



Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council

Where is Home?

10 Stories About What Home Means





Where is Home? A home is a place where you live. It is a place where you feel comfortable and safe. Home is where you have your own space to be yourself.

More people with developmental disabilities are choosing to live in their own home – sometimes with live-in supports, sometimes with supports only during the day, and sometimes choosing to use natural supports in the community around them. These different options help people live the lives that they want, where they want, and with the support they need.

Where is Home? tells 10 stories of people across Maryland living and thriving in their own homes. They set their schedules. They overcome challenges. They build relationships and become part of their communities. They grow into their own spaces. They feel safe.

These people, their families, and their direct support professionals share their stories of struggle and success moving into and living in their own homes.

Where is Home? shows what that can look like.

Words to Know

This is a list of some of the words used in these stories and what they mean. When you read the stories, you will get even more information. You can come back to this list if you want a reminder of what something means.

Condo: A home that looks like an apartment, but the person owns it instead of renting it.

Coordinator of Community

Services (CCS): A person who helps you get the services and supports you need to live safely, independently, and be involved in your community.

Day Provider: A business or organization that offers services and supports to people with developmental disabilities during the day.

Developmental Disabilities

Administration (DDA): A state agency that helps people with developmental disabilities in Maryland get services and supports.

DDA Rent Subsidy Program:

A program that helps eligible people with developmental disabilities pay part of their rent and utilities.

DDA Waiver: A program that gives people access to long-term services and supports at home or in the community.

Direct Support Professional (DSP):

A support person who helps someone with a disability with daily tasks like cooking, getting dressed, or going into the community.

Group Home: A house where several people with disabilities live together and get help from staff.

Housing Choice Voucher:

A federally-funded, locally-managed rental assistance program. This program helps pay rent for low-income families, older adults, and people with disabilities so they can afford safe housing.

Housing Specialist: Someone who helps people find, apply for, and keep safe and affordable housing.

Job Coach: A person who helps someone learn and keep a job.

Legal Life Interest: The legal right to live in a home for the rest of your life, even if you don't own it. It requires legal documents and agreements.

Live-in DSP: A direct support professional who lives in the same home as the person they support.

Natural Supports: Help from family, friends, neighbors, or community members – not paid workers.

Market Rate: The usual price people pay to rent a home in an area, without help from a subsidy or discount.

Mortgage: A loan you use to buy a home. You pay it back over time with interest.

Provider Agency: A business or organization that offers services and supports to people with developmental disabilities.

Remote Supports: Support or help provided from a distance using technology, like video calls, instead of in person.

Rental Subsidy Housing Voucher: Money or a coupon that helps pay part of your rent so you can afford to live in your own home.

Rosewood Center: A former state-run institution in Maryland for people with developmental disabilities. It closed in 2009.

Section 811 Rental Assistance: A federal housing program that helps people with disabilities live independently by making rent more affordable.

Self-Direction: A model of providing services where you manage your own services by hiring your own DSP.

SSDI: The Social Security Disability Insurance program.

Support Broker: A service available to you if you self-direct your services. They can help you decide what will work best for staff, services, and supports.

Tax Credit Building: An apartment building built with government money to keep rent lower for people with low incomes.

Waitlist: A list of people waiting to get services or housing.



HOME IS...

A Quiet Place

After 7 years living in a group home with 2 housemates, **Kristin**, 34, was ready for a change. Born with an intellectual disability and an anxiety disorder, she likes to have her privacy and everything in its place.

While Kristin benefited from the group home experience and living with other people, she wanted more independence and choice. “There were too many rules,” she says. She moved out and moved in with her parents again for a few months.

Both her Coordinator of Community Services (CCS) and provider agency helped and suggested a new option: with the DDA Rent Subsidy Program, she could rent her own apartment. Staff would come help her there. The CCS and provider agency helped her with the process to get on the waitlist for a rental subsidy housing voucher. It took 9 months to get her voucher. Her

parents helped her find the perfect one-bedroom apartment close to them in Howard County. There is a grocery store across the street and a park with a pool next door.

