

WHY FRONT PORCH COHOUSING IS SO IMPORTANT: From a parent's perspective

There is a saying among parents of special needs children that goes like this: *Don't let the fears of the future rob you of the pleasures of the present.*

Annie W. shared that with us to help explain her feelings about raising a child with Autism. What the saying means is to appreciate in the present all that your child has to offer without worrying about what the future will bring. For the parent of an Autistic child, however, that must be difficult to do when you witness firsthand the struggles your child goes through each day.

“I always embraced that thought,” Annie says. “Until my son turned 25.”

At that point, she says, the precarious nature of her son's future hit her like a ton of bricks, and she now sees that this sentimental thought is just that, all sentiment.

When Annie closes her eyes each night, her first thought is *not* to embrace something funny or hopeful that her son did that day. Instead, since he is now an adult, her mind is flooded with the despair of where her son will live the day her eyes shut for the *last time*.

That's a heavy burden to shoulder.

Annie describes herself as a 'fact person', and her 35+ years as an accountant bear that out. That's why it's hard for her to ignore the fact that more than 5.5 million U.S. adults have an intellectual disability, and over 500,000 young people with Autism are expected to enter adulthood in the next decade. Then, there is the fact that approximately 75% of adults with such disabilities still live with their parents or other family members and don't receive formal support services.

That equates to thousands of people who require help to live independently. And although the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that people with special needs who receive government benefits must be housed in the least restrictive possible setting, other than Section 8 housing, which has decade long waiting lists, there are no plans in place at the state or federal level to meet this objective. This leaves parents with the overwhelming fear that the child they love will be left without the resources necessary to live a safe and meaningful life.

But there is hope on the horizon.

Front Porch Cohousing by NDL has a vision to create a village for special needs adults that are capable of more independent living arrangements. FPC is the brainchild of Jim and Nancy Richardson, who themselves have a son living with Autism. Their goal is to create a co-housing community where Autistic and intellectually challenged adults could live in a 1-4-bedroom unit but still have access to their community in case they work or volunteer, receive support services with things like medical appointments, medications, and paying bills, and take advantage of housing amenities such as a recreation center, gym, and more.

A community like this would be a godsend to parents like Annie. Not only would her son live with the same safety and security he receives at home, but he could socialize, work, and live the kind of life we all hope for our kids.

“The journey has to start somewhere,” Annie says. “And FPC is the only one willing to create the path.”