

# Hartford Courant

## For people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, new housing complex offers hope for independence

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| CANTON



Collinsville, CT - 10/09/19 - Lauren Traceski and Scott Masson are hoping to get an apartment in a new housing complex for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Photo by Brad Horrigan |bhorrigan@courant.com (Brad Horrigan / Hartford Courant)

Lauren Traceski's parents have always worried about what would happen to their daughter as they aged. Traceski has intellectual or developmental disabilities, and there aren't many affordable housing options in Connecticut that meet her needs without stifling independence. "When Lauren was little, my strategy was: well, then I'll just live forever," Traceski's father, Fran, said. "Now I look in the mirror and say, 'That strategy might not be working.'" But a housing complex under construction in Canton is giving Traceski and her parents new hope.



The complex, which is scheduled to be move-in ready by March or April 2020, will have some units set aside for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The other units will be open to traditional tenants, creating a built-in support network and natural community.

A sister complex is also under construction in Bloomfield, although that complex is several months behind the Canton project. Combined, the two complexes will provide housing to 38 people with intellectual or



development disabilities. The apartments set aside for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities will be managed by Favarh, which is the Farmington Valley branch of a nonprofit organization called The Arc. Favarh is based in Canton, across the street from the complex scheduled to open in the spring. The Favarh apartments will draw on smart home technology, such as remote temperature and lighting control, to give tenants with intellectual or developmental disabilities some structure while still allowing for independence. For some people, this style of living is a much-needed alternative to group homes, Favarh executive director Stephen Morris said.

And while the Favarh apartments will fill that need, they'll also be saving money for the state. Morris said that, in his organization's experience, most group homes cost \$130,000 to \$140,000 per year per person. The yearly cost of living in one of Favarh's apartments will be closer to \$60,000 per person, he said. "It's rare that you can find a solution that is not only better for the recipients of the solution, but it's better financially as well," Morris said. Morris said the Canton and Bloomfield complexes are groundbreaking. "There's nothing quite like this anywhere in the country," Morris said. "This is truly innovative."



West Simsbury, CT - 10/1/19 - Longtime friends Simon Kravetz, left, and Chris Corbosiero, are applying to room together in an assisted housing complex in Canton for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. (Brad Horrigan / Hartford Courant)

## The applicants

Chris Corbosiero and Simon Kravetz have been friends since they were in grade school in Simsbury. Both 30-year-old Kravetz and 32-year-old Corbosiero have intellectual or developmental disabilities and they've applied to be roommates in the new Canton housing complex. The best friends said they want to be roommates because it would mean more time to hang out together. Currently, both live with their parents. The two already spend as much time together as possible, scheming to arrange sleepovers and carpool to line dancing or movie nights. "We're best friends and we want to sleep over at each other's houses, like every weekend," Corbosiero said. Kravetz said that the main thing that would change if the two were roommates is that he "won't have to ask" to spend time with his best friend. More time together is also a high priority for Lauren Traceski, 27, and her boyfriend, 29-year-old Scott Masson. The couple — they've been friends for six years and dating for more than a year — have also applied to live together in one of the new apartments. Both Traceski and Masson, who also has intellectual or developmental disabilities, currently live with their parents. The two met through Favarh, but became particularly close during a two-year period when they

both worked at a Michael's arts and crafts store. Traceski said she could tell even then that they were a good team. Masson said he felt a "connection" between them, which continues now.

Like most couples, Traceski and Masson want more independence and control over their time. Moving out would go a long way toward giving the couple the freedom they crave, but housing options for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities are extremely limited, Traceski's and Masson's parents said. Group homes can be overly restrictive, but traditional housing is too free-form to meet the couple's needs and too pricey. Traceski said she and her parents have been talking about her moving out "for quite a while," and she's both nervous and excited about the possibility. "My emotions go up and down," Traceski said. "It gives me a lot to really think about."

## 'An innovation'

Gov. Ned Lamont included [funding in his budget for 70 new apartments](#) for people with intellectual disabilities, under the same concept that Favarh is implementing. By the time Lamont presented his budget proposal in February, though, construction had already begun on the Canton project. The Canton and Bloomfield projects have funding through the state's Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Housing program, known as IDASH. Because of this, the state Department of Developmental Services has been heavily involved in the project. DDS chief of staff Katie Rock-Burns said the department doesn't have any concerns about the two new complexes. The project is "definitely an innovation that we're really excited to see come off the ground," Rock-Burns said. "It's exciting for us to see it come online." Although Traceski, Masson, Corbosiero and Kravetz have all applied to live in the Canton housing complex, their apartments aren't yet guaranteed.

Morris, Favarh's executive director, said that the application period is still open for Favarh's apartments. He expects that decisions will be made by the end of the calendar year. Each apartment will be outfitted with what Morris called "enhanced accessibility features," including roll-in showers, extra wide doorways and non-burn stove tops. And, to allow people to age in place, the building is outfitted with reinforced ceilings that can accommodate lifts. In a bid to address holistic health, Favarh is also partnering with Bloomfield-based Healing Meals, a nonprofit that provides organic meals to people recovering from illnesses or other life events.

Residents of the Canton apartment complex can buy into the program if they choose, to ensure that they're eating healthy and regularly. Healing Hands will also run a teaching kitchen just down the road from the new apartment complex. "We built all of the things we've learned over the decades into this," Morris said. "We built it in."

## 'It doesn't get any better'

With the opportunity for the couple and the two best friends to stand on their own feet, their families will also be given peace of mind. Masson's mom, Linda, said that housing horror stories abound for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The Courant [reported in February](#) that more than 2,000 people are on the state waiting list for in-home services or residential placements. The Massons and Traceskis said they've seen many of those people given placements only because of an emergency situation. One of Linda's primary fears was that, once she and her husband can't care for Masson anymore, he would be given an emergency placement in a group home that wasn't a good fit for him, and then possibly transferred repeatedly. Kravetz's mom, Corinne, said emergency placements are doubly traumatic — a sudden and forced move while the person is grieving the loss of their parents. "We're getting old," Corinne said. "And you don't want your kid to go into housing in an emergency." Traceski's dad, Fran, said that fear has been hovering in the back of his mind since Traceski was a child. "Your background terror is 'what happens when I'm not there? When I can't do it anymore, what happens?'" Fran said. If Traceski and Masson are selected for the housing complex, then those questions will be answered, while they each have their families here to support them through the transition. The parents of all four potential tenants said that

this complex is exactly what they've been searching for, as they waded through decades of waiting lists and housing meetings. "This whole setup, it doesn't get any better," Traceski's mom, Janet, said. Traceski and Masson, while they're excited about the opportunity to move in together, said they know that it will come with challenges and a transition period. Traceski said she worries about money, and that additional household chores will take some getting used to. Their parents brought up the many logistics of independent living — budgeting, grocery shopping, cleaning — but also said the couple is up to the challenge. "We're going to figure it all out as we go," Traceski said. "I can't wait to see what happens in the future, because I know with Scott by my side it'll make a big difference."

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