Kristin was excited to move into her own apartment in June. She now builds her days around what she likes.

Kristin’s support person, Nichelle, helps her from 7 am to 10 pm Monday through Friday. Together they make meals, clean the apartment and do laundry, and take public transportation to work. Kristin has worked at a grocery store for 9 years. For most of that time, her hours changed weekly. Now, with job coaching from Nichelle to help stay on task, she works a reliable 16 hours each week.

With Nichelle’s support, Kristin enjoys many activities with Special Olympics: swimming, cheerleading, dancing, and volleyball. On nice days, they

have picnics and play games in the park. Nichelle also takes her to doctor appointments, food shopping, and out to movies or to get ice cream. They work out together at the apartment complex gym. Kristin spends time with family on weekends.

Kristin is thrilled with her apartment, and her life feels more her own.

“It’s quiet here,” she says. “I enjoy that. I live closer to my parents. And I don’t have to follow so many rules. I do more what I want to do.” ●

HOME IS...

A Place of My Own

From a very young age, **Iman** dreamed of having a job and his own place to live. Although he was born with Down syndrome, “I don’t see that as anything special,” says his mom, Angela. “He should have a dream and independence like his siblings.”

At his high school graduation, Iman gave a speech about his dream and his goals. Soon after graduation, Angela had to move an hour away, and she wanted Iman to come with her. But Iman stuck to his goals. “I want my own place,” he said. He chose to stay in Frederick, his hometown.

Angela bought a small apartment building in Frederick. Iman was thrilled to move into one apartment while she rented out the others. Later, Iman got a Housing Choice Voucher which helped cover the cost of his apartment. He made friends with

a community of neighbors. When Angela would check in every day, neighbors would say they saw him get on the bus to his day provider. Iman worked a series of jobs, and he was very proud of his work and his home.

At age 28, Iman had a stroke that landed him in the hospital. He had to learn to walk all over again, which felt hard after months in bed. Angela told him if he walked, she would take him to a Beyoncé concert. He did, and they got to sit in the front row. “It was expensive, but worth it,” says Angela. “He loves Beyoncé.”

The stroke changed Iman’s health and mobility, and the apartment building needed repairs. Angela had to sell the building, and she thought Iman might move home with her. But Iman didn’t want to give up on his dream. His provider agency found a

ground level apartment he could rent with his Housing Choice Voucher, and increased Iman’s daily support to 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Now 39, Iman has survived two kidney transplants, and is being treated for cancer. He can’t work anymore, but he loves his life. He enjoys going to a friend’s house to watch wrestling on TV, and to local ballgames and concerts. He is busy with friends and activities during the day and gets supports through his provider agency.

His mom welcomes him to come stay with her on weekends, but Iman is often too busy, preferring to stay home near his friends. He does make time to visit once or twice a month.

“He has a whole life,” says Angela. ●





HOME IS...

Where I Want to Be

For most of her life, **Linda** lived at home with her mother in Worcester County. Due to Linda's disabilities — which include paralysis of her legs and one arm — she needs support 24 hours, 7 days a week. Linda, now 65, says, "My mom once said she hoped I would die before she did, because she feared for my quality of life without her."

But her mom thought of a plan. She gave Linda a legal life interest in their little house to Linda, so Linda could stay there after her mom's death. The house was paid off. Linda could cover the taxes with her social security, and utilities with state assistance.

When her mom died 14 years ago, there were some bumps in the road at first. A family member wanted to sell the house and take charge of Linda's care.

"I knew what my mom had planned for," Linda says. "And I wanted to be home, with support people that would listen to me and hear what I needed, not just what suited them."

Through self-direction, Linda chose and hired direct support professionals (DSPs) who listened and worked with her as a team. Now Racheal has worked with her for 7 years, and she has had 2 other DSPs for nearly as long. It means the world to Linda to stay in the home she lived in with her mother for so many decades. "I feel my mother's presence here, and sometimes I even see and hear her."

