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# News Release

## State helps individuals with special needs buy their first homes

*Illinois Housing Development Authority awards \$225,000  
to help Cook County residents begin a life of independence*

**CHICAGO** – Following through on Governor Rod R. Blagojevich’s commitment to help working families, seniors and people with disabilities have access to quality, affordable housing, the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) announced today \$225,000 in grants and loans that will allow five individuals living with special needs in Cook County to afford their first homes. The funding is made possible through the State Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

“I would never have been able to do this by myself,” said Andrea Harris, one of the five recipients of the funding. “I would have easily been overwhelmed by the financial and psychological pressures of living on my own because it involves such a huge adjustment.” Andrea has been wheelchair-bound since birth after being diagnosed with spina bifida.

At 28, the college graduate has never lived away from home and now looks forward to leading an independent life and supporting herself with her part-time job as a local children’s museum receptionist. “Having the help to manage my apartment, finances and daily chores will make a big difference. I have waited so long for this,” Harris added. Andrea expects to move into her one-bedroom condominium in August.

“Gov. Blagojevich’s 2003 executive order identified low-income people with disabilities as one of the six priority populations who are most in need of quality affordable housing,” said Kelly King Dibble, IHDA Executive Director. “We are proud to play a part in helping Illinois’ special needs community fulfill their homeownership dreams.”

Two not-for-profit agencies, the Center for Independent Futures (CIF) and the Housing Opportunity Development Corporation, will help administer the funds. Each homebuyer will receive a \$40,000 interest-free, 30-year loan and an additional \$5,000 cash grant from the State Trust Fund. The grant will be used to provide homebuyer education and assist with down payment and closing costs. The income-eligible homebuyer is also required to contribute a minimum of \$1,000 toward a down payment on the property.

The five recipients, who have already been identified, can choose to purchase one of the 61 units in the newly constructed Sienna Condominiums building on Church Street in downtown Evanston.

Twenty-four-hour emergency support will be available to the special needs residents through a live-in CIF staff member known as a “community builder”. Great care has been taken to ensure community integration and as a result, the special needs homebuyers will not be segregated to one particular floor or area of the building. The special needs homebuyers will also receive daily contact from support staff that will help them access resources to enhance their job skills and personal development.

“People living with disabilities are beginning to outlive their primary caregivers,” said Jane Doyle, CIF Executive Director. “Making homeowners out of them now and helping them with the transition to independent living gives them an enormous sense of achievement and is also a huge relief for the caregivers to know that their family members will have a safe and decent place to call home.”

CIF was responsible for finding and pre-qualifying the homebuyers to receive IHDA’s financing. Applicants had to prove they are first-time homebuyers living with a disability but are capable of living independently, or being willing and motivated to convert to independent living, and earn less than 50% of the area medium income. In Cook County this amount is \$26,400 for a single household.

The Governor’s 2005 *Building for Success: Illinois Comprehensive Housing Plan* allowed for spending earmarked for affordable housing at several state agencies to be strategically targeted to the following priority populations: very low income households and families; low income seniors; low income people with disabilities; homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless; low and moderate income families and people unable to find affordable housing near jobs or transportation; and low income families and people living in existing affordable housing in danger of becoming unaffordable.

The 2005 Housing Plan was developed by the Governor’s Housing Task Force. The 35 members of the Task Force include advocates, developers, lenders, and state agency representatives, including eight Illinois state agency directors. Under the Governor’s direction, the Task Force recently developed “*On the Road to Success: Illinois Comprehensive Housing Plan 2006*” which continues to build on the coordinated success of the 2005 Comprehensive Housing Plan.

Since 2003, IHDA has helped more than 350 people with special needs achieve their homeownership dreams or rehabilitate their homes in Illinois, with \$3.9 million in financing. A further 1,250 people with special needs in Illinois have found homes in IHDA-financed rental accommodation or seen their homes renovated, with funding totaling more than \$91 million.

#### About the Illinois Housing Development Authority

IHDA ([www.ihda.org](http://www.ihda.org)) is a self-supporting state agency that finances the creation and the preservation of affordable housing across Illinois. Since its creation by an act of the Illinois legislature in 1967, IHDA has allocated more than \$7.27 billion and financed more than 174,000 units of affordable housing across the state. IHDA accomplishes its mission through a number of federal and state funding sources, including the Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the Illinois Affordable Housing Tax Credits Fund, the allocation of federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits, HOME Investment Partnership funds and others. IHDA is also a bonding authority, and independently sells bonds, based on its own good credit, to finance affordable housing across the state.