

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

ABOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES



Background

Finding housing is one of the biggest barriers facing adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Tennessee. Housing affects every part of life, including health, relationships, access to work, and opportunities to participate in the community. Yet many people with IDD still struggle to find homes they can afford and that support the lives they want.

In Tennessee, there has been significant attention and activity dedicated to improving accessible housing in the state. In 2024, the Department of Disability And Aging (DDA) created the Housing Innovation Program to help people with IDD and older adults find accessible homes. In 2025, the DDA partnered with The Kelsey, a national leader in disability-forward housing, to garner input from more than 325 people across the state.



They identified the following barriers to housing:

- » discrimination,
- » inaccessible housing,
- » lack of transportation near housing,
- » difficult and slow service delivery systems, and
- » unaffordability.

To begin addressing this growing crisis, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, the Mayor's Advisory Council for People with Disabilities, and Our Place Nashville are coordinating their efforts and exploring new solutions. An important early step took place in October when community members from across the greater Nashville area gathered for a

Community Conversation focused on housing for adults with IDD. The event brought together a wide range of individuals, including families, service providers, educators, policy-makers, and people with disabilities. Their insights build on earlier needs assessments, grassroots advocacy, and ongoing work led by the Tennessee DDA, and community groups across Tennessee. Their input will help guide the next steps in expanding real housing options for people with IDD in Tennessee.

The Nashville Community Conversation

A Community Conversation is a guided event that uses the World Café model to bring people together to generate ideas, share experiences, and explore new ways of addressing a local challenge. These two-hour gatherings take place in welcoming community spaces and are designed to spark dialogue among small groups before moving into a larger, shared discussion.

Over 100 people attended the Nashville Community Conversation on housing. Attendees included self-advocates, family members of individuals with disabilities, disability and/or community organizations, government representatives, and residential providers. The evening opened with remarks from Meghan Burke, Ph.D., professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University and a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center member, who introduced the goals of the event and explained how the conversation would unfold. Then, Jordan Collins, executive director of Our Place Nashville, shared a personal story that illustrated the importance of stable housing for adults with IDD. This set the tone for an evening centered on practical, community-driven solutions.

Community Conversation
October 27, 2026
100+ participants

AGENDA

6:10-6:15	Greeting
6:15-6:25	Opening Remarks
6:25-6:30	World Café Process
6:30-6:50	Round 1 Discussion
6:50-7:10	Round 2 Discussion
7:10-7:30	Round 3 Discussion
7:30-7:50	Harvesting of Best Ideas
7:50-8:00	Closing Remarks

Participants moved into small-table discussions where they exchanged ideas, identified strengths and gaps in local housing options, and explored ways the community might work together. Using the World Café structure, each table responded to a series of guiding questions before joining a full-group conversation to lift up the most promising ideas.

Questions were:

1. What can we do as a community to increase affordable housing for adults with IDD?
2. How might we work together in compelling ways to make these ideas happen here in the greater Nashville area and Tennessee?
3. In the next month and next six months, what can you/we do to make these ideas happen for people with IDD in the greater Nashville area and Tennessee?

4. What are the most promising ideas you have heard this evening? Where should we go next to launch meaningful change here?

At the end of the event, attendees completed a short survey and noted whether they wanted to stay involved in future housing efforts. Notes from each table and from the whole-group discussion are being compiled into a summary that will highlight key themes and potential next steps for expanding housing options for adults with IDD in Davidson County. A sampling of ideas and next steps is included on the next page.

At the event, we especially sought to understand how much the typical person can afford and current housing opportunities. There was much discussion about how the definition of "affordability" varies by person. For individuals who are receiving Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI), they receive up to \$967 a month. However, the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Tennessee costs around \$1,362 a month. Thus, in every county in Tennessee, the cost of renting a one-bedroom apartment exceeds the full SSI benefit. We also discussed currently available housing opportunities; however, such opportunities are limited and are constrained by affordability concerns.

Individuals who receive SSI receive up to \$967 a month. The average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in TN costs \$1,362 a month.

A Sampling of Ideas Shared During the Event

Ideas for disability service providers

- 💡 Work with other agencies to make a shared list of housing options.
- 💡 Talk to other providers to find gaps and make sure no one is left out.
- 💡 Teach landlords and developers how to make homes accessible for adults with IDD.
- 💡 Make a simple guide for families about housing at different life stages.
- 💡 Create a “housing navigator” role to guide families through options and resources.

Ideas for developers and landlords

- 💡 Save some units just for adults with IDD.
- 💡 Use universal design features to make housing accessible from the start.
- 💡 Offer flexible rentals, like shared housing or communal homes.
- 💡 Build homes close to buses, trains, or other transportation.
- 💡 Show off successful housing projects to encourage more.

Ideas for families

- 💡 Go to council or legislative meetings and share your stories to help change housing rules.
- 💡 Look into creative options like tiny homes, shared housing, or living near colleges.
- 💡 Mentor other families by sharing what you’ve learned about housing.
- 💡 Prepare for long-term planning, like what happens when parents age.

Ideas for people with disabilities

- 💡 Advocate to help others understand what affordable housing means to you
- 💡 Try shared living or roommate arrangements to lower costs.
- 💡 Include housing in your future planning with your family and circle of support.

