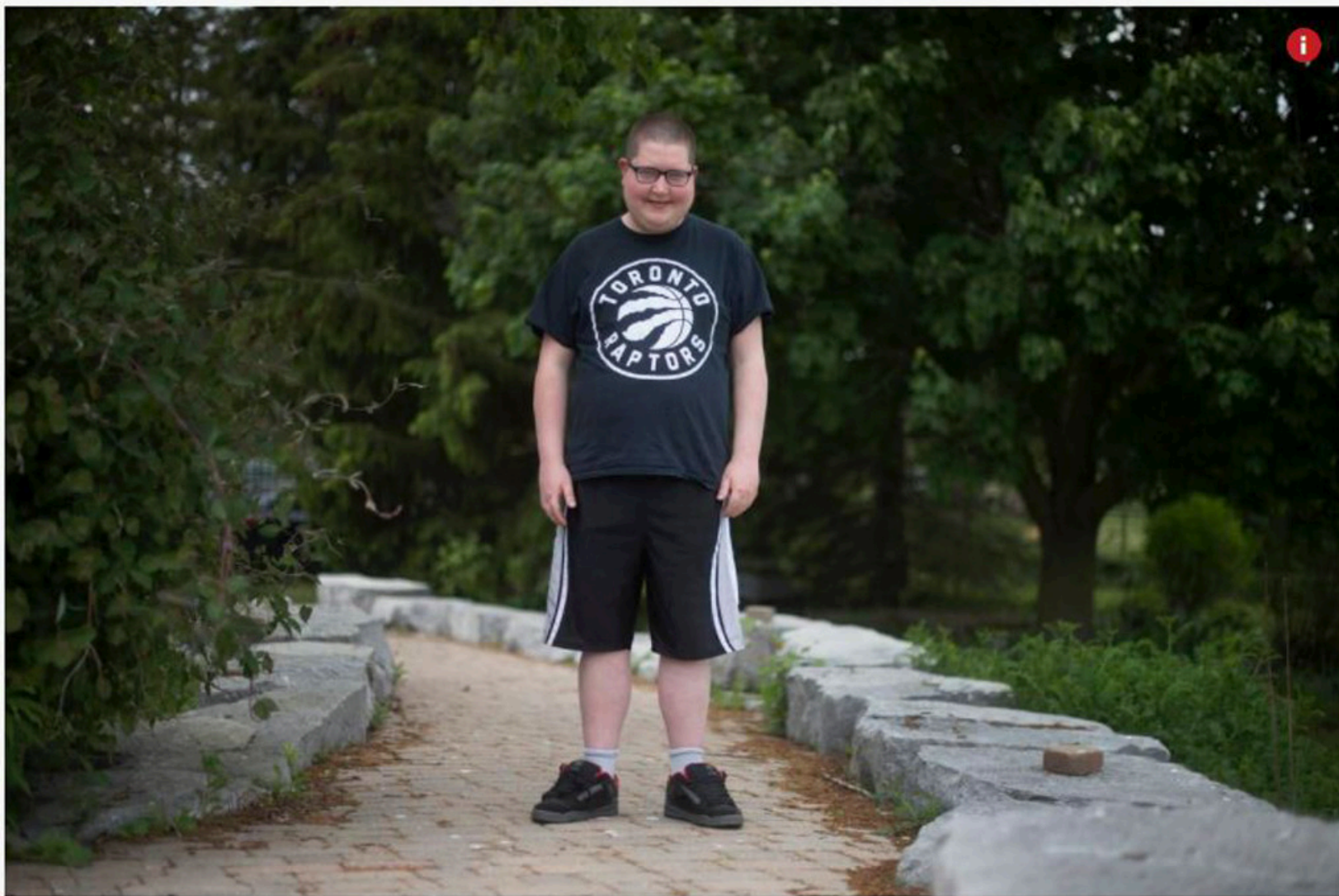


A decent place of their own: New affordable building will bring independence, opportunity, say tenants getting ready to move in



By **Catherine Thompson** Record Reporter
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KITCHENER — Kyle Kivell has been waiting half his life to live independently in his own apartment.

