There are many housing options now available for people with developmental disabilities in New Jersey. It is vital to keep these options in mind as individuals and their families consider the transition to community living. The Community Living Education Project (CLEP) of the Rutgers School of Public Health has developed this publication – the Apartment, Townhome, and Condominium Living guide – with that in mind. It is designed to make you aware of some of these non-traditional settings and the support services that connect to them. The guide explains the staffing, daily activities, medical supports, quality assurance and oversight provided for those living in apartment type settings.

As in our previous guides and publications, we have utilized the stories of actual people who are living in apartments, condominiums, and townhomes. You will read about Sandra, Antonio, Roy, and Lisa as they share their unique pictures and stories. Each region of the state is represented in the stories of this guide with examples of varying levels of support and daily activities.

The CLEG Team extends a hearty thank you to the people who participated and helped us put this guide together. We hope this guide will answer some questions you may have about this option in community living.

Sincerely,

David Wright, PhD, MS
Project Director
Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services

Community living is the cornerstone of an independent, integrated life for people with developmental disabilities. Over the years, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) has supported an increasing number of people in apartment, townhome and condominium settings. These settings offer the opportunity to live among neighbors, both those with disabilities and those without. This also allows easy access to employment opportunities, shopping, community events, places of worship, public transportation and many other amenities.

In addition to these benefits, apartment living provides a high degree of flexibility and choice. People may choose to move to find apartments that are better fits, or to move from one town to another to be closer to family, friends, or jobs. Some individuals prefer to live alone, while others choose to share their lives with roommates. Some apartment settings may be licensed, based on the needs of the person living there, while others may be unlicensed.

The key to success in apartment living - as in all residential settings - is access to high-quality, person-centered services that support individuals in achieving their goals. These services, delivered by trained and dedicated staff, are available to individuals who live in apartments, townhomes and condominiums based on their individual needs, not based on the physical setting in which they live.

As the stories in this guide demonstrate, there is no one model or template for community living. People with disabilities have created independent, fulfilling lives in a variety of community settings, including apartments, townhomes and condominiums. DDD encourages anyone considering community living to explore the wide range of housing opportunities available to them.

Sincerely,

Dawn Apgar, PhD, LSW, ACSW
Deputy Commissioner
“It’s more freedom living in an apartment. [There is] freedom to do things like go to the movies. I feel safe.”

NORTHERN REGION OF NEW JERSEY

Sandra has had an interesting and eventful life. She has lived in several different settings. Sandra is enjoying her life in the community in her own apartment and is served by the agency REM. “It’s more freedom living in an apartment. You can’t be by yourself you have to have a sponsor [staff member] with you. [There is] freedom to do things like go to the movies. I feel safe,” said Sandra. She shares her two bedroom apartment with a housemate.

The apartment consists of beautiful hardwood floors throughout the immaculate space and rich brown wood cabinetry in the kitchen. The bedroom is spacious as is the living room and bathroom. She loves her apartment and is passionate about keeping it neat. "I don't like clutter," said Sandra. She continued by saying, "I have to get rid of old stuff." She takes medicine daily with the assistance of her staff. She goes to work every day at an organization close to her home. Her job includes helping with cleaning, putting labels on bottles, and stuffing envelopes.
Living in her own apartment allows her to have the independence and the privacy she desires while allowing the staff members to help guide her when necessary. The staff members take very good care of Sandra. They transport her when she needs to go places. She loves going shopping.

They make sure that fire drills are conducted once per shift per quarter and individuals have to be out of their homes in three minutes. The entire apartment building is wired to the local fire department should a real fire happen. In the event of an evacuation, individuals are taken to a local hotel. The apartment is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Sandra enjoys living on her own and participating in community events. She is a registered voter and is proud to have voted in the last presidential election. Based on her experience she wanted to inform families and individuals that living in an apartment is nothing to be feared. “I’m not scared living in the apartment because I know the Lord is with me,” said Sandra. She has a life she enjoys where she is safe. Living in the community with proper supports allows individuals to have the life that they and their families have always desired. Sandra is living her life to the fullest.
“Don’t be afraid ‘cause nothing is going to happen to you.”

UPPER CENTRAL REGION OF NEW JERSEY

Antonio has been supported by Community Access Unlimited (CAU) for 10 years in an apartment “because I wanted to live on my own.” Antonio uses a wheelchair and walker; his apartment is completely accessible with a roll in shower and shower chair. He can transfer with assistance in and out of a car. Antonio lives near his mother, who visits often. CAU staff drive Antonio to visit his sister and brothers, who also live nearby.

