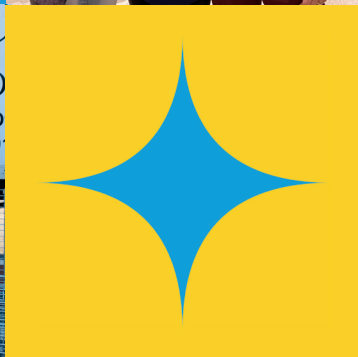


JILL'S HOUSE

# *Family Stories*



20  
23



## Dear Friends,

At Jill's House, we are blessed with the opportunity to provide rest, renewal, and relationships for children with intellectual disabilities and their families. Since 2010, we have been unwavering in our commitment to this mission, and it remains a true honor to serve Jill's House families every day.

As a partner in this work, you are also a part of each family's story. We are grateful for your investment in their lives. That investment allows us to provide them with a level of care they can't get anywhere else. Without you, none of this would be possible, and we are humbled by your commitment to the families we currently serve and—perhaps more importantly—your commitment to the families we will grow to serve.

We hope that by sharing some of their stories with you, you will be inspired and uplifted. Thank you for choosing to walk alongside us in this journey, and for allowing us to make a meaningful difference in the lives of so many families across all our locations.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel".

Joel A. Dillon  
President & CEO

# The WINIECKI FAMILY

**“WHAT WE REALLY WANT FOR WENDY ARE MEANINGFUL DAYS, AND THAT’S WHAT JILL’S HOUSE DOES FOR HER.”**

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Our daughter Wendy has such a funny sense of humor! She is entertaining, and very interesting, but she is hard to get to know because she is nonverbal. Well, she’s not completely nonverbal. She does say one word, “Mom”. Wendy also knows about 6-10 words in sign language. Of the few words that Wendy knows, she will sign “dog” when she sees a dog. Well, one day we were sitting together, and we asked Wendy, “Who is this?” as we pointed to her mom. Wendy said “Mom”. Then we asked Wendy, “Who is this?” as we pointed to me, her dad. Wendy smiled at me and since she is unable to say the word Dad, she signed a word. The word



she signed was “dog”. Wendy laughed and laughed at her joke.

Since Wendy is nonverbal it is hard to see what is going on unless you pay attention, which is why we love Jill’s House so much! Wendy’s Child Care Specialists are always paying attention to her. **Wendy would probably say her most favorite thing about Jill’s House is that she gets her own personal friend for the weekend; a friend who plays with her, goes to the different rooms with her, spends time with her. It’s a special time for Wendy!**

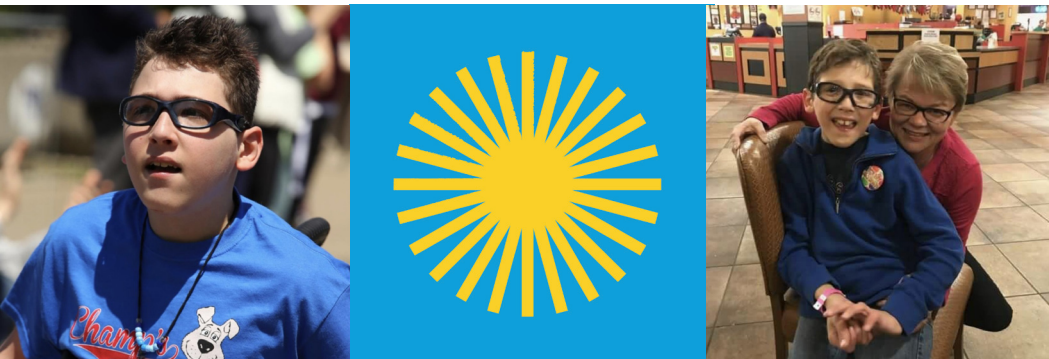
When it is a Jill’s House weekend, we have learned to pack her suitcase while Wendy is at school. We pick her up from school and drive directly to Jill’s House. It might take us 2-3 hours to get there on a Friday afternoon, but she is so happy to learn that it’s a “Jill’s Weekend” she will sing the entire way. Even though we can’t make out the words she is singing, we know it is a very joyful tune. **On Sunday when we pick her up, she is happy to see us, but there is no comparison to the joy she shows on Friday when we are dropping her off.**

While Wendy is at Jill’s House, we enjoy doing activities with our 16-year-old daughter. We may choose to travel out of town, stay home and watch a movie at night, or simply sleep in. Our whole family is very active, and we are always together, but we also know that our activities can get boring for Wendy. Jill’s House is a break in our routine and very exciting for her!