Racheal takes Linda out in her wheelchair for strolls in the neighborhood, where they know many of the neighbors. At home, Linda enjoys reading, watching "almost everything" on TV, listening to podcasts, and making artwork

with beads. She loves playing games, and is a trivia expert.

Last Christmas Eve, Linda suggested they visit her mom's grave 4 hours away. Racheal drove them there, but they didn't know it would snow. When they arrived, the cemetery was covered in snow. Linda said she could stay in the car, but Racheal said they didn't come all that way to give up. They laughed as Racheal pulled Linda and her chair up a snowy hill to reach the grave. They brushed the snow off the headstone.

"Everything has turned out okay," Linda told her mom. "I'm still home." ●

HOME IS...

Where My Friends Are

Nelson, 36, loves living with his little dog Chico in Washington County. Many neighbors greet them out walking. They seem to make friends everywhere they go.

He wasn't always so happy. Born with an intellectual disability, Nelson moved into a group home at the age of 16. By the time he was 22, he really wanted his own place.

“At the group home I needed permission to go anywhere,” Nelson explains. “I had to do what my roommates wanted, and I had to fill out paperwork every time. I wanted to be able to come and go when I wanted to.”

His Coordinator of Community Services and provider agency worked together to get Nelson a Housing Choice Voucher so he could afford to rent an apartment of his own. He

chose a place in town where he could walk to nearly everything he needed.

Nelson has a support person 4 hours a week to help him with errands, doctor appointments, and budgeting.

He had a job cleaning in a store until the pandemic, and he hopes to find another. Until then, he volunteers at the Salvation Army. He's excited to learn new skills. He helps his landlord fix things around the building, and he learns to work on cars with a mechanic friend.

Nelson used to ride a motorized bike, but when it needed repairs he could not pay for, he let it go. “I like to walk everywhere now,” he says.

“It's good exercise. I like roaming the neighborhood with Chico and I have lots of friends nearby.”

He often watches a friend's dog. Chico enjoys the company. Nelson

takes both dogs on long walks to the park. In return, his friend brings him some home cooked meals when she comes to pick up her dog.

Other friends meet Nelson at the basketball court nearby to play ball, or to ride bicycles on trails. Sometimes they go to the movies.

Nelson is happy with his supportive community, and his freedom. “On hot nights,” he says. “Chico and I can sleep outside on my balcony.” ●





HOME IS...

A Happy Balance

Kavita, 33, lived in a group home for 6 years before telling her mother: “I’m not happy here.” Born with physical and intellectual disabilities, Kavita needs help with all activities of daily living, but she knows what she wants and likes.

She lived with her parents at home in Montgomery County until she was 27. She liked taking walks with her dad. They would pick up trash around the neighborhood and enjoyed sharing a sense of humor. But her mom says, “as we continued working and began facing our own health challenges, it was harder to meet her daily needs. We needed more help to support her.” So, Kavita moved to a group home.

“We thought the group home might be a good way for her to be social, but it didn’t work well for her,” her mom explains. “She didn’t like having roommates, and her staff turned over too often to build trust with them.

After several years, we decided to try supported living.” Kavita got on a waitlist for a housing voucher, but her mom didn’t want to wait too long.

“I wanted her to be happy and that was the most important thing.”

Through a housing specialist, they learned about a program that bought condos and rented them to people with disabilities for a lower price, below market rate. One of the apartments in this program was perfect for Kavita. She liked the location — near her parents and her day provider. It has a small patio, a washer and dryer, a parking space, and an elevator.

While the rent is low, it takes most of Kavita’s income, so her parents pay her other expenses, like food, clothing, and college fees. “We can do that now,” says her mom. “But we hope to get the voucher soon.”

