

Intentional Communities Overview

A Sustainable Housing Option

Background

Powerful and important legislation protects the rights of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), including autism. Demand for support services, employment, and affordable housing exceeds existing supply, and the problem is only getting worse. Three distinct populations of individuals with I/DD are quickly converging:

1. Individuals who are exiting high school after years of investment and inclusion into a life of few opportunities
2. Individuals who are leaving licensed facilities as the push for deinstitutionalization continues
3. Individuals whose baby boomer parents are aging caregivers and will soon need care themselves

There is an urgent need for the development of sustainable housing and individualized supports in advancing more person-centered options. Fortunately, the law, including the new Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) regulations, supports the continuation and expansion of a unique housing model that leverages public-private partnerships and provides real community to residents. Called “intentional communities,” this movement is rapidly growing and seen as one solution to the present housing crisis.

The Fellowship for Intentional Community states, “... intentional communities are pioneers in sustainable living, personal and cultural transformation, and peaceful social evolution ... where people live together on the basis of explicit common values.” Intentional communities are designed and planned around a social ideal or collective values and interests, often involving shared resources and responsibilities.

Local educators, service providers, and community members see the struggle and stress of their friends and families who do not know what the future holds. Many groups have organized to provide land and raise resources to offer assistance in developing accessible housing opportunities based on the feedback of community members with I/DD who struggle to find meaningful work, affordable and safe housing, and social circles of voluntary reciprocal relationships.



What Intentional Communities ARE and What They ARE NOT

The Coalition for Community Choice has prepared a chart to compare and contrast features of intentional communities that are created to empower individuals with I/DD:

<p>ARE a type of housing option that the general population has been developing for decades in response to the lack of neighborliness of many modern suburbs and cities, and in order to benefit from shared amenities that would otherwise be too expensive to afford.</p>	<p>ARE NOT a new phenomenon.</p>
<p>ARE advocating for more person-centered and individualized supports in housing options where individuals with I/DD can choose their service provider, their roommates, their schedule based on their self-determined choices.</p>	<p>ARE NOT congregate care facilities.</p>
<p>ARE often developed in response to the isolation that many individuals with I/DD currently experience without access to true friendships, meaningful work opportunities, and with feelings of being unsupported and under-valued by their community. Living in a pedestrian-oriented, intentional community offers easier access to develop relationships, freedom to join or retreat from activities, and more choices in work or volunteer opportunities without being dependent on others or transportation.</p>	<p>ARE NOT isolating individuals with I/DD.</p>
<p>ARE designed to create spaces that foster greater community integration through developing amenities, activities and social enterprises that are needed in the broader community, in addition to neurotypical neighbors, roommates, co-workers, and volunteers.</p>	<p>ARE NOT increasing segregation of individuals with I/DD.</p>
<p>ARE a voluntary, non-institutional, affordable housing option.</p>	<p>ARE NOT in violation of the Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision, which expressly supports choice and access to necessary services.</p>
<p>ARE home and community for many individuals with I/DD.</p>	<p>ARE NOT for everyone - it is an intentional lifestyle choice that many have already chosen.</p>

An intentional community could be an apartment building, located in the middle of a city, offering a social enterprise retail space and an accessible playground/green space; it could be centered around an agricultural center where individuals can grow food for their own consumption and for the greater community, care for animals, or host a weekly movie on the lawn event. The location, community amenities, and physical characteristics will differ, but all intentional communities have one thing in common:

Intentional communities are a sustainable housing option in a time of great need that fosters interdependent, integrated relationships.

The Coalition for Community Choice (CCC) is a national grassroots collaboration of individuals with disabilities, their families and friends, disability rights advocates, professionals, educators, and housing and services providers to advance the principle that community can be experienced in all residential settings. CCC was created to 1) promote and defend the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and autism to choose their residential settings from the broadest range of options; 2) educate federal and state governments on innovative Olmstead-compliant housing alternatives to "one-size fits all" approaches; and 3) preserve access to essential, publicly-funded services and supports in these settings.

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