

How Do We Solve
Ohio's DD Housing Crisis?

.....
**BY ~~GETTING~~
DEMANDING
A SEAT AT
THE TABLE**



DD COUNCIL PROGRAM SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESSING HOUSING SHORTAGE



Fatica Ayers
Policy Analyst
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Disabilities Council

There are certain challenges that seem to be universal in the world of serving individuals with developmental disabilities. The concerns we consistently hear about are transportation, employment and housing.

Housing is always a challenge, and to some degree it has been the fault of our own efforts.

Simply, we never asked for - or demanded - all the funds available to the individuals we serve. County boards had a pot of money that was earmarked for individuals with developmental disabilities, but they were slow to check out other avenues.

I'm not pointing fingers or assessing blame.

It was simply that we didn't know what we didn't know. If county boards were not aware that other funds were available, how would they go about securing them?

Enter Bob Laux.

Bob is the owner of the Wild River Consulting Group and an expert in assisting developmental disability agencies in securing these funds.

Five years ago, Bob was awarded a grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council to assist county boards with securing funds outside of our traditional sources.

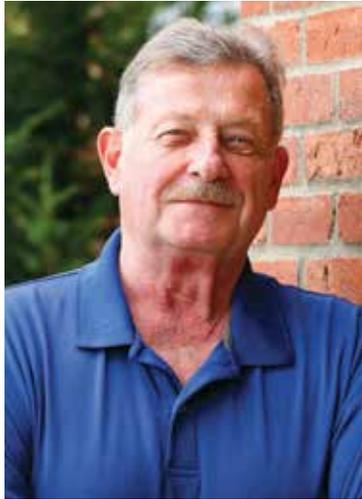
The results have been remarkable. The 12 county boards around Ohio that have taken advantage of Bob's expertise have seen a remarkable improvement in finding funding and securing vouchers for the individuals they serve.

Bob's approach of making sure these boards have a seat at the table has delivered astonishing results.

We have created this brochure to document how this program has succeeded in assisting these county boards and hope that other boards will take advantage of this program so that more of the individuals we serve can live independently.

BOB LAUX: COUNTY BOARDS NEED A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Understanding the Consolidated Planning Process



Bob Laux
Owner
Wild River Consulting

Bob Laux has a simple mantra: *Get a seat at the table.*

For too many years, agencies representing individuals with developmental disabilities were content to simply look inward when trying to accommodate the housing needs of the individuals they served.

“The door swung both ways,” Laux explained. “Agencies controlling federal housing dollars didn’t willingly distribute money for people with disabilities because the common belief was, ‘They have their own money.’ At the same time, too many county boards felt the same way. Thus, they never explored other avenues for housing money.”

Thanks to a grant awarded to Laux by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, that pattern is changing around the state. County boards working with Laux have discovered alternate paths of securing badly needed housing dollars.

Laux is in the third year of working with various county boards and teaching the Consolidated Planning Process. In this system, a representative from the county board is present when the local Metropolitan Housing Authority begins distributing its money, giving it access to funds that were previously unavailable.

This occurs, simply, because they have a seat at the table.

“This was a completely different way of thinking for me,” said Jessica Knupp, director of operations for the Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “The Consolidated Planning Process has greatly increased options for our individuals. We hired a housing coordinator to meet this need. It’s good to be at the table so that we know what our options are.”

How the Consolidated Planning Process works

U.S. Housing and Urban Development earmarks housing dollars for the state of Ohio.

Cities with populations exceeding 50,000, which are designated as Areas of Entitlement Communities by HUD, receive 40 percent of these federal dollars.

The Ohio Development Services Agency determines how the remaining 60 percent will be spent. The money is distributed among the 88 counties based on need.

The Metropolitan Housing Authority in each county makes a request to the state and determines how the money will be distributed in its respective county.

If you’re not at the table, you’re not getting any of the money.

Laux said developmental disabilities boards have been extremely remiss over the years in requesting these funds. The individuals they serve are a protected class, and 95 percent of them fall into a category of “extremely poor.”

Laux said county boards need to be aggressive in making their needs known to their Metropolitan Housing Authority.

“The money is going to be spent,” Laux said. “If you have not expressed your need, you’re not getting any of it.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE?

