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A place to call home

By Erica Chayes Wida

Kevin Carlin is skilled with a needle and thread. He often sews in the evening after feeding his dog and taking out the trash. His hand-stitched pillowcases have been sold at a storefront on Pennington's main street. Carlin loves soccer, basketball and track and competes every year in the Special Olympics.

At 21, Carlin finished his education at Princeton Child Development Institute but continues to participate in its adult program. Ready for a new stage of his life, Carlin, following a celebratory ribbon cutting of a Youth Consultation Service Sawtelle [Home](#) opening in Princeton, will settle into "the college life."

"I told him it's like 'Toy Story,' which he's familiar with. Andy is giving away his toys and going to college and it's time for him to leave his mom's house. It's time to start a new adventure," said Carlin's mother, Henrietta Renzi, who is, like most mothers, used to being by her son's side. "Kevin met one of the other guys when we went to the house. He put his arm around him and said, 'Hey Mikey, we go to college!' He's a pretty sweet kid."

YCS Services, a nonprofit social service agency with 18 group homes for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities throughout the state, is opening its first location in Princeton. This is where Carlin will call home – in the company of three young men around his age and two full-time staffers. Carlin will be able to continue to attend PCDI, who will work closely with the YCS home staff on Carlin's progress, and return home for family-style meals and fun activities around the community.

"We consider ourselves super fortunate that we were invited into this group home," said Carlin's father, also Kevin Carlin, who had just returned from his son's soon-to-be house where he planted a small garden. "The secret to happiness is security – to be able to see and observe him when we're under 60. What could be more important for our own state of mind and our own child?"

Finding the right home, however, was not an easy feat. Carlin had been placed on the state Division of Developmental Disabilities waiting list for 12 years before Renzi received the call in November about placements for a home. Renzi did a lot of research sifting through the live-in opportunities for her son, and after YCS called in February, she felt it was finally the right fit.

“Kevin has come a very long way, and this is the next step,” Renzi said lovingly. “Our goal is that he learns to live with other people and learn more skills to become more independent. It will be a therapeutic home as far as continuous learning, sharing chores, taking turns, interacting with people and the community.”