

# A Chance to be Independent

## New Model Program Enables Young Adults with Autism to Live Independently

JCCA's Compass Project is one of the only programs providing comprehensive social, vocational, educational, and independent-living transition services for young adults with Autism Spectrum challenges on Long Island, Westchester, and New York City. For many young adults with Autism there are few services to help them live independently in apartments (as opposed to group homes) and be productive.

The Queens Independent Living Program opened last summer and helps college and post college age students

with learning difficulties, autism and related disabilities. The program's expert staff (Master's level mental health professionals) help participants find apartments; match roommates; take advantage of social, cultural, sports and religious opportunities; and engage in community activities. In addition, staff assists with such essentials as preparing meals, budgeting, organizing a schedule, internships, and job coaching.

"The goal of the program," according to Evan Oppenheimer, Assistant Director of JCCA's Compass Project, "is to help our clients maximize their abilities, learn new skills, and lead active and fulfilling lives."

One participant Daniel Braun sees new opportunities. "What I like best is the chance to live in the city, in an apartment-style program made for high functioning people, with plenty of access to things to do. It is exciting, and Forest Hills is ideal because we don't need to rely on others; everything is close."

JCCA has run comprehensive programs for 8 years for more than 400 young adults with

autism in White Plains and Long Island. In fact, JCCA's effectiveness in helping young adults with autism is being studied and replicated in Philadelphia, Houston, and Los Angeles.

The Queens Independent Living Program is a partnership between JCCA and FEGS, and received important early support from UJA-Federation of NY. The program is funded by private donations from parents. It also assists applicants in applying for funds from the NY State Office of People with Disabilities.

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