

CRIBWOLF MODEL A 'STEPPING STONE,' SAYS PARENT

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lished documents on the topic — a 2018 report from the Ontario Developmental Services housing task force — listed almost 16,000 adults with IDD waiting for residential services and classified the situation as a "crisis" that has been growing for at least 20 years.

Small group homes are among the most common settings currently meeting the need for some. But Lino Fera — who founded the Halton-based Cribwolf Foundation with IT executive Matt George to address the growing issue — said more has to be done now to prepare for the "tsunami" of individuals with IDD who will be seeking supportive housing as their parents, often their primary caregivers, get older.

"The aging demographic has become more significant now," he said, noting the pandemic has exacerbated concerns about major illnesses striking caregivers. "We have a huge crisis here because most parents take on that (caregiver) role. If that gets taken away, what happens?"

Fera, who authored a book on the topic, titled "The Waiting Game," has an adult son with a rare disorder and special needs. Like others, he has been on the provincial wait-list for

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more than 20 years.

In response to the crisis, the Cribwolf Foundation has put forth a multi-unit residential community (MURC) model as the future of supportive housing in Halton and beyond.

The Cribwolf MURC would offer mixed tenancy for adults over age 21 with IDD, who would live alongside other local residents in the building, such as seniors. The concept would provide access to qualified support staff to meet IDD needs ranging from supervised independent living to more significant hourly support.

"The MURC housing model entails the construction of a much-needed newer housing concept, such as multiple floors of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartment-style units," explains the Cribwolf website, which notes there would be some units for respite use, and space for recreation and community activities.

"This housing model of choice will ensure a safe, secure, and inclusive environment in which all resi-

dents can experience independence, social inclusion, personal growth, and receive their daily supports as needed."

Cribwolf has been working to raise awareness about the issue in the community and is looking to secure its charitable status in the near future, which will enable the foundation to access the institutional and public donations needed to fund large-scale MURC projects.

"When we build, there's going to be a lineup. It's like Field of Dreams — they will come," said Fera. "What gets me out of bed every morning is knowing that once we build this, we can replicate it."

At a time when supportive housing options are limited, local parent Lisa Canning says she sees models like Cribwolf's as a "stepping-stone" that could be replicated to meet the need across the region.

"Numerous individuals, in north Halton especially, have to leave the community they've been part of for most of their lives to relocate to somewhere unfa-



Cribwolf Foundation photo

Cribwolf Foundation founders Lino Fera (left) and Matt George (right) meet House of Commons speaker Anthony Rota at a housing meeting in Ottawa.

miliar (for supportive housing). This change could cause anxiety and stress," said the Acton mother of four, two of whom will need supportive housing in the future.

Burlington's Kimberly Wentrot also said she believes the MURC vision would work to help those like her son Jacob.

The 14-year-old has Down syndrome, is non-verbal and fed by a gastrostomy tube, with Wentrot working part-time to ensure she can be there to meet Jacob's needs.

She emphasized that more government action is also required to collectively address the supportive housing need and shortage of trained professionals required for some individuals with IDD, like personal support workers and nurs-

ing staff.

"It's not only housing that's a problem, it's the whole health-care system. It's just so complex," she said. "We need federal and provincial government funding."

The call for further support from the upper levels of government is also echoed by the Intentional Community Consortium (ICC), which has member organizations across the province dedicated to the supportive housing cause, including Cribwolf.

The consortium is urging the provincial government to earmark 10 per cent of the National Housing Strategy funding it receives to create accommodations for individuals with IDD.

Late last year, the provincial government an-

nounced \$13 million in funding over three years to help connect people with developmental disabilities with accessible and affordable housing in their respective communities.

The province also recently released its Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion plan that looks to reform the developmental services system in Ontario and connect people with IDD with appropriate housing.

For special needs parents in Halton and beyond who worry daily about their children's future, more housing solutions can't come soon enough.

"We go to sleep thinking, what if I don't wake up tomorrow?" said Fera. "The 'what if' is always on our minds."

For further details, visit cribwolf-foundation.org.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With the need for affordable supportive housing options growing, we wanted to take a closer look at the situation and how organizations like the Cribwolf Foundation plan to address the issue.

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