Kavita enjoys learning office skills with her day provider. She answers phones, is learning to type, and helps the nurse stock supplies. She has direct support professionals (DSPs) to help her in the evenings and overnight in her apartment. If she is unable to go to her day provider, her provider agency finds DSPs for her at home. Sometimes, if no DSP is available, Kavita’s dad takes her to his office, where she enjoys scanning, copying, and shredding documents. Kavita visits her parents on weekends. She also takes yoga and music classes.

Kavita loves having her own place. And when friends and family come to visit her, “I like that they have to knock,” she says.

“It’s a good balance for all of us,” says her mom, “and Kavita is happy.” ●

HOME IS...

A Safe Place

Stephen, 31, has autism. While he needs support to live on his own, he values his growing independence. He is friendly and curious, and likes to be active. He works at a swim center 20 hours a week. “I like being around people,” says Stephen. “It’s a fun place.” After work, he often sees friends. They play basketball, take kickboxing classes, play video games, or watch TV together. He likes long walks in his neighborhood and going to his local gym.

Six years ago, his mom helped him find a low-cost apartment through a Montgomery County housing website that has different kinds of reasonably priced homes.

Stephen lists many things he loves about his apartment:

It’s a high-rise, with a balcony. It’s in a nice walkable neighborhood near a grocery store. It’s near public

transportation. His parents live close by. He has a full-size washer and dryer. And, he has room for his keyboard and favorite games.

At first, he moved into the apartment with a live-in DSP, so he wasn’t alone overnight. When his DSP moved out, Stephen chose to try remote supports. Now he spends some overnights and a few hours during the day alone. Stephen can use a tablet to video chat with a support person any time of the day or night. They check in with him each day through the tablet. Stephen also has a stove sensor that alerts both him and his support person if his stove is left on and unattended.

Stephen still has in-person support several hours a day while he is awake. They help him with cooking, cleaning, and learning new skills like how to use public transportation. He now takes the train to work on his own each day.

When his DSP leaves at night, Stephen likes having time alone in his apartment. He feels safe knowing he can reach someone through the tablet if he wants to.

“He used to wake and call his dad and me at 3am,” says his mom, “but now he can call his remote support.”

Stephen says, “I like to know somebody is always there, and they’re friendly.” ●





HOME IS...

What I Know and Love

Colleen, born with an intellectual disability, lived with her mother for 41 years. When her mother died, a family member wanted to sell their Frederick County condo, and help move Colleen into a group home.

But Colleen said, “I want to stay in my home.” The housing specialist at Colleen’s provider agency argued for Colleen’s wish, saying, “Why not let Colleen stay in the home she knows and loves?”

With some creative thinking, they were able to do just that.

At first, a roommate moved in with Colleen and paid rent to help with the mortgage cost. Once the mortgage was paid off, Colleen wanted to live alone. She could afford her condo fees, utilities, property taxes, insurance, internet, and cellphone with her SSDI and a part-time job.

Colleen, now 53, works at a restaurant rolling silverware, with support from her job coach. In her free time, she enjoys activities like singing karaoke, snowshoeing, and exploring the community. She loves Special Olympics, especially bocce and kayaking. She gets 54 hours of support each week. Her support staff help her with laundry, meal prep, self-care, budgeting, shopping, transportation, cooking, and taking medication.

“I like that I can invite friends to my home,” says Colleen. She is planning a holiday party.

When her support staff leaves for the night, Colleen sleeps alone in her condo. She likes being home and doesn’t want to go out, even to check the mailbox, without her support person.

But she keeps their phone number close in case she feels uncomfortable by herself. “When there’s a storm at night and I hear thunder, I’m not scared but...I just want to hear their voice, so I call. Then I can go back to sleep.” ●

HOME IS ...

A Place for Laughter

Jack Sr. recalls how 50 years ago, his baby son **Jackie** loved sitting inside a kitchen pot while his parents spun him around on the table. The motion would make him laugh with joy. His family loved him and his laugh.

But, Jackie needed a lot of support because of his autism and intellectual disability. By the time he was 13, his family made the hard decision to send him to institutions, where he lived for the next 22 years. He eventually ended up at the Rosewood Center. Sometimes his behavior was violent there, and he was restrained, which often made things worse. Jack Sr. visited, but he didn't always feel welcomed or informed. Staff changed often.

