



### MICHAEL'S STORY

Dear Alternative Residential Options FDDC Work Group Participants,

1. My immediate reaction to Michael's story as a solution to a residential setting for him was Promise in Melbourne, as presented by Betsy Farmer at the Work Group meeting of August 25th.

Michael is able to live in his own apartment under the Supported Living arrangement, and has had jobs in the past, although he is presently unemployed. The problem is that Michael has no social life, except for Special Olympics and family activities. He spends the day watching television and eats breakfast, lunch and dinner alone and according to his mom, is completely isolated.

Michael was recently robbed by someone in his apartment complex, after he allowed this person into his apartment to give him a "loan" of \$20.00. The family and the management suspected that it was this person who later entered the apartment when Michael was away and took the rest of Michael's cash, but Michael was afraid to tell police who did it for fear that "Donny" would come back and injure him.

2. Michael needs the kind of residential setting that would offer more security and the stimulation that would make him a part of a community of shared interests. His mom would like Michael to live in a planned residential community.

Michael has not actively pursued a room mate and so a Life Share option would probably not attract him. Since he is capable of preparing his meals, a group home setting for more dependent people would not be appropriate. Michael's needs are primarily social, as well as needing greater security and support to find employment. People in his apartment complex apparently do not interact with him socially, invite him over or offer him companionship in any way. On the contrary, his safety has been compromised and he is an easy target for predators.

Promise of Melbourne would offer an ideal solution to allow Michael choices which meet his needs:

- a number of social activities: pool, jacuzzi, tennis, basketball, coffee shop, food court, computer lab, art/crafts, arcade/game room
- vocational opportunities in the restaurant, coffee shop, building/grounds maintenance, organic garden and laundry
- one & two bedroom apartments as well as a 5 bedroom suite that could allow for a housing assistant if needed
- 24/7 staff support and security

This residential setting would have all the characteristics of Residential Options as we completed in July: access to transportation, natural, social and paid supports, health care; environment that

is least restrictive, safe, not isolated, encouraging of participation in general community; opportunity for informed choice, expression of wants and desires for all aspects of living.

3. Until the vision of communities like Promise of Melbourne is a reality, Michael will lead an isolated life except for the activities arranged for him by his family. Under the Supported Living arrangement, Michael is eligible for Companion services, but would be limited in finding someone who would be truly "companionable." Additionally, it has been our experience that Companions are not willing to work on Sundays to take them to activities. The expense of Companion services would not be necessary if he had other social outlets such as would be available in a planned community setting. Companions are not typically the same as friends.

Michael needs an environment that is safe, friendly, active, resourceful, supportive and dedicated to the development of a community of shared interests. He needs access to activities and friends within walking distance. He needs the "eyes and ears" of all the parents, friends, volunteers, and other natural supports which will be available because it is a true community. This community will be held together by a sense of belonging and purpose to help each resident achieve their full potential as a citizen, friend and person.

How can this happen? Families need to be actively involved to make possible such private initiatives like Promise of Melbourne. The obstacles that they face are, unfortunately, related to uninformed misconceptions about planned residential communities which have been erroneously labeled as segregated "institutions," ghettos and lock down facilities.

The objective of such initiatives like Promise of Melbourne is to expand friendships and interests in activities and resources which are available to the broader community, but uninviting to a person who has never been offered a helping hand. Promises of Melbourne would be a new facet in the design of Supported Living that would make sense for Michael.

Lila Klausman, Pres.  
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