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COMMENTARY 5 DAYS AGO

# North Texas needs more housing options for adults with autism and similar disorders

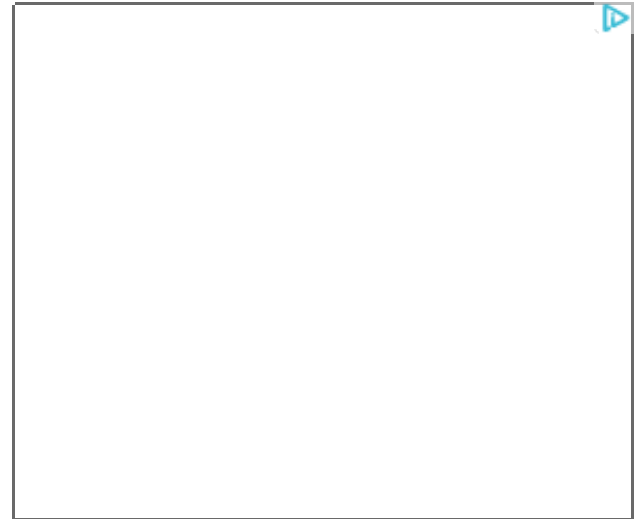


*Brenda Catlett and Robin LeoGrande*

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Our fellow citizens with intellectual and developmental challenges, such as Down syndrome, autism and other disabilities, want to pursue their right to live as independently as possible in their communities.

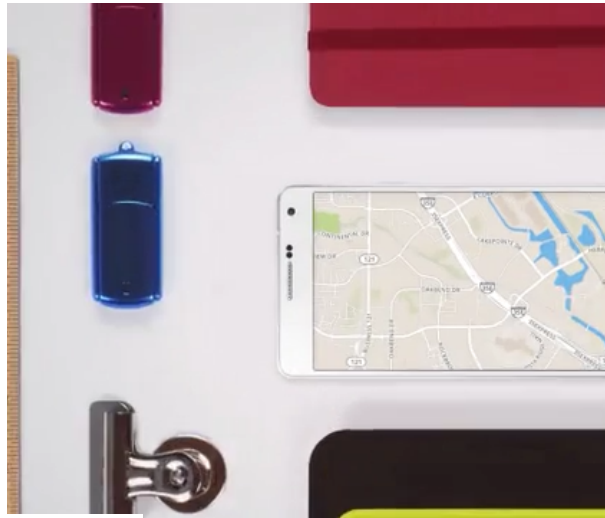


About 100,000 adults in North Texas have an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD) or autism. These adults will not be able to depend forever on their parents for care. Affordable housing is a huge need for these adults. Many can live independently with part-time assistance. Others require overnight care. But generally, adults with developmental or intellectual

challenges want to live in the communities they know, where they can access health care and living assistance through Medicaid and other programs. Texas needs more options for these people.

Recently, *The Dallas Morning News* published two stories about residential facilities in North Texas exclusively for adults with IDD and autism ([Dozens of parents commit \\$1 million to help build autism community in Denton, June 21](#); [Two new D-FW housing communities cater to adults with cognitive delays, disorders, May 24](#)). Residents and their families pay as much as \$3,500 per month, or \$42,000 per year, in rent in these developments. Health care and other services can add to the cost. These are positive initiatives, but they are providing housing for fewer than 500 residents all told, and the cost is out of reach for most families.

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The federal government considers rent at or below 30 percent of income to be affordable. A person with IDD or autism who receives only federal Supplemental Security Income has an income of just \$735 per month. To be affordable, rent would need to be about \$220 per month. Average rents in North Texas are far beyond this amount.

North Texas needs affordable options for community-based housing that can help people with IDD and autism engage in community life, control personal

resources, access health care locally, seek employment and work in a competitive, integrated workplace. And community-based housing can be less expensive than residential developments that exclusively accommodate people with IDD or autism.

Creating this safe, affordable housing is a challenge, but there are potential solutions. One is the project-based voucher system funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In recent years, the Dallas Housing Authority has offered these vouchers in its service area of Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Kaufman, Rockwall and Tarrant counties.





The vouchers allow people with IDD to pay rent that is at or near 30 percent of their income. The Dallas Housing Authority, through HUD funding, pays the remainder of the fair-market rent to the property owner. The property owner sets up an agreement with a provider to manage the care that the residents need. The residents or their families coordinate the specific services.

Currently, 54 people in the Dallas-Fort Worth area live in homes or apartments using project-based vouchers. This is just the beginning

of a movement that could help thousands of people with disabilities live independently in safe, affordable housing with the health care and living assistance they need.

Rising rents make it challenging to find apartment complexes willing to participate in project-based vouchers. HUD's fair-market rent tables have not kept pace with actual market rents, removing the incentive for property owners to participate in the program. The fair-market rent tables need to be updated for Dallas-Fort Worth, and the Dallas Housing Authority is the organization to drive this change.

*Brenda Catlett and Robin LeoGrande are members of the board of directors of Community for Permanent Supported Housing, which advocates affordable housing for adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities and autism. Website: [txcpsh.org](http://txcpsh.org)*