

A PLACE TO CALL HOME:

# HOUSING THROUGH AN AUTISM LENS

## A pathway from crisis to solutions

Long-term housing and independent living are elusive concepts for many Autistic adults. They experience many vulnerabilities and their needs are complex. They have an urgent need for innovative, integrated and collaborative housing solutions.

*Housing through an Autism lens is an 18-month social change lab project to identify and address the barriers these adults face – especially in young adulthood and early seniorhood – in acquiring and maintaining affordable and stable housing that meets their needs.*

### THE HOUSING DISCONNECT

Autistic adults face particular challenges in securing housing that meets their needs. Their vulnerabilities are many. Autistic adults experience unique and heightened social and economic stresses. They are likely to experience co-existing mental illness and chronic health problems and often require specialized supports.

The current crisis-driven housing support model fails to meet these complex needs. At the root of the problem is a disconnect between what an Autistic adult requires to live and thrive and what the housing market is able to offer. Among other shortcomings, current approaches fail to address community social sustainability and integrate service providers.

Through a social change lab approach, this project will explore and develop upstream solutions that focus on preventing housing instability.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The project will develop a pathway to independent and affordable living for Autistic adults that includes an integrated set of flexible housing-related supports and services based on needs, as well as actual bricks and mortar solutions. Longer term, this path to lifelong housing security will help to increase safety and reduce vulnerability and the risk of homelessness for Autistic adults at points of volatility or life changes.

## WORKPLAN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PHASE 1

### DEFINING THE PROBLEM

PHASE 1 (OCTOBER 2020-DECEMBER 2020) is about better understanding the problem. To that end, we will convene representatives from the Autistic adult community – Autistic adults, service providers and experts from the full system of services available. This group will dissect the problem and identify social change lab participants. We will create a stakeholder engagement plan with accommodations to work with Autistic adults and finalize our workplan –including critical path, social media strategy and outreach events.

*WE NEED YOU to join us in lab sessions and contribute your insights*

PHASE 2

### CONDUCTING RESEARCH AND GATHERING STORIES

In PHASE 2 (NOVEMBER 2020 – MAY 2021), our specialized team will complete three streams of research: a) a comparative analysis of existing approaches, b) a technical and legislative review, and c) an innovative approach to understanding the experiences and needs of Autistic adults. This includes using innovative tools, including an online platform and specially trained scribes, to gather and analyze housing micro-stories. This approach is accessible and effectively removes evaluator bias. We will gather 300-500 micro-stories from Autistic adults, service and housing providers, caregivers and other identified groups. Participants will be recruited through media, social platforms, a symposium and partner networks. Stakeholders will then be engaged in a 'sense-making' session to analyze the data and identify emerging insights. These findings will be shared through social media and select digital news sites. We will also host a live webcast to discuss insights to date and generate further ideas.

*WE NEED YOU to contribute your stories, and help connect us to people with lived experience to share their stories*

PHASE 3

### IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

PHASE 3 (JUNE 2021 – AUGUST 2021) will include stakeholder ideation workshops and a policy roundtable to share findings and generate potential solutions. A policy brief will be created, and an op-ed with solution ideas will be shared via digital news sites, social media and partner networks. Research gaps identified will be addressed to the best of our ability and ideas prioritized, with the best going through to prototyping through a GBA+ (gender-based analysis plus) lens.

*WE NEED YOU to take part in insight generation and ideation sessions!*

PHASE 4

### DEVELOPING PROTOTYPES

In PHASE 4 (SEPTEMBER 2021 – NOVEMBER 2021) we will prototype top ideas. We will create one-pagers on solution prototypes and a toolkit to facilitate a person-centred planning process to meet evolving Autistic adult housing needs. The team will develop prototypes and, where possible, test them. We will share lessons learned via diverse media channels and presentations at the 2021 CASDA and CHRA national conferences.

PHASE 5

### MAPPING THE WAY FORWARD

Finally, in PHASE 5 (DECEMBER 2021 – FEBRUARY 2022) we will bring Autistic adults, stakeholders and partners together for a road-mapping session to design pathways and commitments to support the adoption of solutions. A roadmap infographic and summary report will be produced for targeted distribution.

### THE SOCIAL CHANGE LAB APPROACH

Social change labs are processes designed to address complex, sticky problems that other methods have not yet been able to solve. A main operating principle of labs is that they include representation from the entire system in question, are exploratory in nature and evidence-driven, and promising ideas are prototyped and tested as potential solutions.

### ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

We are particularly excited about how we will engage people with lived experience across the spectrum. We'll use a narrative research methodology to capture 300-500 micro-stories of housing experiences that were either amazing or terrible, with summaries and meaning provided by the respondents themselves, not by the researchers. We believe this method will be very accessible for participants and give us the opportunity to find meaning and patterns in relation to what people need for successful housing. We will also gather stories from caregivers and other stakeholders.

THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY:



## PROJECT TEAM AND PARTNERS

### THE CORE PROJECT TEAM INCLUDES:

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### PROJECT PARTNERS INCLUDE:

- Advisors - Self Advocates: Christine Jenkins, Courtney Weaver, and Matthew Dever
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- Algonquin College, Claude Brulé, President
- Autism and Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network (AIDE), Joanna Nefs, ED
- Autism Ontario, Margaret Spoelstra, CEO and Tobi McEvenue, Adult Coordinator
- Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health -
- Dr. Yona Lunsky, Director
- Dr. Jonathan Weiss, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, York University, and a Clinical Psychologist
- LiveWorkPlay - Julie Kingstone, Co-Leader & Director of Operations
- Ottawa Adult Autism Initiative, Sheila Bell, Lead
- Ottawa Community Housing, Stephane Giguere, CEO
- Sinneave Family Foundation - Tanya McCleod, CEO and Barbara Potter, COO
- The Royal Mental Health Centre, Patient Care Services and Community Mental Health - Dr. Susan Farrell, Vice President