

Life Sharing for [REDACTED]

Life sharing has had a positive impact on [REDACTED] quality of life and is the least restrictive of available living arrangements. It is important to define life sharing and family living, as referenced in this document and as understood by [REDACTED] and his family. Our understanding of life sharing is having the opportunity to choose a partner or roommate and build a home together. In family living, [REDACTED] would move into an existing home with a family or partner. [REDACTED] has lived in three group homes. He has not experienced family living, but with an understanding of the concept of family living, a comparison of living in a group home, family living, and life sharing can be made.

Each of the group homes was staffed by a group of four caregivers, who rotated shifts and days to provide coverage. Although the staff followed the agency rules, in each instance there were four very diverse personalities with different interpretations and tolerances, resulting in inconsistent living situations. This contributed to [REDACTED] anxiety level, which is magnified because of his developmental disabilities.

In all three group homes, [REDACTED] housemates had varied abilities, which limited his activities. In the first home, the other two men had difficulty walking, thus limiting [REDACTED] physical activity. With lack of exercise, he began to gain weight, which exacerbated his sleep apnea. One of the men had difficulty sitting and eating and would reach on his housemates' plates to take their food. This behavior also restricted trips in the community. In the second group home, one of the men many times refused to participate in excursions, thus canceling planned activities. Attempts were made to have additional staffing once a week to afford [REDACTED] the opportunity to attend Special Olympics. With staff shortage, he would be unable to attend. In the third group home, [REDACTED] one housemate was in a wheelchair, which again limited physical activity. All of [REDACTED] belongings were kept locked because of damage done by his housemates. In all three situations, [REDACTED] was very concerned about the health and well being of his housemates and worried about them even when he was away. In less than five years living in group homes, two of his roommates died and a third went to a nursing home. All of us experience such losses, but not usually in the short time frame.

In life sharing, [REDACTED] participates in the home selection, which gives him control over his life and builds self esteem. In family living, he would move into someone else's home and his contribution would be limited. He participates in care of the home, including outside maintenance, developing pride in "his home". [REDACTED] is included in the interview process for a life sharing partner. When a partner leaves, [REDACTED] can remain in his home. In family living [REDACTED] would not only lose his "family", but would need to adjust to a new environment.

Are long term relationships the norm in family living? His current house mate, [REDACTED] has lived with him for two and a half years. With this long term relationship, they have developed a strong friendship. They enjoy visiting each other's families. They have similar interests, in music, movies, history, exercising, and other activities. They also have dissimilarities and each participates in activities which interest the other. For example, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] practice different religions. They attend each other's churches and since [REDACTED] is a very spiritual person this is important to him. He has strong relationships in his home church,

such as the Sunday evening group for adults with developmental disabilities. He would be unhappy if he had to assimilate into another church environment.

In [REDACTED] life sharing situation, he and his partner are close in age, resulting in a normal adult friendship. As teenagers transition to adults, the goal is to move from the family home into an adult living arrangement. In family living, [REDACTED] would be in a home situation similar to his home as a child. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have gone on "double dates" with their girlfriends. [REDACTED] attends all Special Olympic and Suncom activities, which are extremely important to him. He enjoys the activities with his peers and builds friendships. He has explored other unique opportunities, such as learning to make stained glass items and becoming a member of a ghost hunting club. These physical and social activities are essential to supporting his physical and mental health. This is not to suggest that a family would be opposed to attending some of these events, but it is a busy schedule to incorporate into an existing family agenda.

[REDACTED] has always desired a home where he can express his artistic talents. He has the opportunity to contribute to the furnishing and decorating the home. Each room is decorated in a theme, with [REDACTED] paintings adding to the decor. He takes great pride in his artistic abilities and enjoys the positive comments from those who visit his home. This builds his confidence. In family living he would move into someone else's home and his contribution would be limited.

[REDACTED] living situation is closely monitored, by the supporting agency. There are monthly meetings attend by the important people in his life, those involved in his program, his family and friends. [REDACTED] chooses who he wants to attend, contributes to the agenda and has control of the meeting. The agency makes routine visits to the home, reviewing finances, activities and providing guidance to the life share partner.

Life sharing provides the most normal living arrangement for adults with developmental disabilities.

[REDACTED] is the safest and happiest he has been in his adult life. When he has guests at his home, his face glows with pride and his smile warms the room. As you make the decision to support life sharing or family living, please imagine what you would prefer in your own life or even more importantly, what you would prefer for your child.