

## State school residents move

By Mike Baird

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### New Group Home



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CORPUS CHRISTI — After about a decade living at the Corpus Christi State School and sharing bedrooms with three other residents, Tim Mahan, 46, and Dan Hilker, 40, moved into a house with private bedrooms last week.

“Woooooo, nice house,” said Mahan, originally of Hammond, Ind., as he passed through the door of the four-bedroom, two-bath home in the 4400 block of Bonner Drive.

“Me and Danny picked out the furniture,” he said, “and I get the master bedroom with a bathroom.”

Hilker plopped onto a sofa they selected together.

“We’re having fried chicken for our first dinner,” he said. “I love fried chicken, and we can help.”

The men, both diagnosed as developmentally delayed, are two of about 350 people in Texas state schools — large residential facilities for mentally and developmentally disabled people — who have been on a list for more than five years to move into community homes. Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services approved the men moving into the home operated by Community Options Inc., a housing organization for developmentally disabled people that purchased two houses here.

Based in Princeton, N.J., the nonprofit is one of about a dozen group home providers in Nueces County for people with disabilities.

“These guys are self-sufficient, can bathe and only need assistance doing laundry and cooking,” said Diana Ortega, Community Options executive director in Corpus Christi. “They will learn to use the bus system, shop for groceries and will learn to handle their own money.”

The men will have around-the-clock staff support inside the home and a case worker to help them with volunteer and employment opportunities, Ortega said.

Each situation is based on background, needs, personalities, level of function and medical challenges, said Sheri Reed, case manager for the men.

“They are very excited,” she said.

Two more state school residents will join the men after Sept. 1.

It costs the state about \$120,000 a year per person in a state school, Reed said, but housing in the community costs about \$45,000 per person annually. Half the cost is paid by Medicaid, and the rest by the state.

Costs are not really comparable, said Cecilia Fedorov, spokeswoman for Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services.

“There are expenses associated with state living centers that private providers do not have,” she said, “such as employee retirement and benefits costs and resident medical costs.” About 60 percent of the people in state living centers have higher levels of needs than those in community settings, Fedorov said.

Community Options hopes to open eight houses in Corpus Christi in the next year.

The state school helped stabilize Mahan, who had emotional outbursts, said his sister Kara Thompson, who lives in Mesa, Ariz.

“They’ve helped Tim get (his) medication adjusted,” she said, “and it’s a positive move for him to be in a community home now.”



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