FAMILY STORIES

2022

Dear Friends,

Our Jill's House families mean so much to us, and we are honored to be a part of their story. As a faithful partner with Jill's House, you are part of their story, too! We wanted to share the stories of some Jill's House families as a way of saying "Thank You!". Jill's House wouldn't be what it is today without your compassion and generosity.

We are thankful you have chosen to partner with us as we walk alongside families raising kids with intellectual disabilities. We pray that you are blessed as you read these special family stories.

With deep gratitude,

Joel A. Dillon
President & CEO

THE AMICONE FAMILY

Our son Dominic, Dom, is 13 years old. Like other teenagers, he is beginning to grow some facial hair, and he enjoys holding a phone so he can listen to music. We help him show off his personality through funky haircuts, fun socks, and cool outfits. Dom is non-verbal so he won't respond, but we know that as he gets older, he appreciates being able to fit in more with his peers.

When I was pregnant, there was a lot of uncertainty surrounding how Dom was developing. We were sent for genetic testing, and later connected with a special team of doctors. Our geneticist shared that Dom had Mosaic Trisomy 6, which is a rare chromosomal disorder, and microcephaly which meant that his head was developing smaller.

From that point on, we had an ultrasound every week. We continued to hear a strong heartbeat and see his movement. He was alive, but the doctors couldn't explain his progress. **We weren't very religious at the time and we had always thought science could explain anything. But since science couldn't explain our child we began to believe that there must be a God. From that moment, we decided to pray without ceasing for our unborn child!**

When Dom was born, we were so excited! He was perfect, small, and adorable.

When Dom was 9 months old, he couldn't sit up or roll over and those delays continued to develop as he grew in age. Medical resources are limited for parents of children with special needs, so as he grew, we saw many different doctors. Many years later, we feel that he is now receiving better care, his medications are managed, and he can be the 13-year-old he is meant to be. And that is what Jill's House does for him! While Dom is at camp, he can be the 13-year-old he is meant to be.

Before Jill's House camp started in Nashville, we par ticipated in several family meetings. We remember those meetings so well! We were excited, but each child has different needs and not all programs are suitable for all kids with a variety of special needs. We worried about him staying overnight because it would be his first time out of his element, and we didn't know how he would respond to this new experience.

Finally, his first camp weekend arrived and we were a wreck. We showed up and they greeted us on our first day with a binder including everything necessary for his support and care for the weekend. When the weekend was over the camp staff returned all his belongings to us labeled and in order. We were put at ease, and we knew this was the right place for him.

Jill's House has helped Dom develop his life-skills. We know that through Dom's success at camp he is working toward living a somewhat independent life as he grows older. It is humbling that Jill's House is so willing to love and welcome our family.

God is leading and growing us all through Dom! We are witnessing God's image here on earth in our son! Dom has pure joy and loves everyone around him, and we also know that others around him are interested in the joy that Dom has. **Since Dom has been attending Jill's House Weekend Adventure camp, we have gained confidence as a family. We feel so blessed by our community and the support we have for one another! We feel this is exactly where God wants us to be.**

THE AWLAKI FAMILY

We have 3 beautiful daughters, and Muna is our middle child. Muna was around 21 months old when I started noticing that she couldn't make eye contact and wasn't responding to her name. We took her to see her doctor, but he didn't take our concerns seriously. I insisted that something was not right, and we were referred to a neurologist at Washington Hospital. We wanted answers right away but were forced to wait for some time to get an appointment. When we finally saw the doctor, he watched her walk around and play with toys, but he wanted to wait until she was 3 years old to fully evaluate and diagnose her. However, he did say that he thought Muna might have autism.

Autism? We didn't even know what it was!

The doctor recommended books for us to read, and I read all of them! In just about every book I was reading, I could see Muna. I began to process what she was going to face for the rest of her life.

Around this time, we were living in Alexandria, Virginia. Muna was receiving in-home speech therapy and occupational therapy, but we really wanted her to be a part of school and a program for children with autism. We heard that Fairfax County offered a program for children with autism, so we decided to move to Fairfax County and placed her in school and an applied behavior analysis (ABA) program. Muna has been in school since she was almost 3 years old. She is now almost 22 years old and will graduate this year!

Muna is a wonderful girl, but between the ages of 7-9 years old she became very aggressive especially with her older sister. She was also not sleeping at night. She would wake up at night, turn on all the lights and would be extremely active. It was such a difficult time for our family! While at school she was not learning skills to communicate, and we didn't notice any changes in her behavior. I became a de facto ABA provider for Muna to help her learn skills while at home, but I had to fight very hard for Muna at school. I have always worked so hard for her!