Wendy has an iPad with a communication app called Proloquo2go. The app came with basic buttons for Wendy to communicate with us, and we have logged in to customize buttons for family members, school, and vacations. We have a whole page dedicated to Jill’s House! In 2020 we went on a Jill’s House Family Retreat. We all had a great time! The Jill’s House shuttle bus was there, and since Wendy loves buses, we would often visit the bus throughout the weekend. I took a picture of the logo on the bus, and that is the picture we use on her iPad button for Jill’s House.

**What we really want for Wendy are meaningful days, and that’s what Jill’s House does for her. We know that Jill’s House focuses on giving the kids like Wendy meaningful days.**

# The ANDERSON-PAGE FAMILY



## **"WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW IS THAT HE IS THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO ME."**

Born on the 25th of December 2007, Steven was a Christmas baby. He was placed with us when he was merely 6 months old. He was such a tiny baby—weighing only 6 lbs. when he arrived. Back then, I never could have imagined how radically he would change my life. **He may not be my biological child, but I think of him as a precious gift.**

At 9 months old, Steven was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, and we were able to get him into early intervention services. He went on to see different therapists and doctors. Over these last 2 years, he has had to undergo several surgeries. He has had bilateral hip surgery on both hips, developed contractures, has had to have surgery on one leg, and is about to have his other leg operated on this summer. He can no longer

use a walker and is now primarily bound to a wheelchair. It has been hard, but he is a beautiful child and is taking on these challenges as well as he can.

I learned about Jill's House many years ago through a friend on Steven's T-ball team. I don't know why it took me so long to inquire about it, but I'm so glad I finally did. I guess it's because we as parents and guardians are so hesitant to send our special needs child into the care of someone else. We worry about our children and whether they will be all right or not. **However, after observing Steven's first weekend at the Rocky Top Weekend Adventures Camp, I wish I had enrolled him earlier!**

Steven has now participated in the camp twice. As he was getting ready to go this last time, I heard him repeat to himself, "Make new friends." As we arrived at the camp's entrance, he rolled his window down and called out to his friends. It's obvious that he loves the camp very much. When I picked him up at the end of the weekend, he went on and on about ziplining, water activities, and horseback riding. Yes, Steven went horseback riding! Who could have thought?

What I love the most about Jill's House is that Steven can participate in various activities, and he is not made to feel limited in his ability. So many people are available to help each child experience all the activities, so if it was going to take 4 people to help Steven enjoy horseback riding, then that's what they were going to do! One camp counselor told me, "Although Steven might forget about me, I will never forget about him." In all honesty, I doubt Steven will ever forget how special the camp made him feel.

**I suppose Steven would say that his favorite thing about camp is being able to see his friends. After all, being a special needs child can be very isolating; you can't just run down the street and play with your friends. However, while at the camp, Steven gets to spend the entire weekend with his friends.**

Today, society has become more inclusive of kids and even adults with special needs by offering spaces for them to engage in a variety of activities; however, there is still a long way to go. Jill's House does a beautiful job of helping these kids. I am so grateful for Jill's House!





## The **BOOSE FAMILY**

**"IF I SAY THAT I  
BELIEVE, THEN I  
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IT, EVERY STEP OF  
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HAS BEEN SO  
FAITHFUL TO US!"**

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We are not originally from Northern Virginia; we moved here when our boys were quite young and my husband was working outside the country. Brady was diagnosed with autism before we moved when he was two years old. When we arrived in Virginia, I quickly found a church and community, and eventually began to call Virginia our home.

