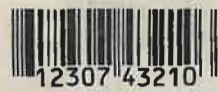


# The Weekend Gazette

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## Housing crunch

### Affordable and workforce units an acute need nationwide

**MIKE SUNNUCKS**  
APG National Enterprise Editor

Lack of affordable and workforce housing have been increasingly acute problems across the country — and across communities.

The U.S. has a shortage of 7.3 million affordable and available to renters with extremely low incomes — below the federal poverty line or 30% below median local incomes, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

A March report from the housing group found the crunch is hitting 27 million low-income households across the country.

“Extremely low-income renters are facing a staggering shortage of affordable and available homes,” said NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel in a statement on the report. “In the wake of the pandemic, federal housing investments are more critical than ever for sustaining our communities

More HOUSING | A3



ANTHONY WAHL/AWAHL@GAZETTEEXTRA.COM

Client Services Director Julie Smith introduces a pin impression toy to Shelby while inside the new sensory room at KANDU Industries on Thursday. Funded through a donation from SSM Health, the sensory room provides a calming space for individuals with sensory processing disorders or cognitive and learning disabilities, like autism or dementia, while also promoting exploration and learning.

# A calm place

## KANDU Industries, SSM Health partner on client sensory room

**KYLIE BALK-YAATENEN**  
kbalkyaatenen@gazetteextra.com

JANESVILLE—KANDU Industries Inc. unveiled its new therapeutic sensory room for clients on Thursday, full of giant bean bag chairs, colorful bubble tube lamps and projections of birds and constellations.

The project was coordinated by KANDU Program Director Julie Smith and the funds were

provided through the organization's partnership with SSM Health.

The sensory room is located at KANDU's corporate office building, 1741 Adel St. in Janesville. According to a release, the hope is to create a sense of calm and stimulate exploration, learning, and development for individuals with sensory processing disorders or cognitive and learning disabilities like

autism and dementia.

Smith said the room started to come together in late December but has been a labor of love for a couple of years.

She said the hope is to encourage growth and help clients gain independence through engaging with their environment. This space will also help them calm down and regulate

More ROOM | A2



## SPORTS

One of the Miami Marlins' top prospects will open the 2023 season with the Beloit Sky Carp.

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## LOCAL

Engineer at SHINE volunteers at Boys & Girls Club to help students with their math studies.

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**Left:** Janice watches bubbles rise in a corner light and water feature inside the new sensory room at KANDU Industries on Thursday.



**Above:** The use of a tactile stimulation board inside the new sensory room at KANDU Industries on Thursday.

PHOTOS BY ANTHONY WAHL/  
AWAHL@GAZETTEXTA.COM

**Room/**from A1

themselves, she said. "We had some clients here earlier that we encouraged to engage with the bubble tubes and different things like that," she said. "It can be as simple as getting them to make eye contact." Along with all the light tubes and bean bags, the room also has a board where clients can communicate how they feel. Different cards on a board list different emotions.

"This helps them express their thoughts and feelings in a more constructive way, rather than property destruction or hurting themselves," Smith said. "We can actually form a relationship and trust that we can help them on how to express themselves appropriately." Smith said the room will sometimes be used when there is a crisis or when a client is not having a good day and they need to reduce their stimulation.

It is also a way to

increase stimulation for some clients.

"It's sometimes part of someone's care plan and they are scheduled for time in the room but sometimes it's a tool to help them in the moment," she said.

Smith said the project was made possible through a partnership with SSM Health. Leadership Development Academy of Rock County also helped paint the room a soft-neutral color.

Smith said looking to

the future, she would like to have more spaces in the building for clients to decompress and hopes KANDU can get more stimulating toys for the room.

**SSM HEALTH CONNECTION**

Megan Timm is regional director for SSM Health which provides KANDU clients with education and hands-on activities surrounding nutrition, healthy living, cooking, and gardening.

Timm said SSM Health has had relationships with KANDU and other non-profits in the area for a couple of years. She said each year it tries to touch base with KANDU and their other partnerships to see what the current needs and future goals are with their clients, participants, and programs — and what can SSM Health do to support that.

Timm said the sensory room "was something tangible that we

could support and something that would make an actual impact on someone's day here at KANDU."

She said mental health is one of SSM Health's priorities and was one of the needs identified in a recent community health assessment.

SSM Health President Eric Thorton said the project aligned perfectly with what SSM Health stands for.

It is a "place where people can go to and

really be their best selves, a place that is safe, accessible and just a place that allows people an opportunity for respite when they need it," Thorton said.

He said that the idea and design of the room was entirely Smith's "brainchild" and SSM Health just provided the funds to make it possible.

"What a wonderful job she did; we are just proud to be able to be a part of it," Thorton said.

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**APG**  
ADAMS PUBLISHING GROUP  
Mark Lewis,  
Regional President,  
Southern Wisconsin  
mlewis@adamspg.com

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**Karyn Saemann, Managing Editor**  
608-755-8294  
ksaemann@gazettextra.com

**Tim Seeman, News Editor**  
608-755-8250  
tseeman@gazettextra.com

**Steve Lauber, Ad Director**  
608-755-9423  
slauber@gazettextra.com

**TO SUBSCRIBE**  
800-362-6712  
circulation@gazettextra.com

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