Each year, county housing authorities receive a pool of federal dollars. Local agencies in need of those dollars traditionally meet with the local authority to vie for the money. This includes mental health agencies, welfare agencies and veterans organizations.

For years, county boards of developmental disabilities didn't receive any of that money because they were not at the table.

"There has long been the belief that because county boards pass tax levies for support that their housing needs were being taken care of," Laux said. "The fact that county boards get local tax support is irrelevant. Individuals with developmental disabilities are entitled to those federal housing dollars, as well. But you're not going to get them until you ask, and you can't ask until you have a seat at the table.

"We want county boards to insert themselves into the mix. No one is going to knock on the door and hand you money. You need to stand up for your rights and the rights of the

people you serve. They are as entitled to those dollars as anyone else."

By making their voices heard, and at times using Laux's direction to educate local housing authorities on the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities, county boards are now receiving funding.

"Bob got us to the table," said Debbie Greenebaum, housing coordinator for the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "He provided us with the technical assistance to help us articulate our needs, so we were speaking the same language as the Consolidated Planning Process.

"Because we are more focused, our needs are being met, and we are being benefited by getting more subsidies.

"The truth is, we're a lot harder to ignore these days."



Debbie Greenebaum
Housing
Coordinator
Hamilton
County Board of
Developmental
Disabilities

HOW DO YOU GET A SEAT AT THE TABLE?

Sometimes, you just have to be tenacious.

Pamela Combs was not to be denied.

When representatives from the local housing authority failed to return her phone calls to arrange a meeting, Combs, the director of provider relations for the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities, went to their offices and sat in the lobby every day for two weeks until they agreed to meet.

“I came into the office, checked my emails, grabbed a cup of coffee and went to their lobby,” Combs said. “I was determined that they were going to meet with me.”

Combs credits Laux with teaching her how to obtain Section 8 housing vouchers offered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Before she worked with Laux, Combs said, individuals with developmental disabilities in Licking County waited on housing waivers from the DD system. The wait was often lengthy, as there had been no effort to secure housing vouchers from other sources.

Laux explained that these Licking County residents - 95 percent of whom are in poverty according to federal guidelines - also qualified for assistance under other federal programs.

“These individuals are American citizens, too,” Laux said. “Just because they have a developmental disability doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be considered for the same housing privileges as other Americans.”

Combs, who has since become the superintendent at the Gallia County Board of Developmental Disabilities, eventually secured her meeting with the local housing authority, started a relationship with the authority and made it aware that the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities wanted a seat at the table when it came to securing Section 8 vouchers.

Combs began working with Laux on the Consolidated Planning Process, prioritizing the housing needs of individuals with disabilities. The Consolidated Planning Process was just a piece of the puzzle. However, it made her aware of other opportunities available to secure housing.

Once she understood those opportunities, Combs was ready to take full advantage of them.

When the local housing authority opened up its application process two years ago, Combs was standing in line with 400 completed applications from individuals with developmental disabilities in Licking County.

“I was there all day standing in line,” Combs said. “There were about 1,000 people in front of me, but I was holding 400 applications, so there were 1,400 in front of the person behind me because each application had to be time-stamped.”

Since then, 65 individuals have received Section 8 vouchers.

“They are not bad people and they were not intentionally trying to deny anyone a voucher, but they needed to be educated,” Combs said of housing authority officials.



Pamela Combs
Former Director of
Provider Relations
Licking County
Board of
Developmental
Disabilities

MIAMI COUNTY DD GOT ON THE HOUSING RADAR



There was a similar issue in Miami County, where individuals with developmental disabilities were never considered for Section 8 housing vouchers by the Miami County Metropolitan Housing Authority.

Jessica Knupp, director of operations for the Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities, summarized it by saying, “We just weren’t on their radar.”

Knupp had a slight advantage in dealing with the housing authority, as it is located right next door to Miami County DD’s headquarters.

“We have a positive relationship with the housing authority,” Knupp said. “It was simply a case of ignorance of the law and our needs. Up until we began working with Bob Laux and using the Consolidated Planning Process, the housing authority thought we had our housing needs handled. They assumed we were taking care of everything.

