



*Welcome to
your home*
**Allison
& Earl**

"There's No Place *Like* Home"

By Alyssa Campbell

SYCAMORE RESIDENTS BLAZE A TRAIL FOR COMMUNITY INTEGRATED LIVING

As childhood friends growing up in Sycamore, Allison Stahl and Earl Hollister formed a special, meaningful friendship at a young age, even as life took them on separate paths through the years. That lifelong friendship is what eventually led them and their families to reconnect years later, marking a history-making event for DeKalb County: Allison and Earl became the area's first developmentally disabled adults to achieve their own home in a two-person community integrated living arrangement.

When you speak with Allison, her smile lights up the room. She's quick to let you know about her favorite things - dancing with her troupe at DeKalb Dance Dimensions, spending time with her family, cooking and watching exhibition figure skating. Allison's warmth and confidence are welcoming. Many local residents might have encountered her at the DeKalb Wal-Mart, where she's worked for the past 16 years. Her love for her family, mother Pam and stepfather Nate Kitterman and her father Tony Stahl, is evident, as is her desire to continue to be able to call Sycamore home.

Earl is a sports fanatic through and through. It doesn't matter what sport it is, he is a fan, and his face lights up when talking about the sports he loves. He has kind eyes, and while quiet

compared to Allison, he is emphatic when talking about what he can't wait for in his new home: independence. Sycamore is home to him, and his parents, Corki and Ken Williams, knew that working to achieve a living arrangement that allowed Earl to live in his hometown would be the ideal scenario.

When you meet Allison and Earl, you hear the same things many young adults wish for in a new home - lots of space, a nice kitchen and full internet capabilities, to name a few. While amenities and accessibility are must-haves, it's the emotional offerings the house will bring that truly matter - freedom, independence and a conclusion to a years-long journey to a living arrangement that offers everything they need to support their disabilities and fulfill their dreams to be able to live independently.



Allison and her Mother sharing the excitement of her new home.



options for their son Earl since the summer of 2011. A chance meeting between the parents one day in Sycamore and a comparison of notes on where they were at in their journeys led the families to join forces to find the best living arrangement solution for their daughter and son.

The process of planning, budgeting and researching community integrated living arrangement options for Allison and Earl was intensive for the two families, even with the assistance of Help At Home. During the emotional and challenging process, the families found encouragement and help from many advocates and service coordinators, along with the strong support of Help at Home, a licensed and specialized home health care provider for CILA in Illinois. Eventually, the families' dedication and teamwork paid off when they received word in the spring of 2016 that Allison and Earl's wish to live together in a two-person integrated home was approved.

"Making something like this happen takes perseverance and power in numbers, and couldn't have been accomplished without all of the advocates we've had along the way" said Ken Williams, Earl's father.

Allison and Earl are the first developmentally disabled adults that Help at Home has successfully assisted in DeKalb County,

THE JOURNEY TO A HOME

Allison's journey began in the spring of 2014, when she was notified that she was eligible to receive Community Integrated Living Arrangement (CILA) funding from the State of Illinois. CILA funding provides a living arrangement for up to eight adults with developmental disabilities in a group home, family home or apartment, where the individuals live under the supervision of a community developmental services agency and one-on-one, full time care providers. When Allison received her notification of CILA eligibility, it also came with a recommendation from the State of Illinois that she use the funding to move into an eight-person group home. Knowing what she wanted and what was best for her, Allison and her family began the journey to create a personalized, smaller community integrated living arrangement that was optimal for her health and wellbeing.

As Allison's family began the process of identifying how to make her dream of living independently a reality, they found that their family friends, Corki and Ken Williams, had been researching community integrated living arrangement



Earl and his Father taking in the view of his new home.



making them trailblazers and a success story for other young adults seeking alternative community integrated living arrangements with full-time, in-home care.

THE SEARCH FOR A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Upon approval from the state, the exciting search for a place Allison and Earl could call "home" began. The families started looking at rental properties in DeKalb and Sycamore, with the hope of finding one that could be transformed and customized to be fully accessible and meet Allison and Earl's needs. After searching and meeting with contractors for advice on the process of renovating a rental home, the families concluded that rehabbing a rental property was not feasible.

As the families prepared to start back at square one in their home search, a private investor entered the picture and generously purchased a home in Heron Creek just for Allison and Earl.

"As soon as we walked into the house, I knew it - it was theirs," said Pam Kitterman, Allison's mother.



With wish lists for their new home in-hand, Allison and Earl were one step closer to making their dream of living independently a reality. In mid-August, a construction crew began the process of rehabbing the home to make it completely accessible and customized.

Although a move-in date is still in the works, Earl is already looking forward to living closer to family and friends and the potential work opportunities in the area. When asked what Allison can't wait to do in her new home, she quickly replied, "I'm going to host Thanksgiving!"

Help At Home has been in operation since 1973 providing In-Home and CILA services throughout the states of Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee. Currently, Help At Home has eight CILA homes in Illinois and the company is continuing to work on providing CILA services state-wide ■