Shortly after the move, our marriage began to unravel,

and I ended up as a single parent. Our boys were just three and a half and seven years old. I remember sitting in my pastor's office during that time, and I was in tears. I felt as if nothing was working out as it should. I didn't know why God was asking me to make this journey. **My pastor said, "Brenda, you must step in and live the faith that you believe in." Since then, those words have stayed with me this whole journey. If I say that I believe, then I must step into it, every step of the way. God has been so faithful to us!**

**Trying to navigate life with autism, working through a broken marriage, and seeing how much my kids missed their dad was hard. Only through the grace of God was I able to get through that season!**

I found out about Jill's House through Access Ministry at McLean Bible Church. Brady's first overnight stay was in 2011 when he was 11 years old. **Those first visits were a little stressful; he was nervous about when I would return to pick him up. However, those weekends provided moments for me to catch my breath, sit still, and rest. Not having to do anything was such a gift!** I also participated in single mom nights where we were treasured and blessed. Jill's House turned out to be such a lifeline for me.

By high school, Brady really blossomed. He missed his older brother, who had gone off to college, but I was able to get him involved in Special Olympics. He participated in track, basketball, and bowling. He did a little bit of everything! Being athletic is very much a family trait. Brady really enjoyed school, and the entire school loved him.

After high school, Brady attended Davis Career Center and graduated in June 2022. After graduation, he began working at Cameron's Coffee and Chocolates, he began serving as Door Greeter at our church, he is in YoungLife Leadership and continues to be in a community of people who love and understand him. He has been given wonderful opportunities for continuing education through Cameron's, and through Jill's House Alumni Nights, he is able to maintain friendships with the people he loves! **He really enjoys being able to go to Jill's House as a young adult. It's such a different experience for him now. God has been so faithful!**

# The PEREZ FAMILY

**"AS HARD AS THIS LIFE MAY BE, I WOULD NOT WANT TO BE ON ANY OTHER JOURNEY. I AM ABSOLUTELY IN LOVE WITH MY AUTISTIC FAMILY."**

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The day he was born was one of the happiest days of my life. Holding my child for the first time filled me with indescribable joy. I gave birth to a darling, sweet, and perfect baby boy, and life at that moment was ... well, it was blissfully perfect.

All the nesting I did beforehand, all the motherhood books I read, and all the stories I heard from moms of typical children did not prepare me to be the mother of my special son. Nothing really prepares you for that moment when a doctor sits you down and says the word "autism".

Joaquin was almost 3 years old when he was diagnosed with autism. Before that, he was thriving, even excelling in some areas. He would easily match picture cards before the age of 2, and boy! he did babble nonstop while doing his best to articulate words. He could recite the alphabet and count to 100. More importantly, my dear son had a special sparkle in his eyes.

That began to change after his second birthday. He wouldn't respond to his name, constantly walked around in small circles, and stopped making eye contact. What was heartbreaking was that he became very quiet—barely a whisper.

It took many years of therapy, tests, school meetings, advocacy, prayers, and a lot of hard work on his part to get to where he is today.

Joaquin turns 17 soon. My little baby boy is no longer little and far from being a baby, but in many ways, he still is.

**As hard as this life may be, I would not want to be on any other journey. I am absolutely in love with my autistic family.**

Not only are we an autism family, but we are also a Jill's House family. We joined Jill's House a few years ago. In the beginning, I was very reluctant and nervous for my non-verbal son to spend a couple of nights under the supervision of strangers.

The first time he went to Jill's House Blue Ridge camp, I was convinced the staff and volunteers would call me in the middle of the night to pick him up. There was no way he would want to stay. Plus, there was no way the Jill's House staff would take care of him the way he needed to be cared for.

I was wrong. I was completely and utterly wrong.

That first weekend, the Jill's House team never called. They did, however, texted me a few photos of Joaquin to reassure me that he was doing fine. He was more than fine. The pictures showed him smiling, laughing, and having as much fun at camp as he should, as any teenager should.

**Fast forward to today, Joaquin now walks into camp as if he owns the place.**

Jill's House is a place of "rest, renewal, and relationships for kids with intellectual disabilities and their families." For me and my family, Jill's House is also about saving lives, because that's what they do.

Note: The opinions stated in this editorial do not reflect that of nor is an endorsement by the U.S. Navy.





# The SCHAUPNER FAMILY



**“ALEX JUST DOESN’T JUST GO ALONG FOR THE RIDE. IN MANY CASES, SHE IS THE RIDE!”**

Germany was special. **Alex just doesn’t just go along for the ride. In many cases, she IS the ride!** While in Germany, she was enthralled with castles and food, more than history. We all enjoyed that trip so much as we were able to cater our trip to meet the interests of Alex – German food and cool castles!