“They didn’t know our people were out there and in need of more vouchers. Now, they do. This is a different way of doing things, and people with developmental disabilities should be included when they are handing out vouchers.”

Miami County is not unlike many other counties where there is a shortage of low-income housing. There is, however, no shortage of demand.

Brian Green, superintendent of the Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said, “We no longer push for institutional care. We prefer to find a place for individuals in the community, preferably near their family.”



Jessica Knupp
Director of
Operations

Brian Green
Superintendent

Case Study

AFTER A COMBINED 120 YEARS IN INSTITUTIONS, JIMMY & JOHN HAVE A HOUSE

It takes hard work, time and diligence on the part of county board housing coordinators to participate in the Consolidated Planning Process. It requires a lot of paperwork and muddling through governmental bureaucracy.

However, at the end of the day, it is all about the individuals who benefit from the efforts.

In Miami County, it is Jimmy Button and his roommate, John Ferrell.

Jimmy and John were very young boys when they met. Sadly, they met when they were roommates at the old Orient State Mental Hospital. They have been together ever since.

Ultimately, they were roommates at the Montgomery Developmental Center, where they had lived together since the mid-1980s.

With developmental centers slated for closing, and Jimmy's brother living in Miami County, the Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities made arrangements for the two lifelong friends to remain together in a house in a Troy neighborhood.

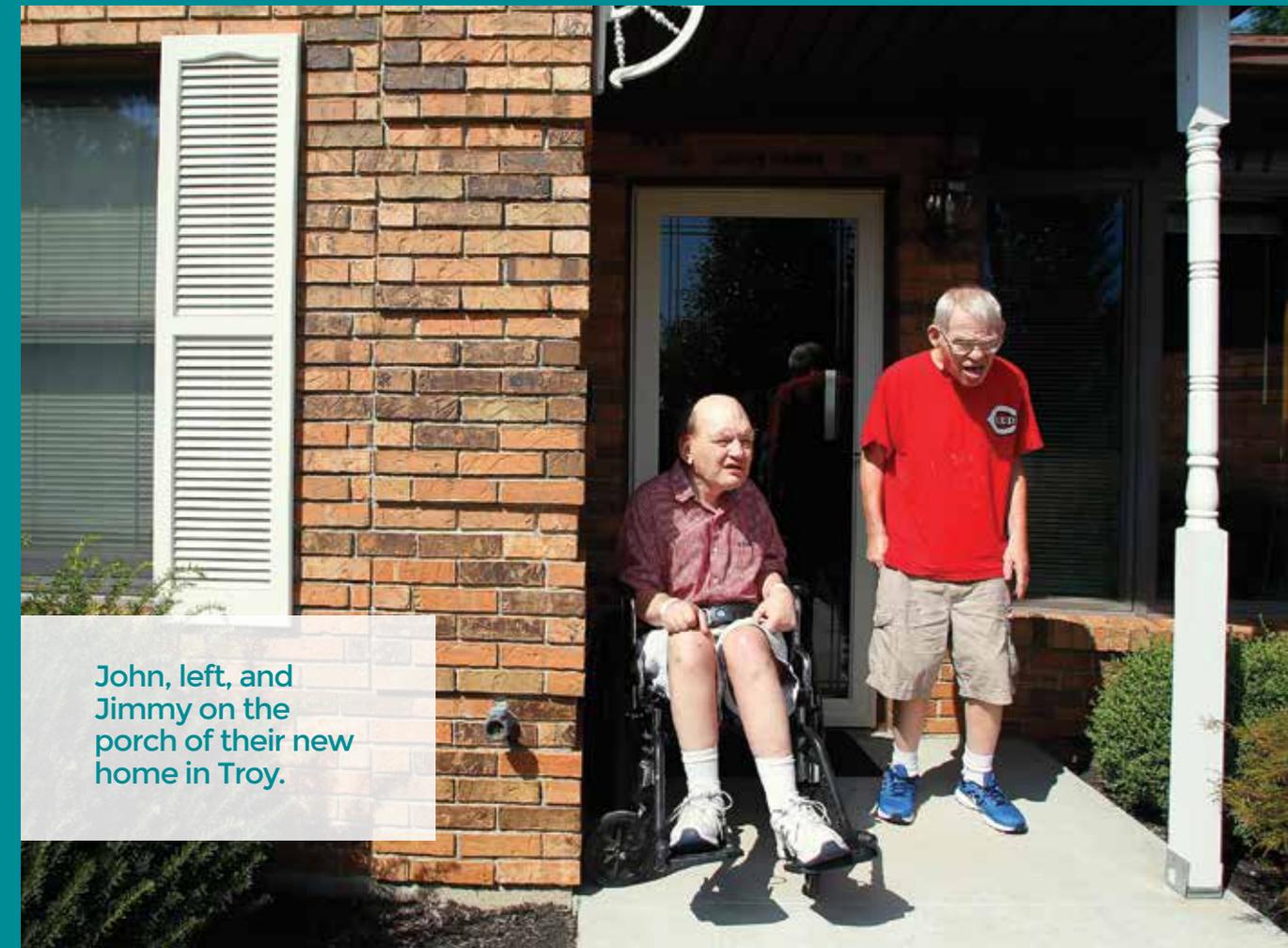
It was the first time in more than 60 years that either man had lived in a house. Jimmy is now 67; John is 63.