Then I heard about Jill's House! Jill's House hadn't opened yet, but I read a flyer describing Jill's House and how they would serve kids with intellectual disabilities. This was going to be place where Muna could go. I was so happy!

When Muna turned 18 years old, we were sad because she was about to age out of the Weekend Program at Jill's House. I was worried that we wouldn't be able to find anything for her, but my husband kept reassuring me that we would find something. Then we received an email from Jill's House explaining that the Weeknight Program was going to be extended in partnership with Muna's school, and she could continue through 21 years old. We were so happy!! It was a relief for us, but this news was wonderful for her. **She loves Jill's House so much! Everything there is covered in love, and her reaction to hearing anyone say Jill's House is complete joy!**

Muna always has the biggest smile. She loves to help in the kitchen making waffles, and she loves walking in our neighborhood. Muna makes us smile and laugh more than anyone. We have so much love for her! I believe that Muna has shown our family how to care and love for one another. She is such a blessing.

THE DAGGETT FAMILY

Our family lives in Washington DC and we have 3 children. Henry is our middle child and just turned 11 years old. We do all the things that families do. Our older son is in middle school and plays travel baseball. Our daughter, the youngest, is our princess and does all the princess things. Henry is in the middle and just loves his brother and sister so much! He wants to be around them all the time. I don't know what it's like to be a sibling of a child with special needs, but both our children do a great job trying to include Henry and being enthusiastic about the games he invents. Henry is just the happiest kid on the planet!

We knew we were facing something unique when we were at Henry's 9-month well-baby appointment. When you have multiple children, you see how one is progressing differently than the other. We realized then that he wasn't hitting the benchmarks for his age. Henry has Christianson Syndrome which is a super rare X-linked chromosomal mutation. There are only about 50 families in the United States with children who have been diagnosed. We are far beyond being sad about the life we had envisioned for him. **We just want him to be happy and successful in the world, which is what we want for all our kids!**

We don't have family around that can help us, and our developmental pediatrician suggested we consider applying to Jill's House because we don't have a support system or respite. **Henry needs constant supervision, and we have our other two children, so finding out about Jill's House was a real blessing.** For Henry to be able to go to Jill's House, where he's in a safe and secure environment, where people care about him, and where he can play and have a really good time, is just phenomenal! While he's at Jill's House Henry gets to do fun things that aren't available at our house.

While Henry is at Jill's House, it also gives us an opportunity to spend time with our other kids and focus on them. Regularly developing families can make decisions on a whim to go for a hike, go to the movie theater, or bowling. Those kinds of activities are hard for us, so when Henry is at Jill's House, we can do things with our other kids who always see our attention on Henry.

When parents are dropping kids off at Jill's House with bags of medications and instructions, we realize how much we handle each day. We don't think about it daily, but when we must describe to someone all the things that are particular about Henry, it reminds us that there is a lot to handle every day. To have a place where he can go, be safe and have fun, is a treasure!

Our family has participated in some of Jill's House sponsored activities. We attended an in-person counseling group for parents a while back, and it was so good to sit and be encouraged. It is hard to hear the journey that some have taken but it is also encouraging to know that you're not alone. Our older son has participated in sibling in-person and virtual events, and our daughter will participate when she is a little older. We are just so happy and blessed to have Jill's House.

For the families that use Jill's House, it is one of the most important things we have in our lives because of the support it provides us. We are just so grateful!

THE HILL FAMILY

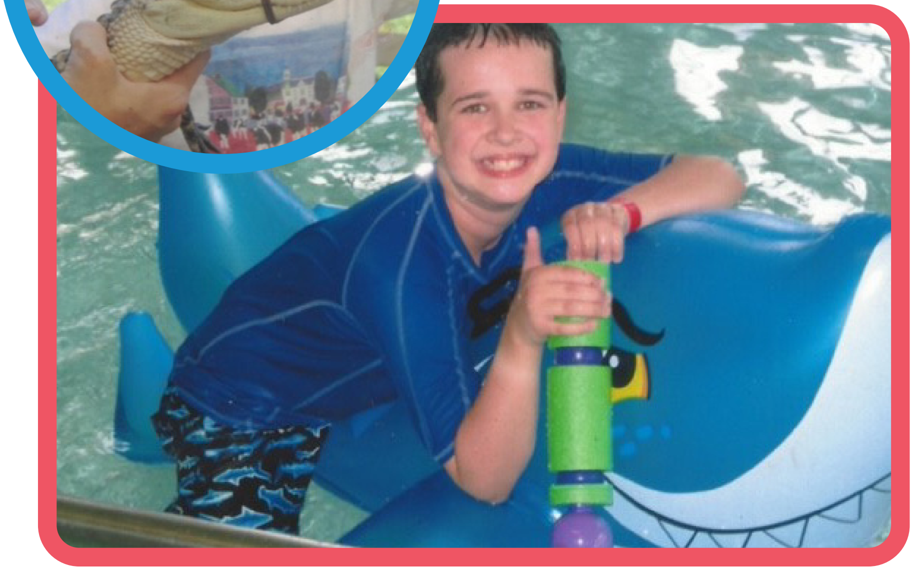
Ryan is 22 years old, and has transitioned out of school. Jill's House been part of our family since he was about 10 years old. Wow, that is 12 years! Ryan has grown up so much in those years.