When Alex turned 5 years old, we began the process of enrolling her at Jill’s House. The intake process took a little time and we wanted to be sure she was ready by the time she was the right age to go. We had family friends whose child had been going to Jill’s House and loved it. We knew Alex would enjoy it, too, and we could not wait for her first stay!

**Alex is now 10 years old and loves to stay at Jill’s House. She can be herself; she enjoys time with her peers, and she gets a break from us! We really appreciate the respite, but when Alex is at Jill’s House, she also gets respite. Jill’s House is her thing, her domain, and it’s her special experience!**

Alex will often see a friend after school, and each time they see one another, Alex will say “I know that girl from Jill’s House!”. Those connections and the friendships established through Jill’s House have made such an impact on all our lives!

According to the form that comes home with Alex after she has stayed at Jill’s House, her favorite activities are swinging on the swings in the playground and swimming in the indoor pool. **However, she is beginning to understand how to share in a conversation, so when we ask what she enjoyed during her stay at Jill’s House, she immediately shares the weekend menu. She loves the chicken nuggets and fries!**

Alex is such a joy and so very special to us and Jill’s House sees her the way we see her. We are just so grateful for Jill’s House, for our family, and for other families like ours, too!

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Having a child with special needs was not something we had prepared for. When Alex was born and the Doctor told us she had Down Syndrome, we didn’t know what to expect. It was a scary time! **Being a family with a special needs child, well, that was other families. But that quickly became our family, too!**

We had au pairs live with us which allowed our whole family, and especially Alex, to build strong relationships.

We grew close with one au pair and later flew, as a family, to Germany so we could visit her. We do a lot of things as a family, and our trip to



## The EDELBROCK FAMILY

Before Emma was born, my husband and I both had full-time careers in music. I was a high school music teacher, and he had served with the US Army Band for 35 years. Then in 2000, God gave us Emma! We knew before she was born that she would have Down syndrome, and when she reached puberty, we learned that she was autistic as well. **We moved from a lifestyle of practice, performance, and perfection to this lovely life we now have with Emma, which we like to call the real life!**

When I was six months pregnant, we found out that Emma would be delivered in this beautiful package, and for the next three months we embarked on a journey to prepare our lives and our hearts for her. But we spent many sleepless nights worrying about the future of our family. **One such night, when I just couldn't seem to fall asleep, I decided to read the Bible, knowing that was where I would find the comfort my heart longed for.** I was reading a passage in Luke about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This was a story I had read often, but that night, I heard God's voice clearly speaking to me.

The two disciples were talking to each other, despondent, when they were met by a stranger. The stranger asked them, "So, what are you talking about?" They simply responded, "We had hoped for

**"...SHE WOULD BARELY WAIT FOR THE CAR TO COME TO A COMPLETE STOP BEFORE JUMPING OUT AND RUNNING INTO THE BUILDING. "**

something different." I had to stop reading. That was us! We had hoped for something very different with our pregnancy and with our family.

But then as I continued to read the story, I was reminded that the stranger on the road was the risen Christ. Jesus had come for the brokenhearted. He had come for us! **I knew in that moment that we were exactly where we were supposed to be.**

Emma started attending Jill's House in 2014, but it took us a long time to get to that point. In my mind, I thought Jill's House was for families who had children with different needs than ours. However, as Emma approached puberty and we began facing new challenges, we were encouraged to reconsider Jill's House. Not just for Emma but for us!

When Emma's first visit arrived, we still weren't sure how her time away from us would pan out. When we picked her up at the end of the weekend, she was so happy. The staff kept thanking us for allowing them to spend the weekend with her! After a few more overnight stays at Jill's House, she would barely wait for the car to come to a complete stop before jumping out and running into the building.

**The blessing of Jill's House goes far beyond Emma's overnight stays.** Now that Emma is 23 years old and out of school, we have established relationships with other parents who are in the same situation as we are. We encourage one another and share resources.

Our story took a big turn, but God was so good to prepare us for it, and he continues to keep us close. Emma is such a blessing to our family and to others around us, and through Emma, we have been blessed by Jill's House.