"It was the right thing to do," said Brian Green, superintendent of the Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "We had the house available, and Jimmy and John were ideal fits. It's changed their lives. We heard stories of how Jimmy would cry and get very upset when he had gone home for a visit and it was time to go back to the developmental center. That's not the case anymore. He loves going to his house."

The men are very happy in their new home. They have a 24-hour caregiver in the house, their own bedrooms, and a patio umbrella so they can go outside and relax. "Imagine

what it was like to live in a developmental center all those years and now be able to sit on the patio of your own house," Green said.

Jimmy's brother, Steve Button, said, "I just wish our parents were still alive to see it happening. We are so happy that at this stage in their lives, Jimmy and John are retiring to such a wonderful home, where they can have new friends and new experiences."



John, left, and Jimmy on the porch of their new home in Troy.

HAMILTON COUNTY ORGANIZES, PRIORITIZES HOUSING NEEDS



Debbie Greenebaum, housing coordinator for the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said working with Bob Laux helped the county board organize, prioritize, collect needed data, and narrow its focus on its housing needs.

“We knew we should be part of the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing planning process. We always talked about going, but year after year would go by and we never did it,” Debbie said. “We were always busy with the day-to-day operation, putting out fires, instead of looking ahead to get the resources we needed to do things much better.

“By participating in the process, we saw that Metro housing was giving money to mental health, but not the DD. But they were asking and we weren’t. This enables us to maximize our housing projects. Being involved in the process enables us to leverage more dollars.”

Diana Mairose receives services from the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities, but also works for the agency as an advocate support advisor. She has participated in the Consolidated Planning Process, which she says has elevated the awareness of housing needs of the developmentally disabled with community leaders.

“It was a great collaboration of city leaders and nonprofits,” Diana said. “It was clear that we need to educate the whole community in finding resources and funds to make the housing dream come true.

“The Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities and our providers were very well-represented at the meeting. We spoke about our resources and the need for waivers. We made it very clear that there is an ongoing need for housing for individuals with developmental disabilities.”



Diana Mairose
Advocate Support
Advisor

Case Study

OLD FRIENDS FIND HAPPINESS IN NORWOOD HOME

Gena Wade and Alex Irving had been friends since junior high in Cincinnati. They are both 39.

Several years ago, Gena was living with her mother and Alex was in a group home.

Both wanted to live independently.

Gena's mother, D. J. Gatwood, who is the director of community inclusion programs for Living Arrangements for The Developmentally Disabled, began working with Debbie Greenebaum, housing coordinator for the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities, to find her daughter a home. D. J. knew Alex through her work and thought he and Gena would be ideal roommates.

"I didn't know they had been friends in junior high until after we started making arrangements for the house," D. J. said. "Sometimes it's difficult to find the right fit, but we found it with Gena and Alex. They have adjusted very well together."

The two share half of a duplex in the Cincinnati suburb of Norwood. They are within walking distance of a grocery store, library, park, shops and restaurants, and next door to a store where Gena can get her daily fix of soda pop.