I first heard about Jill's House at a monthly meeting for Parents of Autistic Children of Northern Virginia (POAC-NoVA). At that time, we would meet as a group every month and different speakers would join us to teach on different topics. **A woman from Jill's House came to speak to us and shared about this new respite facility opening. Honestly, respite sounded wonderful, but seemed too good to be true!**

I remember those years when Ryan was younger. He was much more of a challenge! Ryan was initially given a diagnosis around 3 years old and around that time we began early interventions. He was quite a challenge in those early years. He had issues with elopement, aggression, and behavior issues.

As he grew older, he became a very picky eater, he was resistant to changes in his schedule, and transitioning from a preferred activity to a non-preferred activity was very hard. We had been receiving educational services, and we enrolled Ryan in adaptive Tae Kwon Do and Boy Scouts for kids with special needs, but we continued to have so many challenges with him.

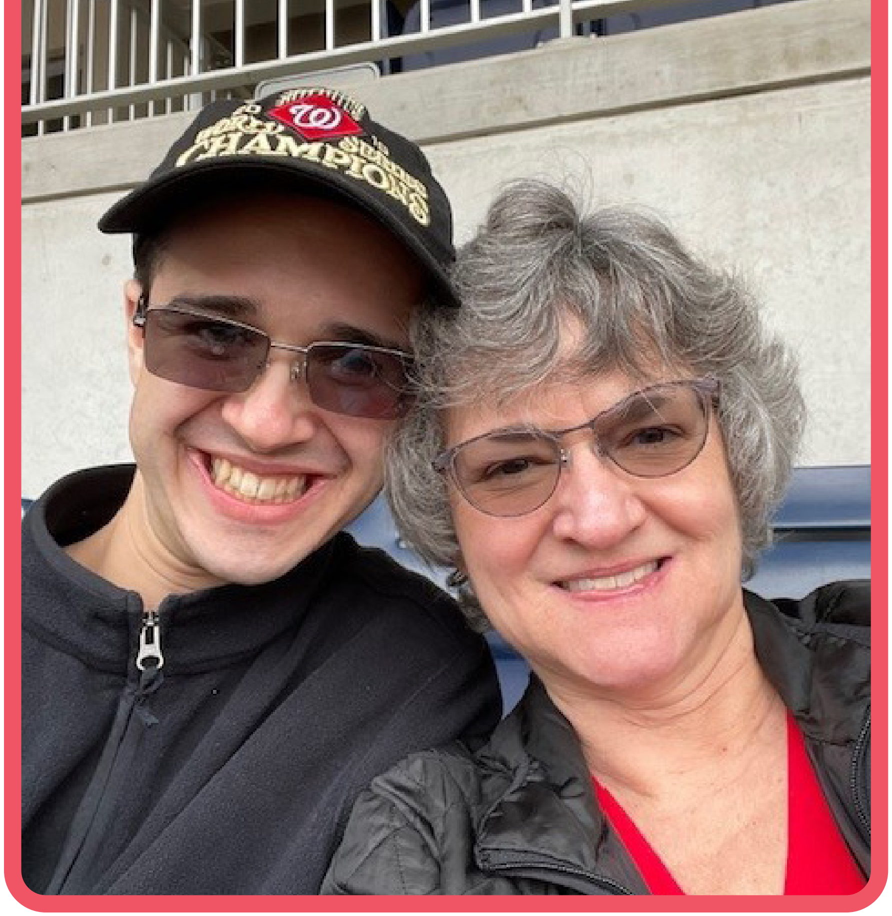
After hearing about Jill's House, we decided to process our paperwork, but it was still so hard to imagine leaving him for a weekend. Our family has always lived so far away, and we had never considered leaving Ryan overnight with a friend or babysitter.



