

Too many people don't have a safe place to call home

BY RHONDA FREDERICK

A recent front-page article in The Buffalo News told the story of eight individuals who are developmentally and physically disabled living in deplorable conditions at an unlicensed boarding home. Despite living in a filthy and hazardous residence, they were simply happy to have a roof over their heads.

Thankfully these individuals were able to move, but their story remains tragic.

It also serves as a warning. As stated in the article, these individuals are not alone in their inability to find a safe place to call home.

A tracking system developed by the

Office for People with Developmental Disabilities estimates that nearly 12,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are seeking residential placements in New York.

In our region alone (Western New York and the Finger Lakes), more than 2,300 individuals are currently requesting some form of residential opportunity because their aging caregivers are more and more challenged to provide proper care.

What's more is the continual push by New York State to pursue a managed care system for individuals with developmental disabilities with the intent of transitioning many from institutional settings to community-based

housing.

While the state is seeking to fundamentally redesign its service delivery system as part of its People First Waiver, new housing opportunities are generally not available, or if they are, only for those still in an institutional setting or for those at risk as a result of an emergency (death or incapacitation of a family caregiver).

These efforts can result in our community's most vulnerable people slipping through the cracks and residing in unsafe, unfit conditions. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, with enhanced funding for the housing service and support needs of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, more people can

live in a safe environment where they receive the care they need.

Without the necessary funds, the story of these individuals will take on new names in a different place - same sad story.

We must continue to advocate for funding for those who need it. Let's bring back those who have been cast aside by the system and give them a safe place to call home.

After all, every person deserves to live in quality, affordable and accessible housing with the services and supports they need to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

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