



Johanne with her son Ian

A Place of Their Own

by Johanne Kieffer

As a single mother, I've always been the glue that held my family together. Time was always on my side.

What seemed like an infinite amount of time is now more finite. The journey has an end point. Closing in on the final years of my fifties, approaching the sixty-year milestone brings a reality check right between the eyes.

This is normal for most, however, when you have an adult child with autism, it is like a reality check on steroids. Impossible questions ruminate in your brain.

How do I provide for him when I'm gone? He's totally dependent on me. Who will take care of him? What kind of life will he have? Will he be safe? How do I begin to plan? Who can I trust? Where will he live? Can I even afford this?

An answer to my prayer arrived in my mailbox last March. A letter stating that a meeting of special needs parents was going to take place to talk about building housing for adults with autism. This small group of parents joined forces that night, with the intention to build housing for their adult children with autism spectrum disorder.

Today, Cape Cod Village, Inc. is an official non-profit organization whose "mission is to meet the ongoing residential and community living needs of adults on the autism spectrum."

Cape Cod Village's vision is to build a campus-like community with four houses to accommodate sixteen residents. In the center of this quad would be a common building to be utilized for things like birthday celebrations, exercise, music, games, and cooking.

Currently, we are searching for a parcel of land on Cape Cod for this project. We are targeting locations that would enable our residents to be within walking distance of the local community. This would enable them have easy access to activities like shopping, restaurants, and the food market.

We would like to construct a green building that would accommodate the special sensory needs of autism regarding stimuli such as, light, sound and smells.

Organic gardens and a possible future swimming pool are also on our wish list to provide opportunities for teaching and ongoing social interaction. This project, while enhancing the lives of others, will also create sorely needed employment on Cape Cod.

Our goal is to create an extended family through a community environment. A place where our children can be safe, while enjoying a quality of life with a sense of belonging. We hope to foster shared life experiences that are meaningful to both our residents and neighboring community members.

There is a tsunami of children that will be soon aging out of the school system in the coming years and we need to prepare to care for them. My son, who is now nineteen years old, is part of the first wave.

As one of many aging parents, I am compelled to be a part of this community housing project to insure my son and others

like him are provided a quality of life after we are long gone.

The Center for Disease Control recently reported that 1 in 88 children have an autism diagnosis. One in 54 are boys. With the increase in numbers, I'm sure you know someone that has been touched in some way by this devastating diagnosis.



This growing epidemic gives a whole new meaning to the quote, "It takes a village to raise a child."

This old African proverb appropriately applies to our intention for Cape Cod Village. We will need support on every level, from construction and building materials, right down to the pillow where they will lay their heads at night.

We are looking for supportive board members and advisors in education, law, medicine and, of course, concerned family and friends. Donations of time, talent, or financial support are welcome.

Please join us and be part of our village, be part of the solution.

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