When Rosewood closed in 2009, Jack Sr. says his goal was to “happify” Jackie, to make his life joyful again. He made a plan to use self-directed

services for Jackie. Tony, who knew Jackie and worked with him at Rosewood, was going to help.

With the help of a support broker, Jackie got a Housing Choice Voucher and rented a 2-bedroom house in the Highlandtown neighborhood in Baltimore City. Tony became his dedicated live-in direct support professional and house manager. He also oversees Jackie's other support staff. Tony is “the hub of all care and oversight” says Jack Sr. Jackie has 2 support people during the day and 1 who stays awake at night. Most of his 7 support people have been with him for more than 10 years. Jackie's home life is stable.

“Jackie is doing 300% better” since living in his own place, says Jack Sr.

Consistent support people who know Jackie have helped. They are careful to oversee his medications and all

activities of Jackie's daily life. He enjoys car rides and walks in parks, and sitting outside on his front porch.

Jackie's family now feels welcome to visit his home. His dad brings lunch for everybody on Sundays, and spends Thursday evenings with him. His sisters often visit too.

Jackie still loves motion most of all. On Thursdays, Jackie and his dad slip into the back seat of the car together and ride for hours all through Highlandtown and beyond, eating their favorite snacks. “Sometimes, I just cover his head with kisses,” says Jack Sr. ●





HOME IS...

A Space for Peace and Privacy

LaShawn, 39, lived in a group home on the Eastern Shore for 10 years. She had 3 roommates, but she really wanted to live alone in her own place. She wanted more peace and privacy.

Her Coordinator of Community Services (CCS) put her on a waitlist for rental assistance provided by the federal Section 811 Rental Assistance program. But when her name came up, LaShawn wasn't ready to move out on her own. She had to turn down that opportunity.

Her provider agency staff, Sarda, who worked with LaShawn in the group home, says "There were things that needed to be in place. We care about LaShawn, and I was kind of worried at first, how she would feel alone at night. We wanted to be sure she could handle herself for some hours alone, if needed. We also wanted to be sure she could afford living alone." Born with an intellectual disability, LaShawn

is her own guardian, and the provider agency helps LaShawn manage her money and budget.

It took a whole team to get ready for the move. LaShawn's CCS, her provider agency, and a housing specialist all worked together to support her wish to live alone.

The housing specialist put her on the list for Section 811 Rental Assistance again, while her team thought about how to prepare her for the move. This time, when she was offered the rental assistance, she was ready. LaShawn worked with staff on independent skills like making breakfast, and being alone for a few hours, to be sure she felt okay with that. She was assigned a dedicated staff for flexible hours each day. Most days she would only need 6 hours, but staffing could go up to 24 hours if she wanted or needed additional support.

A year ago, LaShawn moved into her own apartment. The Section 811 Rental

Assistance program pays most of the rent. The apartment is in a gated community and has an intercom for added security. It has fireproof appliances that shut off automatically. When she first moved in, she had staff support 16 hours a day to help her get used to the place. As she grew comfortable, staff backed off to 6 hours every day.

LaShawn has a job coach who drives her to her job at a restaurant 3 mornings a week. She chooses community activities through her day provider when she's not working. On weekends, she enjoys being home, shopping for groceries, doing laundry, and keeping her place in order. Staff helps with those things and with fixing her meals.

LaShawn's favorite thing is to be in her home. She likes to watch TV, talk on the phone, or have her mom stop by to visit. "I love it here," she says. ●

HOME IS...

Everything

Thea and Kevin, a married couple in their 40s, were both born with cerebral palsy. Their mothers were their only caregivers throughout childhood.

By the time she was in her 20s, Thea wanted to be more independent. She told her parents she wanted to move to her own place. Her family owned their house in Baltimore County for generations. Extended family — grandparents, uncles, and cousins — lived next door and across the street. In 2005, her parents built a separate apartment attached to their house so Thea could stay in their neighborhood.