The staff at Jill's House were so kind, reassuring, professional, and responsive. I cannot over emphasize enough how wonderful it was for us to have Jill's House at that time! When it was time for Ryan to stay overnight, we were comfortable leaving him and knew that he was going to be loved and cared for. We were convinced that Ryan would be safe.

Ryan loved going to Jill's House from the start! I still remember that first time he stayed there. At the end of Ryan's stay we were given a photo of Ryan playing in the pool. He had this enormous smile on his face, and he looked so happy!

We have so much faith in Jill's House!



Ryan has been a student with the Fairfax County Davis Career Center and has had multiple job placements to build his vocational skills. Some of his previous placements have been data entry, filing, and mail delivery, and he has been placed at Jill's House since September 2021 as Front Desk Receptionist. He loves working at Jill's House!

Ryan aged out of the school system in June. We are excited about the next step for him, though we are all a little nervous about some of the unknowns. **We have been so grateful for Jill's House, the young man they have helped our son become, and for everything the staff and volunteers have done for our family.**

THE
HUEBNER FAMILY

Jill's House has been a real gift for our daughter Claire, especially over the last year. During the pandemic, there have been so little opportunities that are just for Claire, but Jill's House gives her the opportunity to do something that is just for her.

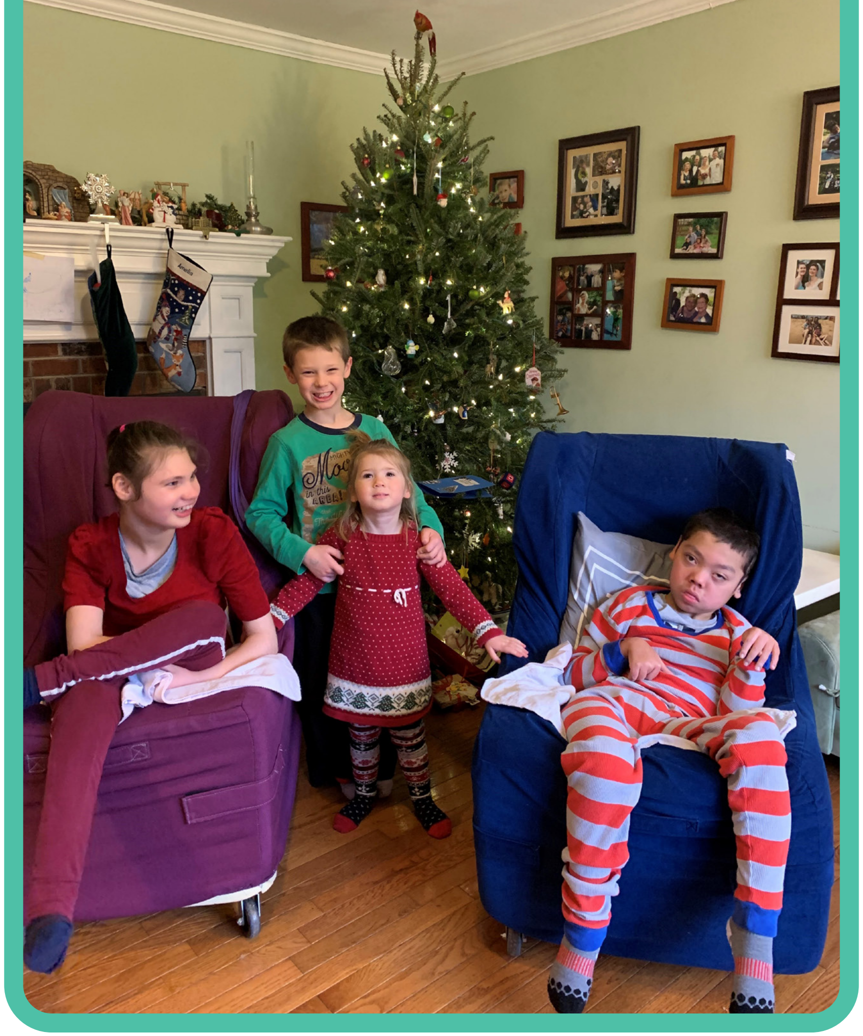
Claire is our first child. She has a brain injury that occurred during delivery, so she has Cerebal Palsy, a visual impairment, developmental delays, a seizure disorder, and is in a wheelchair. We knew from the moment she was born that things were going to be very difficult. We learned about Jill's House when she was a year old and waited for so long for her to be old enough!

