or the tailoring of spending to meet individual needs more optimally”. Michael Kendrick (2015).
- ✔ Home is a deeply personal and creating a home with a person needs to be approached one person at a time by imagining what the ideal home life would look like. A good place to start is to set all barriers and preconceived ideas aside (even for a short time) and imagine, with the person, the ideal home life. This creates a vision which can anchor all efforts in the future. Once the vision is in place, you can then start to work out the practicalities and priorities.

- ✓ Each person's home is different and deeply personal. Focus on the person's unique identity, for example: Where does the person want to live? Who do they want to live with? What are their tastes that reflect their personality? What routines and rituals are important to the person? How can we support the person, with integrity to meet their needs and preferences over time?
- ✓ It is possible for people with complex disabilities to live in their own home. Their desire for a real home is no less important or different to others. This is done through creating a range of flexible and creative supports that are well matched to the person's interests, personality and needs. This doesn't necessarily equate to more cost.
- ✓ People can live in their own home without having to be able to "live independently." Think about all of the connections available to the person who could provide support e.g. family, neighbours, a housemate, friends, a gardener. A range of supports provides a rich and diverse life and reduces the dependence of formal supports. You might ask a neighbour to share dinner once per week or provide a room to a housemate in exchange for support.
- ✓ Often the home of a person with a disability is owned and operated by services. Their home becomes a public setting rather than a private and personal setting. Others manage and run their home. Explore options and opportunities which provide the person with ownership, secure tenure and sovereignty in regards to their homes and lives. Avoid "professionalising" their home e.g. a staff office, rules and regulations on walls etc.
- ✓ The self-determination and preferences of a person are central to assisting them to create a home. Through opportunity, practice and supported decision-making processes, it is possible for all people to have influence over the design of their home and life. This is done through keeping a central focus on the person when planning, making concepts understandable and concrete if required and involving those who know and care about the person (they will know the person's preferences well).
- ✓ Think about those who can provide leadership or join the journey to make the vision a reality. Often this work is done through Circles of Support, which can provide an important safeguard for the future. Many Circle members have been of tremendous practical assistance!
- ✓ Hold positive expectations in regard to the person's potential. People only learn to live in their own home by living in their own home! Through many opportunities and personalised support, many people will exceed what was originally thought possible. It is difficult to discover and explore the potential of people's when competing needs exist e.g. service rules and regulations, high staff turn-over or living with others who have needs.
- ✓ Making a home is an ongoing process - it's not a one-time thing. People's needs change over time so the regular revisiting of a person's vision is vital.
- ✓ It's simply not enough to have a roof over one's head. All people need fulfilling, meaningful and purposeful lives. Look for ways that the person can connect, take up roles and contribute to their home, neighbourhood or community. For example, invite a neighbour to dinner, host a street party, join a local club, volunteer, work, shop locally, etc.

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