Antonio’s staff also drive him to the mall where he likes to shop for clothes, shoes, and electronics. Also, he goes grocery shopping and staff drive him to various local churches each week; his two housemates belong to different congregations and Antonio likes to attend both because “I like to sing!” His staff also clean the apartment, cook Antonio’s meals and do the laundry; Antonio helps
make his bed each day. Antonio enjoys going out to eat at local restaurants; his favorites are Red Lobster, Subway and Applebee's. He currently attends a day program but does “want to make money.” Antonio also enjoys walking through the local park with staff where he watches basketball games and people paddle boating.

In the event of an emergency, staff assist Antonio in evacuating from his ground floor apartment; he told us he practices “fire drills.” The local fire department reviews the evacuation plan yearly. Staff drive him to all doctor appointments and stay with him during the visit. At home, Antonio enjoys watching soap operas on TV especially “As The World Turns.” He said, “That was my mom’s favorite.” Also, he likes to watch Judge Joe Brown each afternoon after attending his day program.

Antonio shared that he “likes the apartment a lot.” When asked what advice he would share for people considering apartment living Antonio said, “Don’t be afraid ‘cause nothing is going to happen to you.”
“The best thing I ever did was move into my own apartment.”

LOWER CENTRAL REGION OF NEW JERSEY

“The best thing I ever did,” Roy said, “was move into my own apartment.” Roy is a paid employee of Allies, Inc., the agency that supports him, working 40 hours a week training newly hired support staff for the agency.

Roy’s staff drive him to work, take him grocery shopping and to the racetrack (Roy’s favorite thing to do) in the accessible agency van. Staff may also drive him to medical appointments or he will use county based accessible medical transportation; it’s his choice.

Roy uses a power wheelchair and his first floor apartment is equipped with an automatic door opener for access through the front door. In the event of an emergency, Roy has two accessible exits to evacuate from; the front door and one in his bedroom to the backyard. He has an accessible bathroom with a roll in shower and shower chair. Roy’s staff prepare his meals based on
what he decides to eat each day.

Roy utilizes a New Jersey vendor who comes to his apartment for wheelchair repairs. If needed, the vendor provides a loaner chair if Roy needs repairs that require the chair to be taken to the vendor's shop.

Roy's hopes and dreams for the future include riding a horse again and writing his life story. He shared his advice for others, "...show respect to staff that you would want in return." Also, "...be flexible, it's not always about you...we take care of each other [people in other apartments]. We want to live like everybody else."
“Try apartment living, you can go more places...and you have more choices.”

SOUTHERN REGION OF NEW JERSEY

Lisa commands respect when speaking and needs everyone to give her a chance to express herself verbally. Friends, family and staff may have difficulty understanding her, but she needs you to try; she will write a note if you cannot understand her. She has chosen not to use an augmentative communication device. Lisa has paid employment at Good Will Industries assembling breathalyzer tubes; she also collates pamphlets and has worked in a kitchen assisting with cleaning.

Each person supported by Quality Management Associates (QMA) has their own apartment; there is a staff apartment in the complex that is occupied 24 hours a day/seven days a week by two staff members. People are supported based on their needs; Lisa needs assistance with medication, communicating with others and social judgment. Each staff member has keys to all apartments for emergency access and will also support people with meals, medications, volunteering, socializing and cleaning.

Lisa’s medications are in her apartment, in a locked cabinet. Staff arrive in the morning,
unlock the cabinet and assist as needed. Fire drills are practiced monthly by every person and staff member. Staff also assist with medical appointments and drive Lisa, and others, in one of the two vans at the apartment complex. Lisa also enjoys bowling and competes in Special Olympics. Her support staff also assist her with the computer and email; Lisa would like to improve her computer skills.

Lisa enjoys living in her apartment; her advice is to “try apartment living, you can go more places, everything is nearby and you have more choices.”
Information on Services Available in the Community

Support Staff

Staff must go through a background check and fingerprinting.

Staff are required to have NJ’s pre-service training, which includes an overview of Developmental Disabilities, preventing abuse and neglect, medication overview, CPR/first aid and Danielle’s Law. Providers may require additional training as needed based on individual needs.

Staffing is determined based on individual needs; many require 24/7 and/or one to one support staff.

Cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry and other household tasks are performed by staff. Staff include residents in all aspects of running the home. Individuals may choose to participate.
Medical

Medical appointments are made by the provider agency staff.

