

Independent Living and Housing Considerations When Transition Planning

Planning for a young adult's independence requires early preparation, especially when navigating complex housing and support options. Transition planning requires students, families, and IEP teams to collaboratively address two key questions: where the student will live as an adult, and what supports are needed to maximize their independence. This transition can look very different from one student to the next and should be based on their strengths and the supports needed. Review the next few paragraphs to explore the full continuum of housing and independent living options, and how to tap into critical funding paths for future independence.

Housing Options

People with disabilities have access to a wide range of housing options. The list below is organized from least restrictive to most restrictive. When considering housing options as part of a comprehensive transition plan, focus on the individual's strengths, preferences, and support needs. Aim to identify an option that promotes the greatest level of independence while providing the needed supports.

Owning or renting a home with natural supports or paid supports: Provides the greatest level of flexibility and choice. Supports are provided by family, friends, or a paid provider to bridge gaps in independent living skills.

Sponsored residential, family provider "Host Home" program: In the family home, family members provide personalized, one-on-one support, such as help with daily living, community integration, and health coordination, as the "sponsor" for this option.

Sponsored residential, professional provider: Support provided by a hired, professional "sponsor" generally in the sponsor's home with individualized supports.

Living with family with paid supports in the home: Paid support providers come into the home and provide care and services to supplement what the family provides for the individual.

Group home, small congregate settings: These settings generally provide 24 hours a day of individualized care and supervision by hired staff.

Supports for Independent Living and Housing

Limited options exist to support individuals with independent living goals and community-based housing. Careful planning should be a key part of identifying the supports needed to help the young person achieve independence and ensure appropriate services are in place.

Medicaid waivers: These waivers potentially provide a variety of services for young adults with significant disabilities. Depending on the type of Medicaid waiver, this service could pay for supports in the individual's home, in a sponsored home, or in congregate living. Medicaid waivers require an eligibility process to be completed before a person is placed on a waiting list for services. If this is a desired option, starting early and carefully planning the transition process is advised.

Financial support: For individuals needing financial assistance to pay for housing, Virginia has a few specific programs that support housing independence, including Section 8 Housing, Section 811 Supplemental, the State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP), and the Local Housing Authority. To find out more about each of these options, visit the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website, Virginia's Department of Housing and Community Development website, or gather information from the local housing authority.

Skill-building support: To continue building the skills to live independently, look for a Center on Independent Living near you or explore seminars and courses from local colleges and community centers to learn new skills.

Conclusion

Planning for independent living can be a source of worry and anxiety for young people and their families. Early and thoughtful planning in the transition process may reduce anxiety and meet the student's needs as they prepare for successful independence. Explore the housing options available in your community, and research organizations and entities that may provide potential supports to help design IEP Independent Living goals and activities that lead to desired outcomes.