



WHITE PAPER

ROOTSTEAD

TOGETHER FOUNDATION

Therapeutic living and working communities for autistic adults

Toward Opportunity, Growth, Empowerment, Therapy, Housing, Equality and Resilience

Tampa Bay, Florida . 2026

An initiative in formation

Executive Summary

Across the United States, an estimated 5.4 million adults live with autism. Roughly 330,000 of them live in Florida. Yet when an autistic person ages out of school based services at 18, the structure that shaped their entire life, the schools, the therapies, the daily routine, very largely disappears. What waits for most families is a waiting list and an impossible choice.

Rootstead Together Foundation is being established to build what comes next. Modeled on L'Éveil du Scarabée, the internationally recognized therapeutic village in France, our planned Florida campus combines sensory adapted housing, individualized therapy, vocational training, a working farm, and a farm to table restaurant that doubles as job training. Phase 1 is designed for 20 residents across five purpose built homes. Phase 2 expands to 40.

We approach this not as charity, but as infrastructure: essential, engineered, and built to last. This paper sets out the need, the model we are adapting, and the path ahead, and it invites the people who will help build it.

THE NEED

The Cliff at 18

5.4M

adults live with autism in the United States (CDC).

21,000

Floridians wait for residential support, an average of 8.5 years.

1 in 31

children are now identified with autism, up from 1 in 36 (CDC, 2025).

Autism does not end at adulthood. The support does. For children, the United States runs systems designed to make room: special education, structured therapy, a federal right to an education that carries a child from toddlerhood. At 18, that scaffolding expires. The person is exactly who they were the day before. They simply stop being served.

Florida feels this acutely. The state Agency for Persons with Disabilities manages a waiting list of more than 21,000 people, with an average wait of roughly eight and a half years, and an estimated 1.2 billion dollars required to clear it. As the childhood diagnosis rate climbs, now 1 in 31, the number of adults reaching this cliff rises every single year.

What families are offered is not a plan. It is an impossible arithmetic: an under resourced group home, often far from family, or a lifetime of full time caregiving at the cost of career, income, and eventually retirement, or a private solution most cannot afford. The option where a dignified, structured adult life simply exists is the one almost no one is offered, because at any meaningful scale it does not yet exist.

THE REFRAME

Infrastructure, Not Charity

We have decided, mostly without saying it out loud, that the care of autistic adults is charity: optional, grateful, underfunded, and perpetually waitlisted. Filed under charity, the outcome is guaranteed to be a patchwork that depends on which state you live in, which nonprofit has capacity that year, and how much a family can pay.

The alternative is to treat it as infrastructure. We do not run charity drives to build highways or hope a generous donor funds the water system. We decide those things are essential, and then we finance them, build them, staff them, and hold them to standards. Rootstead is built on the conviction that housing and employment for autistic adults belongs in that category. Not because it is kind, but because a society producing autistic adults in record numbers and building nothing for them is making an engineering choice and calling it a moral inevitability.

L'ÉVEIL DU SCARABÉE

A Proven Model

Rootstead is modeled on L'Éveil du Scarabée (The Beetle Awakening), the therapeutic village designed by architect Emmanuel Negroni and opened in 2014 in Champcevrains, France. It was selected by the Winston Churchill Foundation of Australia as one of the five most architecturally significant autism buildings in the world, and it received the ArchiDesignClub Award for Health Institutions in 2015. Its core principle is simple and radical: the built environment can directly reduce the intensity of autistic crises, because those crises so often have an environmental source.

“The crises of autistic people always have a source, even if it sometimes escapes us. That source is often in the immediate environment. We must create a habitat that helps reduce tension and stress.”

Emmanuel Negroni, architect of L'Éveil du Scarabée

We have studied this model and are adapting it for the Florida context: its climate, its regulations, and its community. What follows is not a wish list. It is a design discipline.

THE VISION

The Campus, Designed as Therapy

The Rootstead campus is not a residential facility with nice features added on. Every square foot is engineered to lower stress, prevent sensory overload, and support wellbeing. The design combines the evidence based Autism ASPECTSS Design Index with the sensory philosophy of L'Éveil du Scarabée, expressed through seven principles.

