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April is National Autism Awareness Month

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In public discussion, autism is most frequently associated with the diagnosing and nurturing of children with the condition. However, adults with autism face their own set of challenges, especially those whose primary caretakers—often their parents—have become unable to care for them, due to age or illness.

“Adults and teens with autism have difficulties in social situations and many may or may not have sensory problems as well,” explains Kim Clark of Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities. These difficulties can make it hard for them to be in environments we take for granted—work, a grocery store, a mall. They can have trouble making eye contact, a crucial skill for holding a job or building relationships. They may be passionate about something but not understand why their friends don’t want to discuss it constantly; they have difficulty putting themselves in other people’s shoes. “Depending on the individual’s level of ability,” says Clark, “they can have severe anxiety over an inability to communicate to peers, family, friends and employers.”

To help lessen these anxieties and better integrate adults with autism into the general community, programs like Community Haven offer individual assessment for educational placement—whether it’s post-secondary education or skills training—and careful monitoring and nurturing of each person’s development. There are also group home options—often the ultimate solution for those whose caregivers can no longer care for them—that offer “a safe and comfortable environment while maintaining as much independence as possible,” says Clark.