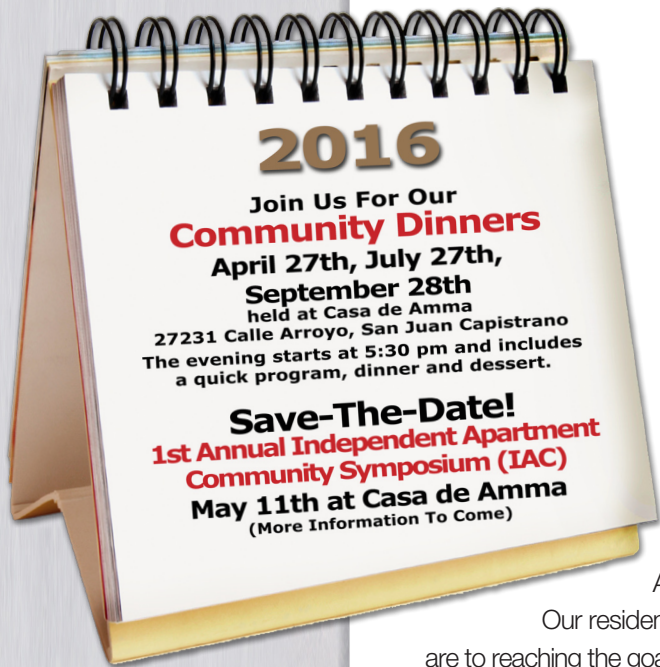




“Far greater than all the material possessions that I own, is my freedom to choose, my freedom to live and my freedom to be happy.”

Author Unknown



Don't forget about your mom. Call her to say Happy Valentine's Day!
– Adam



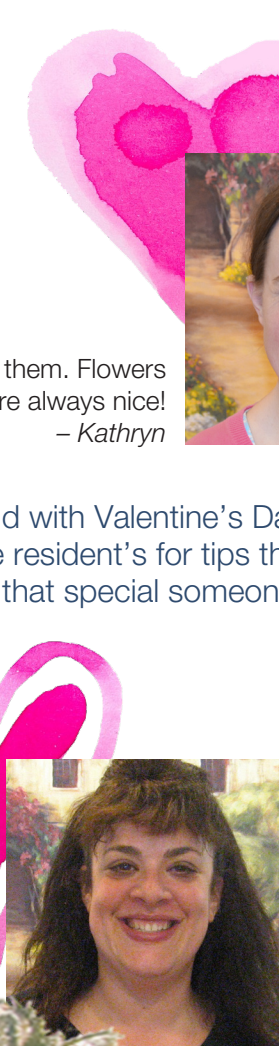
Go somewhere that has special memories for you both.
– Chris



Get a nice gift and flowers.
– Saphoura



Find something you like to do together and enjoy your time.
– Caitlin



Take them out for a nice dinner and celebrate!
– Shari

whose choice is it?

Unfortunately it wasn't too long ago that many adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) were forcibly secluded in institutions. Families were routinely told it was “the best thing” as many thought the future for adults with I/DD held little hope. Today we all understand the incredible error with that thinking and the massive injustice it was to individuals and families who had loved ones confined to institutions. These days we now recognize that adults with I/DD can be contributing members of our community. No matter how limited their capabilities are, they have the inherent dignity to be given choice and opportunity to be part of our communities and workplaces. We have come a long way – or have we?

You may be surprised to find that there is a war raging right now in the I/DD communities. A war where on one side “advocates” and their supporters are working hard to discredit and misrepresent many intentional communities and support networks for adults with I/DD. Their position can sound very agreeable, but often tells only half the story. In a recent article¹ written to celebrate the *American's with Disabilities Act*, two nationally recognized advocacy groups, the AUCD and the AAIDD, made many agreeable but also misleading statements. For instance, many of us wouldn't disagree with the statement “Large institutions do not promote positive outcomes – and limit community interaction and involvement for some of our most vulnerable citizens.” What we call an institution is not widely agreed upon and when used loosely, can wrongly label a larger but supportive and beneficial program. So when it comes to answering the question “How big is too big?” – we find it is a question which must consider the individual.

Another quote from the article asserts, “It is clear from decades of studies that people with IDD have happier, healthier, and more independent lives when they live in smaller community-based residences...” This statement leaves out the untold stories of people with I/DD living isolated, lonely and vulnerable lives, while those around them applaud their “Independence.” Again it is critical to ask the person how their experience is and what they want. Some individuals prefer to live in a rural, group setting that advocates would label “secluded” and “isolated”. Others enjoy the many social opportunities and happenings that come with a program similar to that of assisted living. “Advocates” can label these programs “institution-like” or “congregate settings that segregate people with IDD from their communities” but what about the people that choose to live there. The war I am referring to is making a direct attack on people's choice by trying to limit funding options to only include small settings that resemble an apartment or a board and care. That is a great option for some people but should it be forced on everyone?

Currently there is a #ChoiceFirst campaign that hopes to bring attention to these issues. Overall this campaign is about letting the people who will live in the supportive settings, have the choice. Sounds logical right? At Casa de Amma we think so and we aren't alone. If you believe that adults with I/DD should have the dignity and respect they deserve by not having their living and support choices limited by “advocates” or legislators – find out more about what you can do by visiting the Coalition for Community Choices website at <http://coalitionforcommunitychoice.org>. In addition, take a look at a recent video we made titled ‘MY CHOICE’ #ChoiceFirst, which can be found on our Facebook and YouTube pages.

¹ The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD): *Community Living and Participation for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* (2015)

empowered choices

At Casa de Amma, we believe in the power of CHOICE, in fact we celebrate it! Our residents learn that CHOICE comes in many forms and how important their CHOICES are to reaching the goals in their lives. Some CHOICES may seem obvious but for adults with disabilities other CHOICES may require assistance. Below are some basic CHOICES our residents can employ:

- All Casa de Amma residents sign lease agreements which contain the rights afforded to any tenant in the state of California.
- Residents have a choice whether they wish to participate in the services and support we offer. We do however, encourage them to take part in our programs so they receive the maximum benefit from their residency.
- Each resident develops a weekly budget to determine how they want to spend their money.
- Residents are free to choose their weekend activities and if they want to participate in special events.
- Our residents have a choice for two meals each day; in the resident dining room eating with their friends, or cooking for themselves in the fully equipped kitchen inside their apartment.
- Most of the apartments are one bedroom units, we do have (3) which have two bedrooms.
- Each resident decides with the help of their family and staff, what rules are best for them to keep them happy, healthy and thriving. There are very few “Casa Rules” within the program.
- Residents may choose to travel or visit family for as long as they wish, just as anyone of might leave their home for extended periods of time.
- Residents may decorate, paint and furnish their apartments in a style of their choice. They are also free to purchase cable TV, internet and any other entertainment they choose.



Go see a movie and have fun.
– Tatiana



Remember to call them. Flowers and chocolate are always nice!
– Kathryn

February is the month of love, and with Valentine's Day around the corner, away we asked some resident's for tips they had to make the day special for that special someone.