# The EDWARDS FAMILY

When Keith was born, I could feel the grace and patience of Jesus's love for him in my soul. Keith was born with Down syndrome and autism; but we all knew that Keith was God's perfect plan. He is now 21 years old and has been attending Jill's House since 2010. **If Jill's House had not been part of our lives for all these years, it's hard to imagine how things would've been.**

Keith's first weekend stay at Jill's House was two months after it had opened, in 2010, when he was 11 years old. We were so nervous, as we had never before considered the idea of respite or our child staying away from home overnight. But I'll never forget the look on his face when we were driving home after the first weekend. **He appeared to be in a kind of dream state, as if he were replaying the whole weekend in his mind. It was almost as if he couldn't believe it was real; maybe he was wondering if it was going to happen again. He was quiet. And this type of behavior wasn't typical for him; so I knew, at that moment, that Jill's House was really something special.**

**"If Jill's House had not been part of our lives for all these years, it's hard to imagine how things would've been."**

Between each visit, Keith would mark the days on the calendar until his next visit. He had been going to Jill's House for about a year, when we began noticing how comfortable he was. He would walk into the building and say, "POD two, please!" He was so at ease that it was almost as if he were checking into a hotel.

Though Jill's House has mostly been for Keith's benefit, it feels like God has used Keith and Jill's House to impact the whole family!

After observing Keith at Jill's House, our middle daughter applied to be a volunteer there. Later, she took a staff position. She said that she had never worked at a place where people just loved to be there. She had once considered going into Nutrition. But, observing Keith at Jill's House and being on the team as a volunteer and an employee changed her heart, and consequently her career path. **When you witness people come forward to help fund a cause or help serve, it replaces fear with love. It inspires you to step up and do the same. We feel that there is no other place in the world for families like ours.** Our daughter is now a Special Education Teacher.

When Keith was younger and we were attending the McLean Bible Church (MBC), we were excited about Jill's House opening in the community. Before that, Keith would participate in the Access Ministry at the church, while we would attend the worship service. It was during that time when our faith in God's sovereign plan was really nurtured. We were attending the MBC, so Keith could participate in the Access Ministry. However, we believe that God provided a space for Keith, so my husband would return to church. It was while we were attending the MBC that my husband accepted Jesus as his savior.

**God's plan, for our lives, is always greater than our plan!**





# The VAN HAGE FAMILY

**"AS MUCH AS  
WE NEEDED THE  
WEEKEND, HE  
NEEDED CAMP  
EVEN MORE."**



Recently, Jill's House Weekend Adventure Camp came to our area, and it has made us and our son Shane so happy.

Shane was born in 2010 and before his first 2nd birthday, he was diagnosed with Autism. Shane is now 12 years old, and such a great kid!

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, his world stopped, just like everyone else's. Around the time

things started opening back up, he fell sick with Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS). In 2021, he didn't feel well, developed brain inflammation, and started having seizures; his behavior had changed completely. Almost overnight, he went from being an active kid to not being able to walk for even five minutes without pain. It was such a shock to witness how aggressive PANS was, and how quickly it had taken control over his body.

We worked with our doctors for a long time to diagnose his condition and identify the right treatment for him. He feels much better now, and we are working really hard to help him regain his strength and energy. Due to PANS, he developed anxiety, so the Weekend Adventure Camp was very important for him! **We were nervous about taking him to camp, but when we saw that volunteers who were part of our church were also going to be there with him, it put us at ease.**

As much as we needed the weekend, he needed camp even more. We were so happy to learn that he climbed the rock wall. The encouragement and cheers he received motivated him, and he made it all the way to the top. He was so proud of himself for that accomplishment. Shane attends a wonderful school, and he participates in a special needs Sunday School class at church. His world is pretty small. We know that he wants independence, but it's hard. When he was at camp, he was independent and could do what a typically abled 12-year-old kid gets to do.

When it was time to pick Shane up on Sunday afternoon, we were so emotional and happy to see him. He was happy to see us, too. During camp, he received love, attention, and care. It was a truly special time.

Having a child with special needs is often a journey where you feel alone. We are very grateful to the many people who spent their weekend with Shane so that we could feel human again. It was amazing and a real blessing.

