

# As Lebanon expansion nears opening, project to house adults with disabilities eyes the future



- Tim Larsen, 31, and his mother, Elizabeth Larsen, pet Griffin, who belongs to Tim's older brother, at their home in Lebanon, N.H., on Tuesday, June 8, 2021. Tim Larsen will be one of the residents at Visions for Creative Housing Solutions' new Green Street location. (Valley News / Report For America - Alex Driehaus) Copyright Valley News. May not be reprinted or used online without permission.

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LEBANON — Every week, the nonprofit Visions for Creative Housing Solutions gets another request to support an adult with developmental disabilities, according to its director.

“I read them and it just breaks my heart,” said Sylvia Dow, the Enfield-based organization’s executive director, of the help requests that she has to turn down.

Visions, which currently supports 12 people at its Sunrise Farm in Enfield, is at capacity, Dow said. The organization has a waiting list of roughly 30 people seeking a place to live as independently as possible.

“There needs to be options for families and individuals,” Dow said. “Our state doesn’t have enough service providers.”

To help address the need, Visions is poised to welcome another 11 people to a new site on Green Street in Lebanon next month, where it has renovated two former apartment houses.

And the organization also is working to [open a site for another 12 people to live](#) in Hanover in 2023 and planning to share its supportive housing model with other groups outside of the Upper Valley.

The Green Street Commons project, which is within walking distance of Colburn Park and the rest of downtown Lebanon, will provide residents with access to public transportation, stores, churches, employment, volunteer opportunities, and recreational and cultural facilities. The complex includes two buildings. One is to have four two-bedroom apartments and the other is slated to have one three-bedroom apartment, a large kitchen/dining room for family-style dinners, as well as office space and overnight accommodations for employees.

Lebanon Mayor Tim McNamara said the Green Street project is in a “great location.”



- • A construction crew works on the new Visions for Creative Housing Solutions site on Green Street in Lebanon, N.H., on Tuesday, June 8, 2021. The new project consists of two buildings that will offer apartment-style housing, along with a communal kitchen and other amenities for 11 residents. (Valley News / Report For America - Alex Driehaus) Copyright Valley News. May not be reprinted or used online

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“I think that the idea of supportive housing is fantastic,” McNamara said. “The neighbors I think are very excited about this (and it’s) great for these young people for whom there are limited options.”

Visions took ownership of the property last summer and helped its former tenants find alternative housing, Dow said. Since then, Visions has renovated the two buildings, one of which dates to the 1860s, adding insulation and making it energy-efficient, she said. The effort has been supported by a capital campaign that raised \$800,000.

As at Sunrise Farm, a former inn which has been in operation since 2014, residents will receive the support they need to live as independently as possible, she said. Visions provides 24/7 oversight for each resident, as well as support services such as employment, transportation, health and medical oversight, life skills development, relationship building, and social and recreational opportunities.

Support services and transportation are typically funded by Medicaid, Dow said, while families are responsible for \$720 in monthly room and board, which covers rent, food and utilities.

The organization tries “to make it no cost/low cost to the individual,” she said, noting that is especially important for those who can’t work and who rely on Social Security to cover their costs.

### Hanover project

At the same time Visions is working to open its new Lebanon site, it also is in the midst of planning another in Hanover. After Outreach House, an assisted-living residence on Hanover’s South Park Street, closed in 2019, that nonprofit’s board donated the land and the house to Visions. Visions has since determined that the existing structure will need to be razed to make way for a new, more accessible, energy-efficient building, as well as more parking.

Town officials are supportive and eager to help area families find a place for adult children with disabilities.

“It’s going to be a wonderful project,” said Julia Griffin, Hanover’s town manager. “As parents age, they worry about what the future will look like for their offspring when they’re gone.”

Dow said she estimates the Hanover project’s construction costs will total \$2 million. The group plans to fundraise for the first \$1.5 million and then seek the remaining funds in the form of a larger grant or in loans.

The results of Visions’ fundraising helps it to retain trained employees, Dow said. Each site has 25 employees. Mentors, who work with the residents, start at \$16 to \$19 per hour, she said. The organization also offers health insurance and offers flexible hours.

“Well-trained staff and staff who consider Visions a career; that really makes us who we are,” Dow said.

Marjorie Matthews, who lives next to the former Outreach House and has a family member with developmental disabilities, said she is looking forward to the project coming to fruition.

“We really believe in the model,” she said. “From the families’ perspective, it’s so much more enabling. (It) allows these individuals to have their own places (and to) live as independently as they’re capable of being.”

As with the Lebanon project, the Hanover location is close to a bus stop, as well as downtown amenities. The South Park Street location has the added advantage of being near various Dartmouth College sports complexes, including the hockey rink and the football field, Matthews said.

Though it's not clear whether the project will work for Matthews' family, she said it will be a welcome addition to the community.

"I personally feel strongly that Hanover is a town that needs to step up and provide more of this kind of housing for people that need more support," Matthews said. It "so often falls on Lebanon and Hartford to provide social services."

#### More housing needed

Even as McNamara, Lebanon's mayor, welcomed the Green Street project and its residents to the city's downtown, he also said he would like other communities around the Upper Valley to step up to help address the region's broader housing challenges, noting that recent workforce housing projects proposed for [Norwich](#) and [Thetford](#) haven't come to fruition.

"I don't think we should assume everybody wants to or should be living in Lebanon or Hartford," he said.

Michael Kiess, Vital Communities' workforce housing coordinator, also said he hopes that the support municipalities and neighbors have shown for Visions' expansion could also help create supportive housing for people with other types of needs.

"We have other long-term or complicated needs in our lives and communities, from aging in place to mental health support to transition from trauma or substance misuse," Kiess said. "As neighbors and town voters, it is essential that we help formal service providers create and maintain the supports that make a house a home."

*A ribbon-cutting at Green Street Commons, 12 Green St., Lebanon, is scheduled for July 16 from 4 to 6 p.m. The event is to include speakers, tours and light refreshments.*

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