Ideas for civic leaders

- 💡 Use city or county land to support inclusive housing and give tax breaks to developers.
- 💡 Make rules that allow different types of housing, like shared or multi-use homes.
- 💡 Highlight successful examples of housing for adults with IDD.
- 💡 Include people with IDD when planning housing, transportation, and accessibility.
- 💡 Use community data to guide decisions.
- 💡 Learn from other states about what works.
- 💡 Provide tax incentives for developers and landlords who create accessible units.

Ideas for whole community

- 💡 Donate land, money, or volunteer time to support housing projects.
- 💡 Spread the word about housing challenges through social media, news, and events.
- 💡 Help define what “affordable housing” means for your community.
- 💡 Encourage local businesses to partner with housing initiatives or hire people with IDD.
- 💡 Help create shared community spaces for residents to connect and support each other
- 💡 Include people with IDD in community conversations.

Resources on Affordable Housing

National

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	hud.gov
» Housing Choice Voucher Program	hud.gov/helping-americans/housing-choice-vouchers-tenants
The Kelsey	thekelsey.org
ACL National Residential Information System Project	acl.gov/aging-and-disability-in-america/data-and-research/national-residential-information-system-project-risp

Statewide

Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) Housing Innovation	tn.gov/disability-and-aging/disability-aging-programs/housing-innovation.html
Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA)	thda.org
Tennessee Public Housing Authorities	hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PHA_Contact_Report_TN.pdf
Creative Homes Initiative	tn.gov/behavioral-health/housing/creating-homes-initiative.html
Recovery Within Reach	recoverywithinreach.org/housing/creating-homes-initiative/
TN Housing Search	tnhousingsearch.org
Tennessee Disability Pathfinder offers resources to access affordable housing	TNPathfinder.org
Tennessee Kindred Stories of Disability Housing	vkc.vumc.org/vkc/resources/kindred

Middle TN

Metro Development and Housing Agency (MDHA)	nashville-mdha.org
Urban Housing Solutions	urbanhousingsolutions.org/who-we-help/
Cumberland Regional Development Corporation	ucdd.org/housingandfamilyservices/crdc/
Woodbine Community Organization	woodbinecommunity.org

East TN

Tennessee Valley Housing Services	tvhstn.org
Creative Compassion	ccihomes.org
SOAR TN	soartn.org

West TN

Memphis Housing Authority	memphisha.org
---------------------------	--

What Attendees Said About the Community Conversation

Below is a summary of responses from feedback forms completed by attendees after the event.

This event was a good investment of my time



I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I previously did not know about



I identified specific steps my community or organization could take to expand affordable housing for people with disabilities.



I am leaving this conversation with specific steps I plan to do to expand affordable housing for people with disabilities.



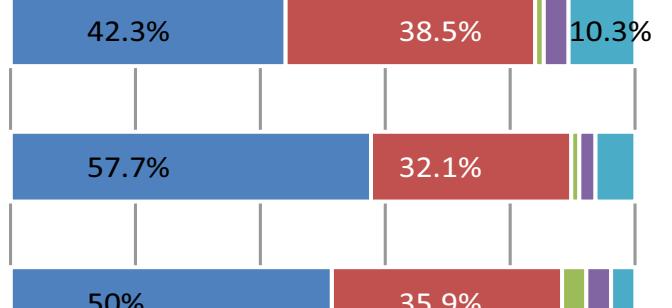
This event will contribute to increased affordable housing for people with disabilities in our community.



I would invite someone I know to attend an event like this one in the future.



The conversation tonight improved my views of the capacity of our community to expand affordable housing for people with disabilities.



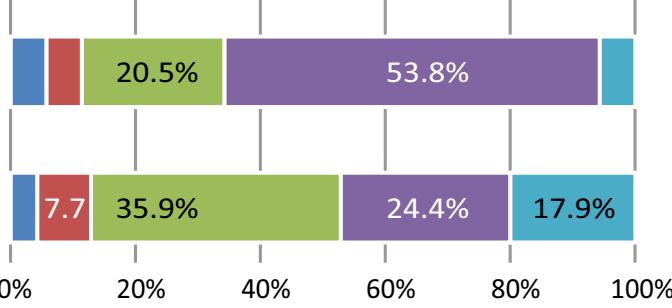
Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.



Housing across our city is affordable for people with disabilities and their families.



Landlords in our community are generally receptive to housing people with disabilities.



Legend: Strongly Agree (Blue), Agree (Red), Disagree (Green), Strongly Disagree (Purple), Unsure (Teal)



Conclusion

In partnership with initiatives and state agencies in Tennessee, we are continuing to move this work forward. In alignment with this work, Dr. Burke has received a grant to develop a national, searchable website characterizing affordable and accessible housing solutions for individuals with disabilities. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, Our Place Nashville, and the Mayor's Advisory Council for People with Disabilities continue to work in this area. We also hope to use these data to inform grant and project applications to improve housing for individuals with disabilities in Tennessee.



For more information:

More data to be released Spring 2026 at:
vkc.vumc.org/vkc/resources/UCEDD/

Our Place Nashville
ourplacenashville.org

Mayor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities,
nashville.gov/departments/mayor/boards/advisory-committee-people-disabilities

If you are interested in hosting your own Community Conversation about housing, download this free guidebook: "Launching inclusive efforts through community conversations: A practical guide for families, service providers, and communities" from:
ucedd.waisman.wisc.edu/launching-inclusive-efforts-through-community-conversations/