

Parish House residence opens

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BAR HARBOR — More than 200 community members turned out Sept. 6 for a dedication ceremony and tours of the Parish House residence for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The facility is adjacent to St. Saviour's Episcopal Church.

It includes six one-bedroom apartments and common kitchen and social areas, as well as accommodations for staff. The six residents moved in between Aug. 8 and Labor Day.

The effort to establish such a home was initiated by the parents of a few young adults with disabilities and others in the community who formed an organization called Local Solutions in 2011. Two years later, St. Saviour's offered to donate its old parish house, which had not been used for several years, to be renovated and expanded for housing.

Local Solutions partnered with Community Housing of Maine, the largest developer of "supportive housing" in the state.

Earlier this year, Local Solutions contracted with Volunteers of America (VOA) Northern New England, a charitable organization that operates more than 30 programs for vulnerable populations in Maine, to administer and staff Parish House.

"We believe everyone deserves a forever home, a place where they can feel safe, valued and respected," said June Koegel, president and CEO of VOA Northern New England, at the dedication ceremony.

"Young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities face a daunting challenge as they age. The infrastructure that supported them throughout their school years disappears after graduation.

"It's not only the tenants at Parish House who stand to benefit. Bar Harbor as a whole will. Six talented individuals make themselves and their skills available to the community."

-Acting DHHS Commissioner Ricker Hamilton

"Our residential assistants will be there to provide consistency, a familiar presence [and] a support structure inside and outside the house," Koegel said.

Cullen Ryan, executive director of Community Housing of Maine, said the creation of Parish House demonstrates "the power of community and the power of parents who love their children and think they ought to be able to live in the community in which they grew up."

Four members of the Local Solutions steering committee, who also are the parents of Parish House residents, spoke at the dedication ceremony. One of them was Enoch Albert.

"Young people with disabilities need to be able to age in place in their home community, close to the natural support of family and friends," he said. "We truly believe Parish House is a model that can be replicated in other areas of the state."

Albert and others acknowledged the assistance of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in the development of Parish House.

Acting DHHS Commissioner Ricker Hamilton said residents of places like Parish House are able to "maintain jobs, participate in volunteer

programs and be encouraged to explore their passions."

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Hamilton praised the parents and others who worked for more than six years "to ensure successful futures and get your sons and daughters the support they deserve."

"That's dedication. That's love."

