



Will Makes a Move!

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When our son Will was 20, he moved from our family home to the home of his high school special education teacher; she was paid out of CLASS funds and through Will's SSI and food stamps card, but she really viewed Will as another member of her family. Her boys grew up seeing Will as a brother and her friends and extended family knew that Will would often be included in their joint activities. Will came to our house at least once a week, but over the years he came to see that household as family, too, and that house as home. He had two moms and two families.

It was a big step for all of us, but that step really enabled Will to grow into an adult through new expectations, new experiences, new learning and social opportunities, new relationships. He matured into a person who preferred adult activities and peer company, a person with unique needs and desires, someone ready to be as independent as possible. He lived with his second family for 12 years!

And then recently his "Mom #2" decided it was time to move on, now that her two sons were out of the house, and embark on new adventures. We agreed on a timetable for the changes and parted on very good terms. But Will's father and I had a huge task ahead—where would Will live and with whom? We had three months before the agreed on date to make the move.

We thought about buying a house and consulted with HOYO, the Home of Your Own organization that helps people with disabilities or their families to buy a house. However, the timing wasn't right—we didn't have the time needed to work with the HOYO folks to buy. We decided to rent, and we found a realtor who has a daughter with disabilities to help. We were especially eager to get Will out of a 2-story place into a 1-story, as Will's mobility had become an issue in the last year or so.

We decided on a price range for the rent (based on Will's monthly SSDI payment) and an area of town (about 5 miles maximum from our house), then we started looking. We spent a day or 2 a week for several weeks in the car with the realtor, driving around northwest Austin—we got to be pretty good friends with her! We looked at apartments, townhouses and houses. The first house we looked at was ideal—close to our home, not too big, not too small, one-story with no steps, open plan, light and clean, a sizable master bedroom, on a quiet street near a major road (easy access for attendants who come and go). However, the owner was not open to our interest in renting, mainly because the people paying the rent weren't going to live there; he was also concerned that Will's disabilities would be hard on the house. He hadn't met Will, just knew he had a disability.

We continued the search but kept coming back to that first house. Then the realtor had the great idea of writing a letter to the house owner, including a photo of Will and telling about his disabilities, his need for a flat open plan, and our desire to find a place near our home. The owner turned into an ally! He switched from having doubts to "let's make this happen!"

Texas Parent to Parent

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The other huge concern was who would live with Will as his care provider. A friend had a part-time attendant for her son who wanted to move into Austin to be nearer her high school TA job, whose children had flown the coop, and who was ready for a move. We met and talked and soon decided that she would be great for the job; we arranged time for her to get to know Will and started talking about the details of his care and the home arrangement. We were offering her the master bedroom and bath in a home in Austin, with rent paid plus some CLASS attendant hours, and in return, she would be Will's companion and care giver for mornings, evenings, and some weekends.

Meanwhile, we worked toward the move-in date. That involved:

- finding home furnishings (Will already had bedroom furniture and the new care provider provided kitchen stuff and her own bedroom furniture); I bought a used kitchen table and some living room furniture
- setting up utilities and cable
- working with the house owner to finish the renter contract and do the walk-through
- finding a truck and a teen-ager to move Will's clothes and furniture from house to house
- setting dates to move Will's stuff, meet the cable guy, and accept several deliveries

I had lists upon lists, and it took lots of time, planning and effort, but it all came together just in time for our date to make the move. And it has worked! Will lives with his new companion, still goes out on week days with other attendants to do a variety of activities, and has bonded with a new care-giver for his home life. His companion's family comes and goes to visit, and we've used the extra bedroom for respite for another family's 20 year old. So far, so good!!

However, there is a big difference between his move-in 12 years ago and this one. Then he was still a youth at 20, just starting to live away from home, and it was a hard step for all of us. We thought in terms of Will's living in another person's home and his having another mom. Now that Will is 32, we are ready to make it Will's home, with a companion for care, but a home centered on his needs and desires. We are thinking in terms of the future, hoping to create a place and a system of care that can go on without us.

It has been a lot of work, but it's really been a joy to pop in for a visit or a meal, invite his network to meet at his place, set up a visit to his house for an old friend, and see him shine in his new place!

To learn more about funding through SSI, SSDI, CLASS and other Medicaid Waiver programs, go to www.txp2p.org, click on Pathways to Adulthood, and scroll down to Services and Supports. Also this DADS website provides information on Medicaid Waivers: http://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/waiver_comparisons/ and click on Texas Long-Term Services and Support Waiver Programs.

To learn more about buying a house through HOYO, go to: <http://www.txhomeprograms.org/program/programdetail.php?id=261>

To learn more about planning a home for your child, go to www.txp2p.org, click on Pathways to Adulthood, and scroll down to Planning for Life after Graduation, then to Home.

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You are also welcome to contact TxP2P to chat about setting up a home, but note that we have no direct services or easy answers! Call toll free: 866-896-6001 or Austin: 512-458-8600 or email cynda.green@txp2p.org or rosemary.alexander@txp2p.org.

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