



***Designed to Thrive: Building Homes for Adults with Autism***  
**By Kim Steele**

For the parents and caregivers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), providing a comfortable home, quality education and safe environment for their child can be a struggle. When a loud noise, unfamiliar touch or hard to use appliance means the difference between a good or bad day for their child, parents must be careful to plan out even the most minute details of their child's daily environment.

It is estimated that every one out of 110 children have ASD, and that 500,000 of them will reach adulthood within the next 15 years. No longer eligible for assistance through schools, and given that there are not enough residential care programs to meet the anticipated increase in demand, this fragile population will be left largely dependent on aging parents and caregivers, some with limited resources. The question of "How will my child survive without me," weighs heavily on the mind of every parent of a child with ASD. For those with ASD, there are various sensory factors in a home that can produce negative reactions.

A study by Arizona State University's (ASU) Stardust Center and School of Architecture and Landscape titled *Advancing Full Spectrum Housing: Designing for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders* recommended strategies for effective ASD living. Full spectrum housing considers how the living environment is designed and built for this vulnerable group. As part of the study, guidelines were issued to help housing providers, architects, developers, planners, public officials, and others involved in the residential development industry respond to this growing need.

Advance planning of the interior and exterior of a home can help to lessen negative triggers. Some examples include simplified floor plans and rooms with objects familiar to the resident, walls and wallpaper with neutral colors, quiet refrigerators, high and low stimulus rooms and technological assistive devices (door alarms, large button phones, reading machines).

As part of the 2011 National Healthy Homes Conference being held in June, top public health, housing and environmental professionals will discuss design and construction methods and practices, including universal design. *Housing Design for Autism* is only one of many sessions devoted to incorporating health and safety considerations when planning begins. Co-author of the ASU study, Professor Kimberly Steele, will present her recommendations on effective ways to build housing for people with autism. To learn more about the 2011 National Healthy Homes Conference, visit:

[www.healthyhomesconference.org](http://www.healthyhomesconference.org).

## **About the Author**

Kim Steele is an associate professor in the Arizona State University Herberger Institute School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. One of Professor Steele's specialties is research into design strategies for people with autism.

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