Housing Options for Adults with Autism

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Introduction

- Context of Housing Options
- The Good News: Separation of Housing from Services is Best Practice
- Don’t Panic! Plan
- The Housing Equation
- The Big 4: SSI, SSDI, Sec. 8, MassHealth
- Housing’s effect on benefits
- Possible ways to acquire housing
- Prerequisites for buying
- Examples
- Financing Options Through Fannie Mae
Won’t my child go into a group home?

- About 500 students with autism will turn 22 this year
- Only about 50 are likely to receive a group home placement from DDS
- About 25 may receive Shared Living in a home shared with a live-in provider – but the bricks and mortar are not funded by DDS
- About 40 may receive individual supports in an apartment – but the bricks and mortar are not funded by DDS

Most families will need to face the challenge of finding or creating housing
Finding housing is challenging, but can lead to better outcomes

- Individuals can choose with whom they live

- If the service provider is a poor fit, the individual can change providers without moving

- If a live-in caregiver quits, the caregiver leaves, not the person with a disability
Don’t Panic! Plan*

- Learn the alphabet soup of the Housing Equation
  - Rules govern which government programs can be combined, which can’t, and where they can be used
- Develop a housing strategy that you can implement over time; 5–10 years is not uncommon
- If possible, save money when the child is young
  - Never in the child’s name, although the child can be the beneficiary of a special needs trust or ABLE account
- At 18, start taking concrete steps
- Don’t wait until you’re ready for your child to move out – because when you start taking steps is when the 5–10 year clock starts!

* Nothing here constitutes legal or financial advice
The Housing Equation*

**Bricks and mortar expenses**
- SSI
- SSDI
- Section 8
- Other “affordable housing”
- DDS
- Energy/utility assistance
- Private resources

**Food**
- SSI
- SSDI
- Food stamps (SNAP or Bay State CAP)
- DDS
- Private resources

**Supportive services**
- SSI
- SSDI
- MassHealth (Medicaid)
- DDS
- Private resources

* Slide taken from “Learning about Housing: A Workshop”, Copyright © 2015, Autism Housing Pathways, Inc. Used with permission.
The Big 4: SSI, SSDI, Sec. 8, MassHealth

SSI
- $576–$1,187/month, depending on living situation
- Makes you eligible for MassHealth
- Can be used for housing or services
- Income and asset limits

SSDI
- Based on the parent’s work history, the individual’s work history, or both
  - If based on parent’s history, kicks in when parent retires, becomes disabled, or dies
- Usually pays more than SSI
- Makes you eligible for Medicare
- Can be used for housing or services
- Fewer income and asset limits
The Big 4: SSI, SSDI, Sec. 8, MassHealth

Sec. 8

- Individual pays 30% of income in rent to landlord; the balance is paid to the landlord with funds from the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development
- Can be a 10–12 year wait
- Having a family member be the landlord can be permitted as a reasonable accommodation, but the person renting must live in a legal, separate unit
- Coming soon: “18? Section 8!”
- Come to an AHP Sec. 8 sign-up clinic
The Big 4: SSI, SSDI, Sec. 8, MassHealth

- MassHealth
  - The main way to pay for services
    - “State Plan Services” – one of the few entitlements in the adult world
      - Adult Family Care / Adult Foster Care (@$26 or $52/day)
      - Personal Care Attendant (PCA) (allocated a budget for a certain number of hours per week)
      - Group Adult Foster Care (@$1227/mo)
### Housing’s effect on benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family buys</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(reduces benefits)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family buys; individual</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rents from family</td>
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<tr>
<td>(May or may not reduce benefits;</td>
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<td>depends on amount of rent)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family rents</strong></td>
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<td>a house or apartment for the individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>(reduces benefits)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual rents with help from</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>family (reduces benefits)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual rents</strong></td>
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<td>(does not reduce benefits)</td>
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Possible ways to acquire property*

- Convert basement or garage
- Add on an accessory apartment
- Sell home and buy two condos
- Sell home and buy a two or three family
  - Third unit might be for rental income or maybe two families buy together
- Individual can (if income is high enough to qualify for a mortgage) enter a first-time homebuyer lottery
- Buy a condo or house (either alone or with other families)

* Nothing here constitutes legal or financial advice
Prerequisites for buying*

- Money for a down payment (assets)
- Financing
- Ability to afford something long term

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Examples (1)

- **Liam**
  - Applies for an apartment in state senior housing and gets in after 3 years
  - Uses Group Adult Foster Care to pay for two hours a day of services

- **Ana**
  - Her parents give her a fixed amount every month, which she combines with her own funds to get an apartment in private affordable housing
Examples (2)

- Raj
  - Gets on the Sec. 8 waiting list at 18, and waits 10 years for a voucher
  - When Raj gets his voucher, his family uses a home equity loan to convert the garage to an apartment
  - Raj uses individual support hours from DDS
Examples (3)

- Sue
  - Gets on the Sec. 8 waiting list at 18, and waits 10 years for a voucher
  - While waiting, her mother is her Adult Family Care provider, and her father is her guardian
  - Her mother saves the AFC stipend for 10 years, acquiring $90,000 to use as a down payment
  - When she gets her voucher, her parents buy her a condo, and she uses the voucher to pay rent; her parents use the rent to pay the mortgage
  - An Adult Foster Care provider moves in with Sue
  - Sue’s parents retire, and Sue moves onto SSDI, increasing her income
Fannie Mae considers parents or guardians buying a property for their disabled family member to be an owner-occupier, provided the person with a disability can’t work or has insufficient income to qualify for a mortgage*  
◦ Borrower must be a natural person, not a legal entity+

Most Fannie Mae lenders are unfamiliar with this accommodation

* https://www.fanniemae.com/content/guide/selling/b2/1/01.html
+ https://www.fanniemae.com/content/announcement/0909.pdf
Community HomeChoice

- A special product providing benefits to disabled persons that are not otherwise available under Fannie Mae’s non-Community HomeChoice guidelines

- The borrower, or a family member* residing with the borrower, must be “handicapped” as defined under the federal Fair Housing Act.

  - The borrower’s spouse, child, dependent, domestic partner, fiancé, fiancée, or any other individual related to the borrower by blood, marriage, adoption, or legal guardianship.
Program Eligibility Requirements

- Parents/guardians names can be on the deed
  - Housing debt can’t be more than 33% of income
  - Total debt can’t be more than 38% of income

- Only one and two-unit properties are eligible.
  - One unit property requires credit score of 680, 5% down, down payment may be gifted
  - Two unit property requires credit score of 700, 5% down, 3% must be from borrower’s own funds
    - A portion of rental income from the second unit may count toward qualifying income

- Ceilings on borrower’s income apply
For Further Information

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