The 31-year-old has lived in group homes since he was 15, and is very excited to be moving in early July into one of the 48 apartments in a new affordable housing project at 544 Bridgeport Rd. near Lancaster Street.

“It totally feels like a new chapter in my life,” he says.

The \$12.7 million project is an innovative partnership between three community groups: [St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church Bridgeport](#), which donated the land; housing non-profit [MennoHomes](#); and [Parents for Community Living](#), a charity that provides support and housing for adults with developmental disabilities.

All of the units in the five-storey building will be affordable, including 10 units for disabled adults, 12 accessible units, and a couple of units for former refugees. There's a community hub and community kitchen for Parents for Community Living, and worship space for St. Paul's.

Mostly though, it will be providing decent places to live for dozens of people who have had real struggles finding a home they could afford.

Kivell admits he feels "a mixture of excitement and nervousness" about the move, which will be a big change from his current living arrangements, where staff do all the grocery shopping and take care of many day-to-day tasks.

But he's been learning how to cook — tacos are a big favourite — as well as meal planning, budgeting and other skills.

Marianne Irvine will be one of Kivell's neighbours. She too is eager to move in — she's now sharing a basement apartment and says the search for a decent, affordable place has been disheartening.

"There is nothing affordable for my income level," she said. "Absolutely nothing. It's just beyond my grasp."

Many of the places she looked at were renting for \$1,400 a month. Irvine, 65, has a disability that affects her joints, heart and lung function, but less expensive places "were in areas that I wasn't feeling secure to live, with my mobility issues."

Irvine feels "so grateful" for the chance to have her own place, knowing 6,000 households are on the region's affordable housing wait-list. Seeing the growing numbers of people who don't have a home is heartbreaking, she said.

Taylor Ropp is also on a disability pension, and says her current apartment, a tiny basement place, eats up 70 per cent of her income.

Moving to a place she can afford will mean the 27-year-old will have money for food, her contact lenses, and other basics.

“I couldn’t keep going in this apartment,” Ropp said. “It’s too much money.”

She too is grateful for the chance to move. “I know it will be safe, and clean and nice, and everything I could never have found on my own with my budget.

“This is a big deal to have this,” she said simply. “I just don’t have the words to explain it.”

Kivell is living at a group home in Breslau run by Parents for Community Living, and says he’s looking forward to being in the city, having access to transit and being able to walk to nearby stores and coffee shops, where he could meet friends for a coffee. “Right now, I’m just kind of out in the country.”

Kivell has already begun packing up his room. As a big wrestling fan, he plans to decorate his new place with plenty of wrestling posters.

“I’ve wanted something like this for a long time. I’m just happy it’s happening.”

His mother, Lacy Kivell says she’s thrilled with the opportunity the new place provides, combining greater independence and support. “I know he’s still going to be in good hands,” she said.

Parents for Community Living will have staff on site around the clock, to support the adults living in the 10 units earmarked for the organization.

The building includes a community hub and a teaching kitchen where staff will offer programs in digital literacy, budgeting, comparison shopping and other skills, Kathy Loveys, executive director of Parents for Community Living.

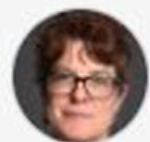
The site will have raised garden beds where residents and others can learn to garden. The group has partnered with Second Harvest, a food rescue organization, and hopes to be able to include other residents in the building if

they're interested.

"We have so many opportunities to partner with others in the community in this space and create much more meaningful inclusion opportunities for people with varying abilities who just want to belong in their community," Loveys said.

That sense of community appeals to Irvine. "It just seems like it will feel like there's activity happening, people coming and going and using the space. That just kind of feels good."

The groups have raised more than 90 per cent of the funds needed for the project, but each is still looking for community support to get them past the finish line.



Catherine Thompson is a Waterloo Region-based reporter focusing on urban affairs for The Record. Reach her via email: cthompson@therecord.com