



Sylvia Dow, executive director.

VISIONS FOR CREATIVE HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Meeting a
substantial
need for
individuals,
families,
and the
community



Sylvia Dow and her husband Dave know the challenges of raising children with special needs. Their two daughters, now adults, have developmental disabilities, and for many years Sylvia cared for them at their home in Enfield, a large farmhouse that was at one time a European-style inn operated by her family. Before long, she became a home provider to two other individuals seeking the home-based care the Dows offered at Sunrise Farm.



Clockwise from left: Ashley washes dishes in her apartment. Mary Ellen, executive assistant, and Sylvia work closely together in the Visions office. Miranda vacuums her apartment while her mentor LeeAnn assists. Cassie helps to prepare a delicious dinner.

Opposite: Betsy, Cassie, and Emma play a game while Emma's mentor Betty assists. Betty and Emma enjoy lunch together. Betty has assisted Emma for 28 years.





“This generation of adults with developmental disabilities wants a place of their own,” Sylvia says. “They are already an integral part of their communities. They’re looking for a place that is theirs.”

As she learned about the system of care and housing for developmentally disabled adults, Sylvia also learned there were few options for them and their families. “I realized that my children were getting older and I was getting older and realized others like them needed a stable place where they could live as independently as possible, where they could have jobs and friends; that their lives would be about them,” Sylvia recalls.

She partnered with Pathways, a local agency that provides services for adults with special needs, and established Visions for Creative Housing Solutions in 2014 with six residents. Today there are 10 residents and a long waiting list, prompting a new vision—a similar housing and care facility in Lebanon.

A Place of Their Own

A lot of families, she says, “want to be a typical parent whose child leaves home and finds their own way,” or they are getting older and worry about what will happen to their children should they become infirm or die. At Visions in Enfield, developmentally disabled adults can live as independently as possible and are encouraged to work,



Clockwise from top: Residents who are more independent live in these four suites. Before dinner Trevor and Brandon play basketball with their mentor Bradford. Maranda is proud of her work at Panera in West Lebanon, where she just celebrated her two-year work anniversary. Artist's rendering and an aerial view of Visions' next site at 12 Green Street in Lebanon.



Opposite: Trevor works at BJ's in West Lebanon. Visions has an employment specialist who helps residents find employment and volunteer opportunities with great success.



The front building will have four two-bedroom apartments for residents who don't need 24/7 assistance and for staff. The back building, a duplex, will be handicapped accessible on both sides and will be for overnight staff, residents who need a higher level of care, and offices for other staff members. The downstairs common area will have a dining area and a kitchen.



“We treat people as adults and try to support their hopes and dreams, needs and desires,” Sylvia says. “What I think is so magical is that those who are more independent help out those who need more assistance.”

volunteer, attend classes, make friends, and live a healthy lifestyle. Those who require 24/7 care live in the large main house; others live in nearby buildings on the 80-acre property that includes apartment suites, studios, a shared apartment, and a shared house.

Staff include Sylvia, who’s the executive director, and her husband, who does building, maintenance, and grounds work; mentors who work one-on-one with residents; overnight staff; shared mentors; a nurse who oversees medication administration; and a house manager who oversees resident and staff schedules.

“This generation of adults with developmental disabilities wants a place of their own,” Sylvia says. “They are already an integral part of their communities. They’re looking for a place that is theirs. They have hopes and dreams. They want a schedule that is theirs. They have jobs and a social life. They go to art class, go shopping. We help them access the community, but it’s always ‘what do you want to do?’”

Aiming to Become a Family

At Sunrise Farm in Enfield, each of the individuals has a residential goal; it might be a cooking goal or learning to clean their apartment, or perhaps budgeting. Some have an employment goal, others a community goal—learning how to ride public transportation, how to become more independent, volunteering, taking classes.

“We treat people as adults and try to support their hopes and dreams, needs and desires,” Sylvia says. “What I think is so magical is that those who are more independent

help out those who need more assistance. Starting Visions, I realized what is nice is the two together. They make each other’s lives better. Our dream is that they become a family because they’re going to lose their families one day.” They all eat dinners together at the main house, the one time during the day that they all come together. That interaction among the residents with various needs is somewhat unique and what Visions is hoping to replicate in Lebanon.

In 2017, Visions got a \$50,000 Emerging Opportunities grant through the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority to explore the need in the area for supported housing for adults with developmental disabilities and to assist other groups as well as Visions to open more supported housing based on the Visions model in the next five years.

“The need is huge,” Sylvia says. Visions has an extensive waiting list, and Sylvia notes there are more than 25 individuals and families seeking supported housing in the Upper Valley. “Families are struggling to decide what to do with their grown children with developmental disabilities. There are few options out there. We’re hoping to support individuals in the most independent environment that connects them to the community.

“We strike a balance between support and independence,” she explains. “All our residents have paid employment. Our residents volunteer. We’re part of the community. We’re giving back to society. For families, it’s peace of mind. For residents, it’s the feeling

ONLINE EXTRA

A grateful mother speaks about the need for housing at www.uppervalleyimage.com.



of independence and the knowledge that this is their home.”

A Solution That Benefits All

After searching for a place in Lebanon that would house about 10 adults with space for staff and a communal area, a property at 12 Green Street with two buildings became available. With zoning board approval, Visions expects to fund part of the project using the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston with support from Mascoma Savings Bank. The remainder of the costs will be funded through a capital campaign, Visions 2020; the goal is to raise \$800,000.

Visions also hired Christopher Kennedy at UK Architects in Hanover to help them with renovation plans to meet the needs of the residents who will reside at Green Street. The front building will have four two-bedroom apartments for residents who don’t need 24/7 assistance and for staff. The back building, a duplex, will be handicapped accessible on both sides and will be for overnight staff, residents who need a higher level of care, and offices for other staff members. The downstairs common area will have a dining area and a kitchen.

“Once people learn about Visions and what it does, the people of the Upper Valley should be very impressed that there’s this organization working to solve the problem of housing and care for adults with developmental disabilities,” says Lisa Green, a mother of a developmentally disabled adult who is part of the capital campaign. “They should get on board to help. Just a little bit can make such a difference in so many people’s lives. The impact is bigger than just the residents. It will provide great jobs and allow the residents the independence and dignity that they deserve.”

For more information about Visions for Creative Housing Solutions, visit visionsnh.org. **1**