



This year we will be highlighting some special people and organizations who are making a difference in the lives of those with disabilities and their supportive families. We hope you make use of these connections as it is our hope that they will link our Special Needs Community in a more personal and supportive way.



inspired independence

In our series we have been highlighting programs that make a difference in the lives of adults with disabilities and the additional supports for their families. This month we would like to re-focus on one that began right here! **The IAC Group** (Independent Apartment Community) was first imagined by Casa de Amma's Executive Director Aaron Vorell, as an attempt to convey what the 'Casa Model' really is. This quickly grew in collaboration with Andy Conover, E.D. at St. Louis Life, to form an association of organizations, professionals, families and individuals who believe that Independent Apartment Communities represent a unique, beneficial and preferred option for housings and supports for those individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The IAC exists to offer education, resources, networking and support for those that want to create an IAC in their local area and/or to support existing Independent Apartment Communities which fulfill their mission in a sustainable and person-centered focus. Because IAC's are a unique and very successful model, there has been a great deal of interest in replication and consulting in regard to best practices. This effort has led to similar communities being imagined, built, and now successfully supporting adults with I/DD and their families!

There is a critical shortage of housing and support communities that adequately address the individualized needs of adults with I/DD. IAC's represent a wonderful option to this crisis. An IAC offers a unique mix of personal choice, freedom, independence combined with individualize support, a responsive and nurturing environment and a community-within-the-community to help meet the social needs and challenges of many adults with I/DD. In order for a new IAC to get started, it is important that those interested join forces to contribute their specialties needed to start an IAC. The IAC Group is an ideal support for collaboration and expertise as people identify the different "pieces of the puzzle" needed for the creation of an IAC. The IAC website offers information, guidance and support for individuals, families and professional who want to learn more about an IAC — from exploring what this unique model is to getting the actual support and help to build an IAC, this website offers something for everyone interested in a proven and effective model for housing and supports for adults with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities.

The IAC Group has a very informative and comprehensive website; www.independentapartmentcommunities.com, that can provide more detailed information such as defining what an IAC is, answering the question why IAC's are needed, giving resources on how to start an IAC, and offering many helpful and insightful blog posts. One of the most import things the IAC Group does is offer Symposiums for people from across the country to meet others interested in this model, learn about best practices and determine how they can be a part of the creation of a new community. If you aren't aware of what the IAC Group is, take a look at our website, we think you will like what you see!



oh how we have grown!

Last October we launched an exciting new program called **CasaGrows**, which comprised of building a horticulture area on Casa's campus that would be used for growing vegetables, herbs, fruit and flowers. This would also function as an area for teaching stress and anxiety-reducing skills using horticultural therapy and outdoor relaxation techniques. We are now excited to announce that after a great deal of planning and much labor involved, the garden section is now complete — blossoming into more than we could have ever imagined! The newly created CasaGrows space has eight raised beds, grape trellis', multiple berry vines, a fruit and citrus orchard, and a walking path with butterfly gardens, therapeutic herbs and seating for relaxation along the way.

Beyond our original plans, the fruits of our labor will yield much more than fruit! We will enjoy fresh, home grown vegetables, fruit and herbs to complement our dinners each night, and freshly cut flowers will adorn our tables. This program will add new jobs and encourage interaction with experienced gardeners within our local community to teach us how to make our garden thrive. We will invite the community in to sample/purchase food that we have grown, and create an outreach team that will take some of these items to distribute to those in need in our community. As we grow we plan to make jams, herb salts, tomato sauces and so much more — using what CasaGrows!

We are also doing more than just planting a seed! We have teamed up with a local nonprofit called **Goin' Native**. They will be working with our residents in our 'outdoor classroom', providing horticulture therapy sessions and teaching sessions about the wonders of horticulture and working in the dirt! We are very excited about this new opportunity and want to thank all those who generously contributed to this new program at our 2018 Benefit Dinner.



www.casadeamma.org