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| Acoustics | Sound absorbing ceilings and surfaces, soft flooring, and no fluorescent lighting, so there is no hum, flicker, or echo. |
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| Spatial sequencing | The campus flows from private to semi private to public, with clear pictogram wayfinding and no confusing intersections. |
| Escape spaces | Every bedroom has a personal retreat corner and direct access to a private garden patio, day or night, for immediate regulation. |
| Compartmentalization | Living, eating, working, and resting zones are visually and acoustically separate, so only necessary stimulation is present. |
| Transitions | Covered walkways and gentle thresholds between indoors and outdoors, with no abrupt environmental changes. |
| Sensory zoning | Four energy zones across campus, from high energy workshops to minimal energy bedrooms, navigated by daily need and mood. |
| Safety | Rounded edges and corners, visually neutral flooring, and outdoor spaces gently enclosed without feeling confining. |

Within that framework, light is treated as medicine rather than utility: flicker free LED throughout, abundant but diffused daylight, skylights over a central plaza that warm to amber at dusk. The heart of the campus is a village square, a large covered space organized around a living Florida native tree, where residents meet naturally and choose their own level of engagement. Around it sit small residential homes of four private rooms each, a farm to table restaurant open to the public and staffed by residents, production workshops for jams, teas, honey, and crafts, a greenhouse and working farm, and animal assisted activities. The campus targets LEED Silver certification and exceeds ADA requirements throughout, treating accessibility as a founding principle rather than a checklist.

OUR NAME IS OUR MISSION

The TOGETHER Principle

Our name carries our mission. Rootstead is the place. TOGETHER is the principle that governs how it is built and run, a promise to every resident captured in seven words.

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|----------------------|---------------------|
| T Toward | T Therapy |
| O Opportunity | H Housing |
| G Growth | E Equality |
| E Empowerment | R Resilience |

FROM PROOF TO NETWORK

A Phased Path

We are deliberately starting at a human scale and proving the model before we expand. Phase 1 is a campus for 20 residents across five purpose built homes: a complete, working therapeutic village, and the proof of concept. Phase 2 adds five homes to reach a full capacity of 40 residents once the model is

validated and funding is secured. Beyond Florida, the long term vision is a replicable national network of therapeutic villages, each built to the same standard, so the answer to families stops depending on geography and luck.

THE FOUNDERS

Operators, Not Bystanders

Mickael Roche

Co-Founder. A real estate developer with two decades of experience building and managing residential housing in France and the United States. He brings the operational discipline of someone who has actually sourced sites, structured financing, and run residential communities, now pointed at a population almost no one builds for.

Jean-Charles Faust

Co-Founder. Honorary French Consul for the Tampa Bay region and the father of an autistic adult daughter. He brings lived experience, community standing, and a deep personal commitment to the families this work serves.

WHERE WE ARE

Governance and Status

Rootstead Together Foundation is currently in its founding phase. The founding board consists of the two co-founders, and we are actively building out a board of directors and an advisory circle of autism care professionals, clinicians, real estate and capital partners, and family advocates. We intend to establish Rootstead as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Until that process is complete, Rootstead is an initiative in formation: it is not yet an established 501(c)(3), and contributions are not yet tax deductible. This document is provided for informational purposes, to introduce the project to prospective partners, advisors, and supporters.

THE INVITATION

Join Us

We are looking for the people who will help build this: prospective board members and advisors, real estate and capital partners, autism care professionals, and families who understand the need firsthand. The families we serve are not asking for sympathy. They are asking the country to stop treating their adult children as a problem to be managed, and start treating them as citizens to be housed, employed, and included.

We just have to decide it is worth building. We already have.

Start a conversation: info@rootstead.org . rootstead.org . Tampa Bay, Florida

Rootstead Together Foundation is an initiative currently in formation. It is not yet an established 501(c)(3) organization, and contributions are not yet tax deductible. Statistics cited are drawn from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities. This document is provided for informational purposes only.