

# Boston Sunday Globe

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## Program aims to help homeless but ‘needs to be easier’

HomeBASE, billed as salve for shelter emergency, is hard to navigate, critics say

By Samantha J. Gross  
GLOBE STAFF

When Elaine, 40, was evicted from her Framingham apartment over the summer, she couldn’t believe she was homeless.

Her husband is disabled and her 5-year-old son is severely autistic, prompting her to quit her well-paying job as a caseworker for Veterans Affairs last year to help care for her family’s needs.

The money quickly dwindled. The family moved into a hotel shelter in Woburn after Elaine decided they needed some time to get back on their feet.

Then the family turned to HomeBASE, a decade-old emergency housing assistance program run by the state’s housing office aimed at diverting homeless families from shelters or hotels by covering burdensome move-in costs, such as security deposits or the first and last month’s rent. The program also pays for furniture and subsidizes rent for up to a year.

But the state program — once heralded as a

**HOMEBASE, Page A7**

‘DDS doesn’t really understand what their clients’ needs are.’

TERE RAMOS, mother of a 22-year-old who is in a temporary residence

## Families confront system in turmoil

As autistic children become adults in Mass., they face troubled group home network



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Kati Dunne (left) chatted with her mother, Tere Ramos. Dunne lives in a temporary group home, where Ramos has been dissatisfied with the care.

By Liz Kowalczyk  
GLOBE STAFF

Thousands of Massachusetts children who have been diagnosed with autism in recent years have entered a daunting new phase of life: adulthood.

And those with the most severe forms of the disorder are up against extraordinary challenges. Despite years of warnings about the inevitable explosion in need, they are encountering a state group home system for adults that is hobbled by poor staffing and struggling with allegations of abuse and neglect, and that many find is simply unprepared to care for them.

A record number of children

with intellectual disabilities or autism turn 22 years old this year and qualify for adult services with the Department of Developmental Services. The number of people reaching this milestone each year has doubled since a decade ago to more than 1,430, driven by the tremendous increase in children with autism. Autistic children now account for more than half of these new adults.

“There has been very little planning to prepare for this,” said Michael Borr, the parent of an adult son with autism and former chairman of Advocates for Autism of Massachusetts. “I can go back to the speeches I made every year, and I would talk about the tsunami that is coming. It’s not coming any more; it’s here. We are in a crisis.”

**AUTISM, Page A11**

### BEYOND THE GILDED GATE

## THE \$600,000 PROBLEM

Many forces drive the housing crisis here, and the sky-high cost of construction is one of the most powerful

*This series was reported by Tim Logan, Catherine Carlock, Mark Arseneault, Andrew Brinker, Stephanie Ebbert, Diti Kohli, and Rebecca Ostriker. Today’s story was edited by Patricia Wen, and written by Carlock and Logan. This is the last in a series, which can be found at [www.bostonglobe.com/housing](http://www.bostonglobe.com/housing).*



Somerville, literally laying the groundwork for a project that could help change the way housing gets built around here.

At the same time, 25 miles away in a factory in Littleton, some of the 168 apartments that will soon rise from this foundation were

On a gray morning this month, a construction worker in a neon vest knelt with his tools in a concrete foundation dug into a hillside on the western edge of

being hammered together, piece by piece.

This 12-story building underway in Somerville’s Clarendon Hill public housing complex is one of the most ambitious experiments in factory-built — or “modular” — housing in New England. By building the apartments — including kitchens and bathrooms — offsite and then stacking them like Legos on this sliver of land, this project’s developers say they’ll deliver it 40 percent faster, for substantially less cost, than a similar-sized building they’re constructing the typi-

cal way in Boston.

In a business where time is money, that’s a huge difference, the sort of factor that just might jumpstart construction and begin to put a dent in the region’s massive housing shortage. Aaron Gornstein, a former top state housing official who now leads POAH Inc., the developer of Clarendon Hill, said this approach could be a game-changer. If it can be repeated elsewhere.

“And we don’t know that yet,” he said.

**CONSTRUCTION, Page A8**



### Bright back

**Sunday:** Some sun.  
High: 40-45. Low: 28-33.  
**Monday:** Clouds then sun.  
High: 37-42. Low: 26-31.  
Sunrise: 7:13 Sunset: 4:21  
Complete report, **B10**.  
Deaths, **C17-22**.

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### Sox trade Sale to Braves for prospect

After a spectacular start to his Boston career, he struggled with injuries for most of his seven years. **Sports, C1**.

**In 2023, New England faced its share of crises and challenges,** but we held on to a sense of community. A look back at the big headlines of the year. **B1**.

**Israeli forces clashed with Hamas militants across Gaza,** the Israeli military said, deepening their engagement in the decimated enclave. **A2**.

## Harvard student cracks code of history

‘Book detective’ unearths secrets of Louisa May Alcott and other famous women

By Malcolm Gay  
GLOBE STAFF

Louisa May Alcott was heartsick when she checked into the old Hotel Bellevue in Boston. It was April 1880, and Alcott was mourning the death of her sister May, who’d died unexpectedly a few months earlier.

Alcott was by then one of the country’s best-known writers, a household name following the triumph of her novel “Little Women.” But that April, as if summoning simpler times, she returned to playwriting, a literary form she’d embraced in childhood, writing dramas her sisters had performed. Newly bereft and holed up at the inn on Beacon Hill, Alcott began a dramatization of Jules Verne’s “Michael Strogoff,” a daring tale whose eponymous hero seeks to quell a Tartar rebellion on behalf of the czar.

Alcott’s unpublished version of the work, “For Russia and the Czar,” has been all but forgotten in the nearly 150 years since she composed it in her looping script, its obscurity no



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

doubt hastened by an early biographer who asserted that it was never completed.

But a few years ago, Harvard doctoral candidate Vanessa Braganza stumbled across the

**CODES, Page A6**

Vanessa Braganza, shown outside Harvard’s Widener Library, is focused on ciphers.