Claire loves the music room at Jill's House and the swing set out back. It's a special place—there are not a lot of places in the world made for kids like Claire and Ryan. Ryan is my friend's child. She and I met when Claire was 8 months old, and he was just over 2 months old. Ryan's mom died in 2017 and we have been raising him ever since. Ryan has a rare genetic disorder and has Cerebral Palsy, a seizure disorder, and is in a wheelchair like Claire. He has very low muscle tone —while Claire can bear weight and sit on her own, Ryan is like picking up a 60-pound newborn, supporting his head and everything. He is more medically involved with more respiratory issues than Claire has. When my friend passed away, my husband and I talked about how we could help. We knew how to care for children with special needs and had just done a home renovation with an accessible bedroom and bathroom for Claire, so we had an open room at the perfect time. We brought Ryan home with us in June 2017.

Claire has participated in both the school night program as well as the weekend program at Jill's House. Because we no longer have a caregiver for her, and there are so few opportunities like the one that Jill's House gives us, that time at Jill's House is all the more appreciated and important.

On top of the respite Jill's House provides, we have been able to go on a Jill's House family retreat, which was just awesome. The whole weekend was designed for families like ours and kids like ours. I've also attended a few of the parent support groups, and our son has participated in the Typical Sibling nights. He was super excited about that!

Asking for help is something my husband and I don't like to do—it's hard for us. Now we have no choice but to shift our usual way of doing things and not only accept help but ask for it. That is still a challenge but is important. Having Claire at Jill's House has certainly fallen into that category. **The fact that she has a place that is literally built for her, with some of the few people who are qualified to care for her needs, puts our mind at ease as we think about the fact that she is cared for and safe.**



Jill's House is the one place besides school that she can be apart from me, and that change of scenery is very important for her. Thank you for this gift you have given to our whole family!

THE KNOWLTON FAMILY

To describe Margot in one word it would be, tenacious! She is a great friend, and a strong advocate for kids with special needs. She is sensitive to the needs of others and has such a great spirit!

Margot considers herself to be an average 15-year old high schooler and she has a good group of friends. She has an older brother who is in college, and a 4-year-old brother we adopted after fostering him when he was a baby. We know Margot sometimes feels left out, being a girl with special needs in the middle of her brothers, but she truly loves her family.

Margot was crowned Miss Illinois Amazing Junior Teen and she went to Nationals in July. This is an advocacy event that empowers young women with special needs to speak up for themselves, to gain confidence, and to inspire others. Margot wants to be a writer when she grows up and has been doing a lot of writing. She also volunteers, does charity events, and advocacy work for kids with disabilities. We are so proud of her!

Margot has a great friend group of kids who have special needs and some who do not. Margot would say that she and her friend group are 'Really cool!'. They do typical teenage things like go to the movie theater, go to McDonald's, or hang out at each other's home. Though she has a great time with her friends and her family, we also know that she needs something special and just for her.

Margot's special place is Jill's House Windy City Camp!

We were so happy to learn about Jill's House around 4 years ago. A friend of ours shared that she was working at the Windy City Camp. I had no idea this camp existed! We connected with the camp staff and immediately enrolled her.

Now that Margot has been going to camp for several years, she has developed some favorite things about camp. For starters, Margot considers herself a foodie and says the food is really good! She also loves having a camp buddy. But hands down, her most favorite thing about camp is the talent show. Margot will carefully prepare for the talent show. She plans what she will do and what props she will bring. She will sometimes dance or sing along to a favorite song.

Camp has been so great for Margot! She knows a few of the girls who attend camp regularly, and she loves being able to spend time with other kids who have different special needs than herself. In our family with an older brother and a younger brother, camp is Margot's special place where she gets her special attention. **While Margot is at camp, we spend one on one time with our other kids. We are relaxed because we know that Margot is cared for. The nurses really show love and care for Margot, and that means so much to us.** When we pick up Margot from camp, she chatters about her camp experiences for the first few minutes of the 90-minute car ride home. She will sing her favorite camp song, "Father's House" and share about the talent show. But camp is also exhausting! It never takes long before she is fast asleep.

We are so grateful for Jill's House and the Windy City Camp and providing Margot a place to be herself and feel special.

THE MA FAMILY

Caroline is in 2nd grade and she works so hard! **When she is at Jill's House, it's like a nice slice of life that is outside the normal daily life and rules. Caroline loves going to Jill's House!** She has been going for a little over 1 year. If we tell her on Monday that she's going on Friday, she will ask us every day, "Is today the day?"

