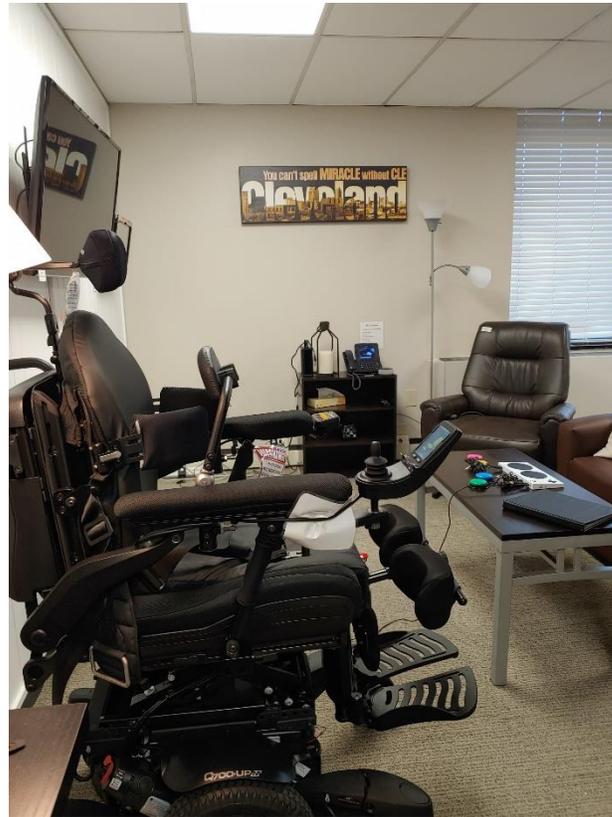


Visitation Report on Cuyahoga DD's Custom Living Environment (smart apartment)
By: Joshua Ford
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I visited the Custom Living Environment (CLE) with my PTK organization in November of 2019, before the world was turned upside down by COVID. The CLE is a “smart” apartment that showcases many of the assistive technology devices that can empower clients to live a more independent life. The CLE was developed and fully funded by the Cuyahoga Board of Developmental Disabilities. The demonstration apartment is located within the William Patrick Day Center in downtown Cleveland. This apartment consists of an entrance area, living room, dining area, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. The entrance area is equipped with automatic door locks, voice activated temperature control and lighting controls. The living room has a television that can be accessed in several different ways, depending

on the client. The television also has a feature that allows the user to access 24/7 support for physical or emotional support. A technician is always available to video chat and give advice or notify the proper professionals. This is so reassuring to a client who is living independently for the first time.



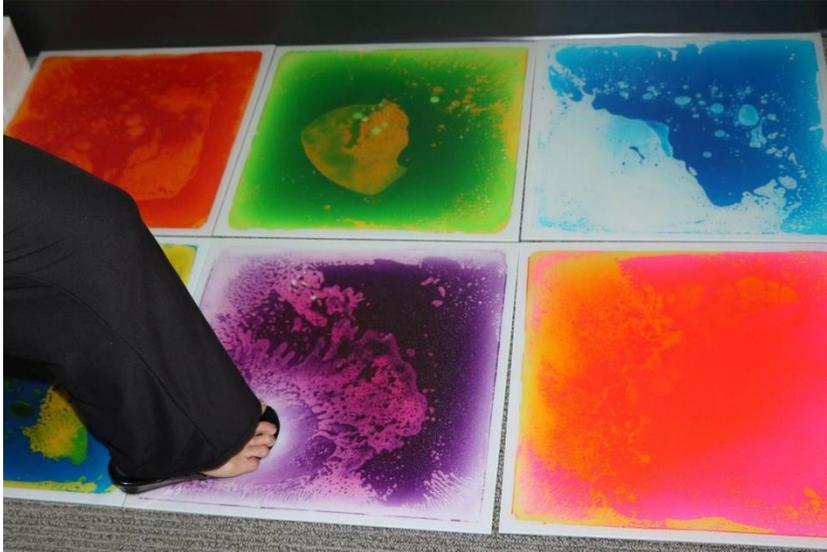
The dining area has a robotic feeding device to help individuals with poor hand control. There is also a display of assorted utensils and tableware that can enable person to eat a meal independently.



For a person who may need additional supervision while trying to reach the goal of independent living, this remote monitoring camera can be installed.

The apartment is set up to show many of the devices that can be used to achieve a more independent living situation. Any of the equipment can be used by individuals who are not living independently but want to gain more independence in their family setting. These adaptations can also make life easier for caregivers and create sense of security for both a client and his/her family. There is a 12 page print out available at cle_atv_equiplist.pdf (cuyahogabdd.org). This printout lists all the amazing products and devices that can be used to adapt a living environment to an individual's unique needs. For instance, I use an augmentative communication device, so I was excited to learn that most of the controls (such as turning on the television and lighting) are

responsive to synthetic speech. There are so many amazing products available to assist an extensive variety of needs. I was interested in the sensory products available for people on the autism spectrum.



This is a sensory mat and there are also items such a bubble wall to help someone with autism stay calm and focused.

The above portion of this paper was based on my initial in-person visit to the CLE. Since COVID precautions made revisiting the site impossible, I reached out to Julia Wolff, the senior Assistive Technology Director at the Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Julia was very receptive and helpful, and provided links to additional information. She contacted me by email to answer some of the additional questions I did not ask on my visit. She also shared an hour-long video presentation she did for “The Upside of Downs”, which explained the program in depth. In the video, two assistive technology professionals demonstrated the equipment in the apartment. There was a Q & A segment near the end of the presentation, and it was highly informative to hear the various uses for the resources.

(A bonus was the surprise appearance of my former camp counselor from Camp Cheerful who was one of the expert technicians involved in this project)!

The CLE is totally funded by CCBDD funds. The CCBDD also funds an Assistive Technology Vehicle, which is a more compact version of the apartment



The ATV was a good way to make people aware of the existence of this program. Before COVID, the ATV visited seminars, workshops, and other County Boards. The staff also spoke at Universities and professional organizations to generate awareness of the program. Although anyone is welcome to tour the apartment, the visitors were primarily CCBDD eligible individuals, their programs, schools, or HPC providers. The apartment has the capacity for 8 people to tour at one time and most tours lasted approximately one hour. The ATV could accommodate 4 visitors and the tours would last approximately 20 minutes. The ATV, of course, is wheelchair accessible. Although the ATV is a scaled down version of the apartment, the main difference between the two sites is that the apartment is primarily controlled by Amazon technology while the ATV relies on Goggle technology. It was pointed out that both systems have their own strengths and weaknesses.

This program has equipment that can serve clients who can benefit from the use of assistive technology to enrich their lives. The staff will do an assessment of a client and suggest equipment that may be useful for his/her needs. They will also set up various equipment on a trial basis to see what works and what doesn't. The team is very dedicated to helping individuals and families reach their goals. I think any social worker that works with a clients who face challenges in reaching their optimal level of independence would find this program to be a valuable resource.