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## Housing project a grand success

### People call campus home for a month

Tuesday July 29, 2003 Natalie Miller

When a group of people moved in together for a month, they experienced friendship and interdependence.

They talked, they laughed, they prepared meals and they played bocce together. They got into the occasional spat over plumbing. But most importantly, they tried out a living arrangement that offered privacy, companionship and support.

Mostly in their mid-20s, the Ottawa-area residents moved into a residence building at Carleton University. They stayed in four-bedroom and two-bedroom suites, with each having a common kitchen and living room. The participants, who have disabilities, were supported by 10 volunteer facilitators. Called 'On Our Own Together,' the project is an initiative of LiveWorkPlay, an organization that supports people with developmental disabilities.

"It went really great," says Keenan Wellar, co-founder and CEO of LiveWorkPlay.

He calls the event "the most-important short-term project in the eight-year history of the LiveWorkPlay organization."

Keenan says participants were encouraged to look to themselves first, then their peers, then support staff and then their parents as an approach to solving problems. He says organizers hoped participants would develop a bond that would continue to be nurtured beyond the experience.

"What they think of themselves and each other, I think, will be forever changed by the experience. It was really starting to gel... people were solving their own problems."

The idea to move into the residence came about in the fall, when the participants, who are all associated with LiveWorkPlay, discussed various housing models.

"Home, apartment, group home – we talked about the advantages and disadvantages of each," explains Keenan. "Then we discussed what their ideal housing solution would look like, and they came up with a home that allows a combination of private and public space, with housemates of their choosing."

The participants liked the idea of having their own room, plus common space such as a kitchen and living room.

Keenan says they decided to take that research to the next step and give the living experience a try. The housing project officially wrapped up on July 19 with a catered dinner and multimedia slide show featuring 150 photographs. The participants emceed the evening and after were escorted by limousine to a night out in Ottawa's Byward Market.

Keenan says staff and participants are now reflecting on the experience and researchers from the University of Ottawa are in the process of collecting data from the project "to explore quality of life and related issues." The organization will use the researchers' findings, along with its own, for future planning with the goal of reaching an "appropriate housing solution."

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This article has been modified from its original format, which originally appeared online at the address:

[http://www.oacl.on.ca/Daily\\_News/2003/July/july29.htm](http://www.oacl.on.ca/Daily_News/2003/July/july29.htm)

and was published by:

**Community Living Ontario**  
240 Duncan Mill Rd. Suite 403  
Toronto, Ontario M3B 1Z4  
Tel: (416) 447-4348  
Fax (416) 447-8974  
email : [richard@acl.on.ca](mailto:richard@acl.on.ca)

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