

HOUSING THROUGH AN AUTISM LENS: THE DOUBLE CLIFF

Research shows that most Autistic adults live at home well into adulthood, and often middle age, with their family functioning as their fundamental source of support. They are also much more likely to be on social assistance and have poor employment outcomes. As young people transition to adulthood — and as their parents/caregivers age — they face unique and urgent housing needs. Commonly, a shortage of solutions means the situation becomes a crisis for them, their parents and siblings.

THIS TYPICALLY HAPPENS DURING AT LEAST TWO PRESSURE POINTS ALONG THEIR LIFECOURSE.

FIRST CLIFF: EARLY ADULthood

When an Autistic teenager enters adulthood, they may strive to live independently – with a level of support if needed. Sometimes it works and sometimes it does not. Typically both suitable housing options and the right level of support are scarce. If housing is found, the young adult may return home if the arrangement is not working out. Some will not leave home at all. This first cliff can be a very messy and stressful situation.

CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES INCLUDE:

FEW SUPPORTS.

Young adults transition from school-based supports to an underfunded and uncoordinated adult service system.

LONG WAITS. In communities across Canada, the wait for affordable housing is long. On the Ottawa waitlist, for example, 13,000 people will wait up to 10 years.

MENTAL ILLNESS.

One in two young adults with ASD have at least one psychiatric diagnosis, compared to 1 in 5 in the non-ASD young adult population. This population is also at greater risk of addictions and substance use.

SKILLS GAP. In many cases, barriers and challenges mean these young adults need significant support navigating what it means to live independently and live well.

CONTINUING CONCERNS.

When housing is finally found, families often worry about:

- lack of quality support
- housing setting (ie., congregated living), support qualifications
- social isolation
- their continued role as safety net for problem solving
- safety and abuse prevention
- affordability and financial security

SECOND CLIFF: TRANSITION INTO SENIORHOOD

As parent caregivers grow old, the need to find housing becomes urgent. Parents may no longer be able to provide care, or they may pass away. Too often, Autistic adults are forced to accept the first available living arrangement, even if it takes them out of their home community and networks of support.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE CRISIS IS:

LACK OF FUTURE PLANNING

HIGH COST OR LACK OF AVAILABLE SUPPORTS

INCREASING NEEDS AS THE AUTISTIC ADULT AGES

THE INVISIBILITY OF THE CRISIS, WHERE STOP-GAP SOLUTIONS ARE USED OVER THE SHORT-TERM

THE HARD REALITY

Very often, serious problems coexist with or result from these housing crises, including:

POVERTY

POOR MENTAL HEALTH

ISOLATION

FOOD INSECURITY

POOR PHYSICAL HEALTH

LACK OF SUPPORT

THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Housing through an Autism Lens is an 18-month Solutions Lab project to identify and address the barriers Autistic adults face – especially in young adulthood and early seniorhood – in acquiring and maintaining affordable and stable housing that meets their needs over a lifetime. For more information contact:

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