Individuals are transported by staff who also attend the medical visit.

Families may choose to participate in medical visits.

Physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, behavioral and psychological supports are available in the community.

Many providers have nurses and behaviorists on staff.

Individuals with feeding tubes and tracheostomies are supported in the community.
The Community Living Education Project

Activities

Traditional and medical day programs, individualized or self-directed day activities (in and out of the home based on the person's needs and preferences).

Providers have recreational and social calendars for the people they support.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) provides supported employment, job coaching and training.

People may also choose to volunteer within their community.
Quality Assurance

Quality assurance follow-up visits begin shortly after an individual moves to insure their health, safety and well being. Visits occur 30/60/90/180 days, first year, second year and third year.

Visits may include the individual and family members, guardians, DDD’s Community Case Managers (CCM), Transitional Case Managers (TCM), and staff from the DC and the provider agency.

There is continued oversight from the CCM, DDD’s Office of Licensing and Quality Management and Planning, internal agency quality assurance and municipal agencies.
The Community Living Education Project

**Emergencies**

In the event of a medical emergency, agency staff will call 911 and will accompany the person to the hospital. Family members/guardians are notified of the emergency.

Evacuation plans are in place for all residents; everyone must be able to get out in three minutes. Evacuation drills are practiced once per month on all three shifts.

**Aging in Place**

As a person’s needs change (medical, behavioral, or self-care) their supports and services may need to be reassessed. This will enable a person to remain in their home.
Check out our publications and media!

Publications and Information

My Life Now Magazine
For copies of our previous issues of the My Life Now magazine, please contact us.

New Beginnings in Community Living Newsletter
To receive current and back issues of the New Beginnings in Community Living newsletter, please contact us.

Community Living Explore the Possibilities Guide

All About CLEP Report
Want to know more about CLEP? Please contact us to receive a copy of the All About CLEP report.

Community Living Envision the Possibilities DVD
The new CLEP DVD is available now! Contact us to receive a copy.

Contact us at 800-500-0448 to receive copies of the publications or media listed above.
The Community Living Education Project

About CLEP

CLEP works with people with developmental disabilities, their families, guardian, and staff as they explore the possibility of community living.

CLEP is committed to the goal of helping individuals and those that care about them understand what’s available in the community.

CLEP can arrange a group home visit and/or a day program visit and accompany those interested to see an example of community living.

CLEP partners with the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities, NJ Community Providers and others in supporting individuals and their families in exploring community living.

Community Living Education Project Staff Members

Project Director
David Wright, PhD, MS

Co-Principal Investigator
Susan R. Hamman, PhD, MA

Training and Consultation Specialist
Myriam Casseus, MPH, MA, CHES

Training Specialist
Ann C. Martinelli, BA

Secretary
Margaret Mitchell

Principal Investigator
Bernadette West, PhD, MA

Training and Consultation Specialist
Natalie C. Trump, BS

Training Specialist
Sheilah M. Garry

Communications Manager
Antoinette S. Johnson, MAEd

Student Assistant
Ernestina Pelayez

CLEP is funded by a grant provided by the New Jersey State Department of Human Services Division of Developmental Disabilities
Fast Facts

1. Apartments are an alternative to group homes and are created based on a person’s support needs.

2. Support staff have the same background checks and training requirements as group home and developmental center staff.

3. Apartments are located throughout the state and can be in a small or large complex.

4. People with all types of needs can be supported in an apartment, including diabetes and feeding tubes.

5. One person can be supported in their own apartment and some people choose to share an apartment.

6. Two to three people can successfully be supported in an apartment and each person has their own room.

7. Daily activities such as supported employment, day program, or an activity such as class enrollment are available for individual participation.

8. If a person requires 24 hour supervision, staff will be provided on all three shifts. Coverage will be provided for staff emergencies.

9. Staff are responsible for medication administration, meal preparation, taking individuals to doctor’s appointments, etc.

10. If a person does not feel well and cannot attend program that day, they can remain in their apartment with staff, just as in a group home.

Thank you to all who have participated in the creation of this guide. Special thank you to the individuals who allowed CLEP to come into their homes to conduct the interviews for this publication!

Merci
Gracias
Obrigado!
Community Living Education Project
School of Public Health
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
335 George Street, Liberty Plaza, Suite 2200
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(800) 500-0448 toll-free number
(732) 235-3277 main number
(732) 235-5434 fax number
web.sph.rutgers.edu/linkweb
clep@sph.rutgers.edu

“Educating families and staff about the possibilities in community living!”