

## A Holistic Live-Work Community Concept for Autistic Adults



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### **Background**

How is my son/daughter going to survive when we are gone? Every day, autistic parents around the world are asking the same question.

Currently, families are faced with just two options to support their loved ones as they enter adulthood. The first option is to set up a trust fund for their loved one and hope for the best possible future. Unfortunately, a trust fund is not immune to market and economic forces, nor is it financially feasible for most families. The second option is for a family to place their loved one in a group home or another long-term care facility. Group homes and long-term care facilities have several drawbacks, however. First, the group-home model of care is a one-size-fits-all approach where support and care are usually offered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This kind of intensive care isn't always needed for all individuals with autism and as a result is a waste of time and money. Second, a high-quality group home or long-term care facility is expensive and as such, hard to sustain. Finally, the biggest drawback is that often individuals living in these settings may, in fact, regress because they are often not given the opportunity to thrive and explore to their full potential. Families are disheartened by the lack of any third viable option where their loved one can thrive.

In 2019, Technology North introduced assistive technology RoboCoach and an employment program called TN Digital Services (see related article), which creates sustainable jobs and incomes in a safe, supportive alternative work environment where individuals can perform certain IT and general office duties by employing and supporting their strengths.

### **Introducing the Holistic Live-Work Community Concept in Development - TN ActiveLife**

Now Technology North is taking another exciting step forward and reimagining what life can be for individuals on the autism spectrum by creating a new kind of community where work and life are fully integrated and supported. To accomplish this, TN is excited to introduce TN ActiveLife. Building on the model of sustainable work in our employment program, RoboCoach and TNDS, TN ActiveLife will go a step further to create an all-inclusive live-work community that creates and supports independence and high quality of life.

In contrast to traditional models of care, TN ActiveLife will create a new kind of community, where residents live and work, and where supports and access to help are available when and where needed, or “just in time,” using modern technology infrastructure and purpose-built program and application. Rather than a “one size fits all” approach, TN ActiveLife will

facilitate support and help when needed to residents. As a result, day-to-day operations will benefit from improved efficiency and reduced costs, and, more importantly, the residents will benefit from greater independence and a higher quality of life.

In the TN ActiveLife model, parents invest in the use of living spaces on a term basis, residents hold sustainable income-generating jobs through TNDS, and high-quality social and living support services are provided as needed. The purpose-built software and technological infrastructure, bundled with a unique management approach where the care, work, and the lives of individuals are integrated so that help and support are available as needed. This new approach eliminates the resource-intensive nature of long-term care facilities or group homes that focus just on an individual's living arrangements. This approach goes beyond programs that focus merely on an individual's work situation. Instead, TN ActiveLife, takes a person-centered approach to life and work where individuals can thrive, and explore their full potential, while still receiving the care and support they need using a just-in-time model of service delivery.

The TN ActiveLife concept is developed based on TN's core competencies and experience: integrating businesses, processes, and technologies to resolve unique challenges. Around the world today, many initiatives address the challenges facing autism care, employment or long-term living. Technology North's vision is to learn from the best models in each of these areas and address all of these areas of need from an all-inclusive point of view. TN ActiveLife will capture and use the most successful components and take into account the failures and lessons learned to develop a unique, robust, holistic, integrated, and sustainable live-work community to satisfy parents, including TN's CEO himself.

Further, TN ActiveLife addresses parents' and families' common concerns:

- A transparent governance model to ensure the vision and focus remains on the community members' wellbeing and quality of life;
- A sustainable and agile approach to ensure the same quality of life is possible well into the future;
- An all-inclusive, arms-length and dedicated trust, legal and financial services to ensure accountability, and funds from families are used only to support their loved ones;
- Liaising with government funders and services to ensure what's available from government programs are fully utilized and used to support community members;
- The family's initial investment is secured and can be withdrawn if they decide to leave the community; and
- As additional concerns arise, these will be thought through and addressed as the model evolves.

Currently, Technology North is working with a group of parents to develop the concept and high-level blueprints. The next step is to obtain funding and hire dedicated staff to develop our business plan and initial implementation. Our long-term goal is to develop a packaged TN ActiveLife program that can be repeated anywhere in the world. We welcome all feedback. To find out more additional information about TN ActiveLife please contact Ling Huang at [ling.huang@technologynorth.net](mailto:ling.huang@technologynorth.net)