Gena works at a laundry and has a micro business making bracelets and necklaces. Alex works at a workshop.

Gena and Alex have a voucher, which helps defray the costs of living independently.

"Securing housing dollars is like securing liberty. You must be eternally vigilant," said Greenebaum. "For years, Hamilton County DD had a pot of money. Now, there are a different set of skills required to play the housing game. You have to continually educate

people. To the general public, most believe people with developmental disabilities still live in institutions and group homes. As you can see with Gena and Alex, that is certainly not the case."



Old friends Gena and Alex pose for a photo in front of their Norwood home.

HOUSING MEETING GIVES IRENE A HOME FOR LIFE



Several years ago, the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities hosted a housing meeting with Bob Laux in attendance to answer questions from caregivers.

At the end of the two-hour meeting, no one would go home.

“We tried to end the meeting, but everyone had so many questions,” said Pamela Combs, the former director of provider relations for the Licking County Board. “Bob stayed and answered every question. People crave information on housing. As caregivers get older, they want to be sure their loved ones are cared for after they’re gone.”

Laux told caregivers to take charge of their situation and not allow government red tape to interfere with their goals. Combs told the crowd, “I’ll bet some of you could buy your own house.”

William Flowers, 85, took the suggestion to heart. Soon after the meeting, William purchased a house for his daughter and donated it to the Licking County Coalition of Housing. His daughter, Irene, is 48 and developmentally disabled. William had long been concerned about where his daughter would live after his death.

He was planning to leave money in his will to buy Irene a house, but Combs suggested buying one now. “He’s made sure his daughter has a nice house to live in,” said Combs, who has since become the superintendent at the Gallia County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Flowers bought a ranch house in Granville. Under an agreement that he worked out with the Coalition of Housing, Irene will live in the house for the remainder of her life. “I’m so glad I did this now,” Flowers said. “It’s a great relief knowing where she’ll be living and that it’s safe and well cared for.”



William and Irene Flowers on the porch of her Granville home.

Case Study

OUT OF INSTITUTIONS, MARK HANGS HIS BUCKEYE MEMORABILIA; DOMINIK WALKS TO WALMART

Dominik Spotti and Mark Moore were living in developmental centers when the opportunity to live in their own homes was presented to them.

Dominik had only one demand. He wanted to live within walking distance of his favorite store - Walmart. He got his wish.

The two men are very happy in the ranch house they share in Newark.

“Both Dominik and Mark are extremely happy to be out of the developmental center and in their new home,” said Angie Finck, the director of provider relations for the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “This is such an improvement in the quality of their lives.”

Mark has a bedroom adorned with photographs and autographs of his beloved Ohio State Buckeyes. Dominik has the freedom to walk down the street. They have a say in what’s for dinner and what plays on the television.

“Sometimes we forget that it’s the little things that make a difference in a person’s life,” Finck said. “For Dominik and Mark, this house represents freedom and independence.”

Pamela Combs, who is now the superintendent for the Gallia County Board of Developmental Disabilities, preceded Finck as the director of provider relations in Licking County.

Combs said had it not been for information supplied by Bob Laux, Dominik and Mark might never have had this opportunity.

For years, the local housing authority had a practice of allowing only one voucher per building.

Laux explained that the practice was unacceptable. Vouchers are not to be distributed by household. According to federal law, each bedroom is to be treated as an apartment.

Thus, each resident can have a voucher. With two or three vouchers per residence, it enables the residents to share expenses and helps them keep more of their income.

When Combs pointed this out to the local housing authority, the policy changed.

“This practice puts more money in the pockets of our individuals,” she said.



Dominik Spotti, left, and his roommate, Mark Moore, pose in Mark's room, which is adorned with photographs and autographs of his beloved Buckeyes.



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The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council is one of a national network of state councils, committed to self-determination and community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities.

The Council consists of at least 30 members appointed by the governor. Members are people with developmental disabilities, parents and guardians of people with developmental disabilities, representatives from state agencies, and representatives from nonprofit organizations and agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities.

One of the Council's goals is to educate and inform how state and local government services and policies can be improved, expanded or strengthened on behalf of people with disabilities.