Caroline has a rare genetic disorder. The technical name of her disorder is 2q23.1 microdeletion syndrome, which affects all areas of function, her speech, fine motor, gross motor, attention, memory, and processing. But this disorder is so rare that the prognosis is also unknown. At the point when she was diagnosed, there were only 500 cases worldwide and many of these kids have much different symptoms than Caroline. Many kids can't walk or talk, but with Caroline, she doesn't have a problem communicating. In fact, her teachers would say she has a gift of "self-advocating". But we have had years and years of therapy to get her to this point!

Caroline also has a secondary diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Most people think that all kids with autism get overstimulated, but Caroline is the opposite. She likes things loud!! As a baby her favorite song was the theme song to West Wing, which is loud with all the brass. She wants everything loud, and colorful. She would tell you her favorite color is rainbow! And she wants her food spicy. When we first started giving Caroline baby food, she wasn't interested in eating it. We tasted her food and realized that it was bland, so we would season it with some salt and pepper. It was then that we realized that she liked her food spicy! We have a video of Caroline when she was just 2 years old drinking hot sauce directly out of the bottle! She loves hot sauce so much that we send her to Jill's House with her own bottle of Sriracha. The food log would come back from her weekend at Jill's House, with the exact measurements that she was given of the Sriracha, and it just makes us laugh. As a child, she would watch us put hot sauce on our food. But we also think her love of hot sauce has to do with her condition, where her senses are somewhat muted, so that bold taste of hot sauce would be more stimulating. Caroline needs a lot of input to be happy. When she's at Jill's House she loves the sensory and music rooms because she can be loud!

She also loves Chapel when she is at Jill's House. She just loves it! Chapel allows Caroline to explore religion in a good and appropriate way. James is Caroline's younger brother and has been tagging along to therapy appointments ever since he was a baby. He is growing up with all the attention on her because she has so many needs. **When Caroline isn't home, James is an only child. So, we take him to Olive Garden because that is his favorite restaurant. He gets all of Mommy and Daddy's attention. When he's all by himself he doesn't have to feel self-conscience about what he can do. It is just another way Jill's House is a blessing to our family.**

We are just so grateful for Jill's House. Caroline must work so hard, and she doesn't even understand why! Having time at Jill's House is healthy and good for her!

THE SORELL FAMILY

Our family is originally from Kansas, but the Army moved us to the greater Washington DC area almost 11 years ago. The military has allowed us to stabilize in DC because of our son Jacob. With all the medical and academic services available we passionately believe God sovereignly led us here!

Jacob is a sweet, joyful nine-year-old little boy who is nonverbal and non-ambulatory.

Our family initially heard about Jill's House around the time Jacob was going into kindergarten. The first time we left Jacob at the Jill's House, I was quite anxious to leave him because we had never left him overnight with anyone before. As an overprotective mom, I felt guilty and overly responsible wondering how other people would understand Jacob's nonverbal cues or methods of communication. **Now every time he goes to Jill's House, Jacob's body language and huge smiles show us he is so happy! Jacob proudly uses his gait trainer to walk inside the entrance while holding his head up grinning ear to ear like he owns the place!**

When you have a child with special needs, a caretaker or family member remains on high alert during the day or night. Circumstances keep your adrenaline up as thoughts preoccupy your mind constantly such as, "Will my child have a seizure?" "Will my child fall out of bed?" "Will they need a diaper change?" The first night Jacob is at Jill's House is always the hardest to fall sleep as we contemplate if we will get an emergency call to come get him. But when we do not hear the phone ring, our minds and bodies are finally able to relax... the second night we usually fall into a deeper sleep.

We are so grateful for Jacob. His heart is so pure! When we are playing worship music at home, often he will lift up his hands or tap on our chest as a gesture that he wants us to lift our hands in worship too!! Although he is intellectually a 4–10-month-old and his body is disabled, he is such a beautiful representation of purity. Jacob cannot physically feel pain or cry. In a way, all these attributes combined remind us of what it will be like in heaven when there will be no pain, no crying, just pure JOY! Due to Jacob's limited intellectual ability, it makes us think of the verse where it says, 'the pure in heart shall see GOD' (Matthew 5:8).

This winter, we were able to enjoy a marriage retreat with a few Jill's House couples. What a refreshing blessing. In addition to periodic retreats, having a small women's Bible study on zoom has been a huge source of strength and encouragement especially during the pandemic when most of us were isolated at home not even able to go into a church building with our children.

We are so grateful for the way the Jill's House not only cares for our special needs kids, but also abundantly blesses and nurtures the whole family throughout our journey.