The apartment has its own ramp, porch, kitchen/living room, bathroom, and bedroom. Thea worked a series of jobs while living in her own apartment. She got onto a DDA waiver and began to get some hours of support staff.

Thea met Kevin in 2006. He was living with his mother in Prince George's County. He used a rough wooden ramp to get in and out of the house. He did not have enough support to get out in the community, and was stuck in the house a lot.

Thea and Kevin were friends for years before their romance grew. Thea says, "Our families were supportive, driving us 45 minutes to see each other." Kevin moved into Thea's place, and they got married in 2014. "We had a big wedding to celebrate, with lots of extended family," says Thea.

By this time, their parents were getting older. Thea and Kevin now have people who support them from 7am to 10pm every day.

"We wanted our own support staff instead of family," says Thea. "We're planning for when family can't support us

at all. DDA supports make us independent of family. Our family can still be our family, but not necessarily our staff."

There is a door from their apartment to the main house, but it stays closed. Staff come and go through the apartment's separate entrance. Family can offer support overnight if needed. Thea and Kevin have been able to self-direct their services, which works well for them.

Thea works at their church, overseeing activities for a large disability ministry. Kevin spends his days with staff support to go out and volunteer at church, shop, and take care of the household.

What does it mean to Thea and Kevin to be living their best lives in their own space? "Everything," says Kevin. ●



Thank you to everyone who shared what home means to them.

Kristin Frandé
Howard County

Kavita Pattabiraman
Montgomery County

LaShawn Cornish
Wicomico County

Iman Hart
Frederick County

Stephen Eure
Montgomery County

Thea and Kevin Taylor
Baltimore County

Linda Bednar
Worcester County

Colleen Tibbs
Frederick County

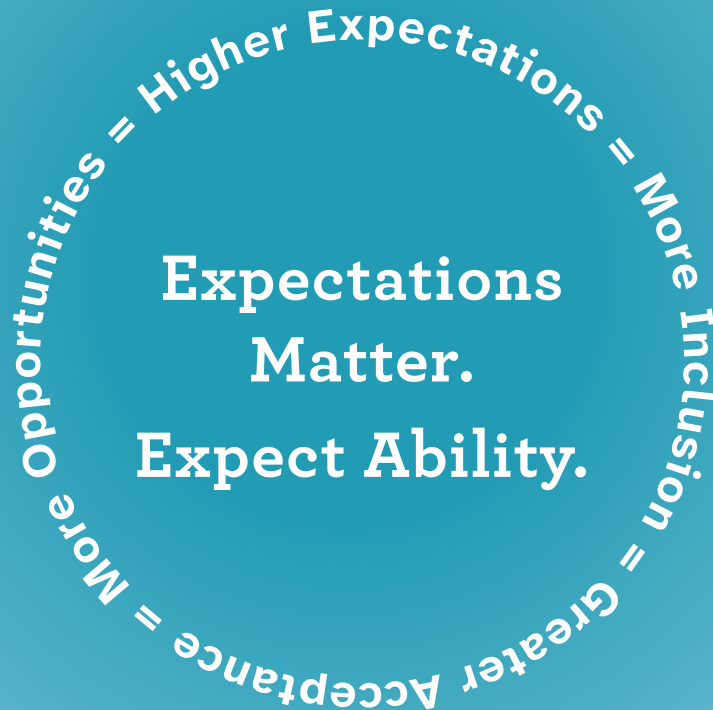
Nelson Fuentes
Washington County

Jackie Banz
Baltimore City

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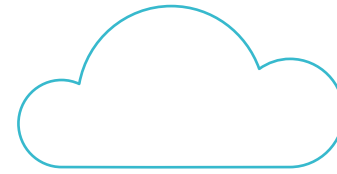


OUR MISSION

We create change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the live they want with the support they need.

OUR VISION

People with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

