



Darren Walker
President, Ford Foundation

May 3, 2017

Via email

Dear Mr. Walker and Trustees of the Ford Foundation:

I am writing with sincere gratitude for the Ford Foundation for funding the Homes for Life Foundation report, Building an Intentional Community in Delaware. This report illuminates the housing and support crisis and shares an example of a consumer-controlled housing model for individuals with intellectual / developmental disabilities (I/DD) to have control of their home, autonomy, and a safety net of support when Medicaid funding is inadequate. Most importantly, this model offers access to friendship and natural supports that are certainly not guaranteed in “typical” neighborhoods today.

As the National Director of Housing for Madison House Autism Foundation and the National Coordinator of the Coalition for Community Choice, I speak alongside the leaders of organizations nationwide and hundreds of thousands of advocates who are striving to meet the growing demand for an array of life options for those with I/DD. I would like to reply to an article that accuses the Ford Foundation of funding an institution.

Forty years ago, Medicaid introduced the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers, and citizens with I/DD have had access to residential supports in a home outside of an institution. Now, a marketplace of expanding residential options is emerging because of the failure of scatter-site housing to meet the needs of the widely diverse preferences and support needs of citizens with I/DD.

It is has been an honor and pleasure to visit over 100 intentional communities and social enterprises across the country and abroad that have been developed to meet the supportive housing, employment and social needs of citizens with I/DD. What I have seen are not “institutions,” but innovation that is empowering citizens with I/DD who have experienced countless moments of bullying, rejection, being told they are not “able” and have often been victims of abuse. The opposition to intentional communities and its attribution as a neo-institution is a gross overgeneralization without regard for the vast difference in service delivery models. Moreover, this biased ideology stems from those who have not built relationships with neurodiverse citizens who have chosen to live in intentional communities.

As all social justice movements have experienced, there is no progress without upsetting the status quo. Thank you for giving a voice to citizens with I/DD and their families who are often shamed and ignored despite being the backbone of long-term support for our country. By breaking down barriers of access to an array of life choices, a better future is possible.

With gratitude,
Desiree Kameka, Director
dkameka@madisonhouseautism.org



ABOUT DESIREE KAMEKA

Ms. Kameka is the Director of Community Engagement and Housing Networks for the [Madison House Autism Foundation](#) (MHAF). She developed and spearheads three MHAF housing initiatives: 1. [Autism Housing Network](#), an online platform to bring together the best ideas in housing for autistic adults and others with developmental disabilities; 2. [Coalition for Community Choice](#), bringing together thousands of stakeholders and self-advocates to be part of the conversation and inform policymakers about the importance of choice and true self-determination; 3. Empowering Communities Initiative in which she consults with individuals seeking housing solutions and to forming projects.

For the last eight years, Ms. Kameka's work for MHAF has focused on researching housing issues, advocating on issues of autism in adulthood, and presenting her work at local and national gatherings. She visits residential communities and social enterprises across the USA and highlights their unique victories and learning curves while sharing stories of individuals on the spectrum or who have other developmental disabilities. Her passion is empowering autistic adults and parents to create a future that is exciting and life affirming by offering small group consultations for forming projects.

A recognized disability housing expert and keynote speaker in conferences across the country, Ms. Kameka is cited in media outlets such as [The Atlantic](#), [Rolling Stone Magazine](#), and [ABC News](#). Desiree's work in housing is included among international academics and professionals in the pioneering scholarly volume [Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mid and Later Life](#). Most recently, she was a major contributor to [Building an Intentional Community in Delaware](#) (Feb 2017), a report funded by the Ford Foundation.

ABOUT MADISON HOUSE AUTISM FOUNDATION

Madison House is one of the few organizations in the country that is focused on addressing quality of life issues for adults with autism and their families. It was formally chartered in 2008 following five years of research invested by its founders on areas of greatest unmet need impacting people with autism and their families. Originally chartered as a private foundation, it is now in the five-year transition period required by the IRS to become a public charity. Madison House's larger vision encompasses the many factors that are essential to creating a better future and basic quality of life for adults with autism. Visit www.madisonhouseautism.org for more information.