THE WINFIELD FAMILY

We first heard about Jill's House Weekend Adventures Camp in 2017 when our daughter Kate, was 8 years old. Kate is now 13 years old, and she still enjoys attending camp!

We did not know Kate was going to have Down syndrome when she was born. I was excited about having a second child and we decided not to undergo any testing, so when she was born, that is when we found out. She was born 3 weeks early and was also born with Duodenal Atresia, which means the first part of her small intestines was blocked. She immediately had surgery and wasn't discharged for about 3 weeks.

When Kate was about 6 weeks old, we began early intervention. There was one other family attending with us, and our families have been close ever since. Those first weeks were such a blur, but we are so grateful for the friendships that began during that time.

Kate attends school in a general classroom and has a close group of friends. She loves her family and loves when we are together, but she's a typical 13 year old and enjoys her own space, too. She

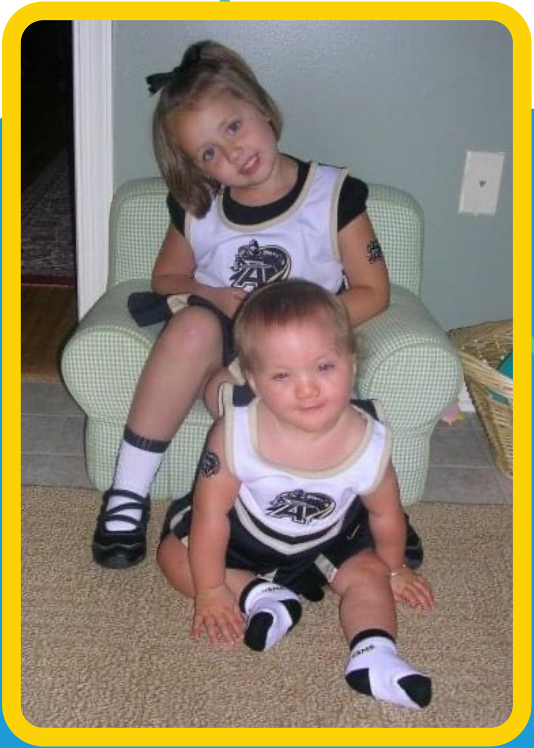
enjoys dancing, singing, and being the center of attention. When Kate is in the room there is always music and dancing and noise. She is full of life!

Kate and her brother are close. I think her brother enjoys the quiet when Kate is at camp, but we all look forward to our family time.

Our family is very active! Kate participates in gymnastics and swimming through Special Olympics Washington, and she is on the local cheerleading team. She also plays soccer and is part of drama at her school. Her older brother also plays soccer so together as a family we are always moving. We enjoy spending a lot of time outside together, too. When we aren't running to our kids' activities, we are in the front yard, playing soccer, jumping on the trampoline, or playing baseball. We are always playing together.

When Kate is away at camp, we can relax knowing that she is safe and having a great time. She loves participating in the talent show, and roasting marshmallows. While she is having a blast at camp, our son has an opportunity to be the center of our attention at home. We will watch his soccer games, or just ask him what he wants to do with us. Enjoying a date night and being together is also really nice!

We are so grateful for Jill's House and for helping our daughter experience all that camp has to offer. It's unique for kids like Kate to be able to attend an overnight camp, and because of Jill's House, she can!



THE ALLARD FAMILY

As a military family we have moved a lot, but we have been able to call Virginia our home since 2015. This past spring my husband retired from the Army, which means we could live wherever we want. But Northern Virginia has so many great resources, schools, and of course Jill's House. There's no reason we would leave!

We have 2 daughters, and my mother lives with us as well. Our oldest has gone off to college which means Charleigh, our 15-year-old daughter is the center of all our attention. Charleigh is a happy, healthy girl who loves her iPhone, taking rides in the van to school, playing outside, and eating good food.

Before moving to Virginia, we lived in Oklahoma, which is where Charleigh was born, New York, and Texas. Charleigh was much younger when received the first diagnosis of Severe ASD, and we received an official genetic diagnosis when she was 10 years old. Charleigh has CDK13 which is an incredibly rare genetic disorder, with only 231 known cases worldwide.

When she was younger, we actively pursued different therapies and doctors. We researched genetic components of her diagnosis to provide the best care for her, and to help her achieve her milestones. Then when we moved to Virginia, a lot of opportunities opened for us. The resources are incredible! We had never really considered the scope of support that is available for us here in Virginia.

