

Alternative Family Living (AFL) is little known and largely misunderstood. It's an excellent way to find housing for your adult child provided they have the Innovations Waiver (or you're willing to pay privately from your own pocket). If your adult has the Innovations Waiver contact your Care Coordinator for options. If you don't have the Waiver you can contact your MCO (e.g., Cardinal or Alliance) and request a "short term care coordinator" to talk through your options.

AFL is different from a group home in that (1) the AFL provider owns or leases the home, (2) there isn't staff turnover and (3) there are hundreds of them around the state, most likely one closer to you than a group home. Agencies like United Support Services and Universal (represented at the meeting) do a very careful search and screening of people offering to be AFL providers. Then there's a process to cross-check the match with the person being placed. The fit must be right. The goal is to find an AFL provider who is doing it out of love, for the long term, not for the money.

AFL is different from Supported Living in that (1) the adult with the Innovations Waiver owns or leases the property and (2) there's less staff turnover. AFL is also already well established and agencies already have answers to questions such as who calls the plumber. Supported Living still has many kinks to be worked out.

An AFL does not have to be licensed by the state if there's only one adult placed in the home. It does have to be licensed if it has 2 or 3 adults. Three adults are the maximum allowed. Amelia, a resident of an AFL represented at the meeting, says, "It's like a little family." She also likened it to a college dorm where the AFL provider is the RA.

The AFL-placing agency gets a per diem payment from Medicaid which it then shares with the actual AFL provider. The per diem is about \$160/day. This is a much cheaper option than a group home which gets supplemental funding from the state.

Some parents shy away from AFLs fearing them to be like a bad foster home. Or there's guilt at "giving away" their child to another family. The panel assured us that leaving home while young to live in another family offers opportunity for personal growth, just like it does for a neurotypical child going off to college or moving out to room with friends. Parents are also encouraged to stay in close touch with their adult child and the AFL provider. The adult child is free to return home for overnight visits as desired. Amelia's parents were at the meeting and confirmed that their daughter had made great strides while living with Tarsha, the AFL provider.

AFL residents also get day supports to take them to day jobs, volunteer positions or appointments in the community. The AFL provider can do the same, but not for additional pay. Note that the AFL provider can step in to provide such coverage in between staff turnovers.

AFLs are monitored by the MCOs with monthly checks. The agencies also stay on top of the living situation.

In sum, AFLs should be considered a viable option in lieu of group homes or Supported Living. For questions, contact Maegan Mohr, I/DD Care Coordination Supervisor at Cardinal Healthcare with email maegan,mohr@cardinalinnovations.org.