Shortly after arriving in Virginia, Charleigh's developmental pediatrician asked if we had heard about Jill's House, which of course we hadn't. Hearing about Jill's House was a com

plete blessing!! We were so focused on providing the best care for Charleigh, that the idea of respite had never entered our minds.

Charleigh first started going to Jill's House when she was 8 ½ years old. Her first visit was a weekend stay and she loved it! Our whole family loved it. She has been going to Jill's House for almost 7 years now, so we have all grown to really appreciate and value those weekends.

Jill's House is set up to meet all Charleigh's needs. She enjoys different activities and transitioning quickly between those activities, and the staff are so attentive, kind, and patient with her. Charleigh is provided a mini vacation with play on the moon bounce, swimming in the pool, and fun outside on the playground. While Charleigh is at Jill's House we enjoy a slower pace at home. We eat dinners while watching movies and enjoy quiet mornings.

Charleigh attends a private day placement year-round school. Her school is so great, and best suited for her and her needs. Another benefit is that Jill's House partners with her school and provides weeknight stays for students. Jill's House staff pick up the students from the school, the students spend the night at Jill's House, and then staff return the students to school the next morning. So, during the school year, Charleigh also gets to stay at Jill's House one night a week.

Jill's House has been the one constant in our lives for so many years. In fact, Charleigh has been going to Jill's House for so long and she knows exactly where her suitcase is, that whenever she's angry with us or simply wants to go, she will grab her suitcase and drop it in front us as if to say she wants to go. Now! We love how much SHE loves going to Jill's House.

Charleigh is safe and happy at Jill's House, and we can relax knowing that she is receiving such wonderful care!

THE KING FAMILY

From the moment my son, Simon, was born, I felt like God had been preparing my family for Jill's House.

Peter and I are longtime attendees of McLean Bible Church and participated in fundraising events to build Jill's House. This was before we had children. We attended fundraising banquets and Peter participated in a marathon to raise funds for Jill's House. I was pregnant with our first child at that time, and we were excited about Jill's House coming to the community. While we were supporting Jill's House financially, we did not know God was preparing us to experience Jill's House firsthand!

Fast forward several years, and the organization we grew to love and support, is now a respite for our own family and a safe haven for our son, Simon.

When I was pregnant with Simon, the pregnancy progressed as expected, however, toward the end, the pregnancy changed quickly. Simon appeared to be in distress, and as a result of an emergency C-section, was born 5 ½ weeks early. Shortly after delivery, we were shocked when the doctor told us Simon had physical features consistent with Down Syndrome. The room became still and quiet. The doctor peeked over the curtain at me and I said, "He is my son, and I will love him forever!" I knew in that moment God had given him to me, to us, to our family; we trusted in the promise that God works all things together for His good. A few days following Simon's delivery, I read in the birth file, "Mother has accepted child."

When Simon was born, he had significant respiratory issues and remained in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for 5 weeks. When we finally brought him home, we adjusted to life with our fourth child. In addition to the typical needs of an infant, we initially focused on managing Simon's medical needs: numerous

specialist appointments, medications, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Over time, as his medical needs stabilized, and he developed physically and cognitively, it became apparent that he required constant supervision to keep him safe. The amount of supervision Simon required exhausted Peter and I and left us with little energy for each other, or for our other 5 children, ages 3-12.

Simon is now 7 years old and is extremely active. He enjoys playing outside, swimming, going to the beach, and building with Legos. In addition, he plays Challenger Baseball, which is for children with differing abilities, and participates on the neighborhood swim team. This fall he is trying football, too. Regular physical activity is essential for Simon!

We enrolled Simon at Jill's House when he turned 6, and this past Spring, he had his first day camp and overnight experience. The timing was perfect; we were physically exhausted from his high level of activity, coupled with mental exhaustion due to a constant fear of elopement. We were discouraged by our limited options for respite.

During Simon's first overnight at Jill's House, we took our other children to a Japanese steakhouse for dinner. Since Simon's initial camp and overnight stay, he has participated in school weeknights stays, summer camp, and another weekend stay at Jill's House. **Jill's House has revolutionized our life! When Simon is at Jill's House, we know he has a blast participating in activities he loves, and we can spend more focused time with each other, and our other children.**

I joined the Jill's House Moms Community Bible Study, and my husband participates in the Jill's House Dads gatherings. Other Jill's House moms have been an encouragement to me. On the weekend retreat, one insightful mom shared that we live our life forward and understand it backwards. Looking back on our life with Simon, I can see how God has guided us through each and every day. God has never let go of our family.

Because of Jill's House, our church, and local community, we have established relationships that love and support our family. We are eternally grateful to be part of the Jill's House family.