Shane kept saying, "I want camp," for many days after the weekend. He has also taken on a new love of rock climbing, which we get to enjoy at a local indoor rock-climbing gym. **We are so grateful for Jill's House and look forward to many years of more weekend camp experiences. Thank you, Jill's House, for coming to New Jersey!**





## The ROLAND FAMILY

**“...realizing that we aren’t carrying the load by ourselves, that we have a team of supporters and encouragers in Jill’s House, means so much.”**

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When Zoe was born, we discovered she had Down syndrome, and our world became very confusing. We hadn’t received any resources and didn’t know how to care for a special-needs child. I remember a social worker speaking with us in the hospital, but even that meeting was discouraging. What we were facing was not at all what we had expected.

Zoe’s first year was full of medical appointments, and she had many seizures. She couldn’t even smile! We were in an unknown space, and I was unable to continue working at my job, as caring for my family was a lot of work.

Zoe is now 11, and though our journey was hard, we truly feel like we hit the jackpot with our sweet and tender girl. **She is the most delightful person, and we are so grateful God chose her for our family story.**

When Zoe was around 1 year old, God began to perform miracles in our family, as He began to heal us and knit us together! God healed Zoe of her seizures, and my husband and I were strengthened as parents of a special needs child. Besides these miracles, the Lord brought Jill’s House to us!

I found out about Jill’s House from a mom at the playground. I was apprehensive, but excited to learn that Jill’s House is a Christian organization. Zoe has now gone to Jill’s House 3 times! She loves camp so much. Jill’s House is the most wonderful experience for her!

Zoe’s weekends at Jill’s House help her to feel like a grown-up girl. She gets to try on an independent life and enjoys doing things that other kids get to enjoy! She would probably say her favorite part about camp is sleeping in a sleeping bag, hanging out with friends, packing all her favorite belongings for the weekend, and spending a weekend away.

Families like ours don’t have much margin for anything outside our daily load. But we are also used to carrying it all. **So, realizing that we aren’t carrying the load by ourselves, that we have a team of supporters and encouragers in Jill’s House, means so much. It’s just another way God has shown His faithfulness to us.**

We have learned so much through Zoe! Walking through life with her and our community of friends has opened our eyes to the very special needs we all have. The team at Jill’s House has shown us that the most healing message anyone can hear is that even in your unloveliness, you are still loved! The team really covers everything they do for every child, with love and understanding. Having a team of people who love us, though we are different, is so healing to our hearts.







## The **SULLIVAN FAMILY**

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When I was pregnant with Kate, we decided not to do any prenatal testing but we had ultrasounds throughout the pregnancy. I remember during one ultrasound the lab technician took extra time looking at the space where her heart was, but we were not told about any problems. Kate was born with two holes in her heart and she was also diagnosed with Down syndrome. She had to under-

go open-heart surgery when she was just three months old; then a pace-maker had to be put in, as some complications occurred because of the surgery. She was in the hospital for two weeks! Gratefully, we were with my parents during that time as they helped with taking care of our older daughter. God knew what we needed when He moved us to Illinois!

I had studied early child development before our first child was born and worked with kids with special needs—even those with Down syndrome, but we didn't know what Kate's diagnosis would mean for her or our family. **Looking back, I believe God was preparing me for Kate, and I think God knew that I needed to see her and hold her in my arms before we received the diagnosis.**

Those first few years of her life were filled with so many visits to doctors. At one point, she had eight different doctors! She is quite healthy now and doing very well.

When I first learned about Jill's House, I visited their website and read

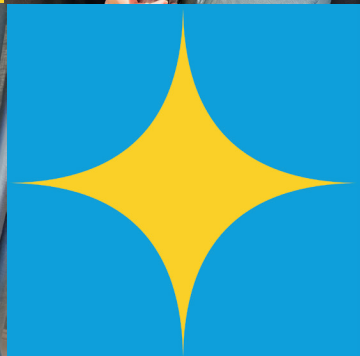
## **"God IS good, and He has a plan!"**

Brenda's testimony there. I remember being so touched by her words! In her testimony, Brenda shared about their busy life with their older boys, and when Jill was born and later developed very special needs, she felt she couldn't leave Jill's side. They were all in desperate need of rest, but Brenda prayed that God would use Jill's life for a greater purpose. When I read her words, all I could think was that when Jill was born, God was also thinking about Kate, our family, and all the other families that are being served by Jill's House today. God is sovereign over all, and I'm so thankful to Lon and Brenda for their faithfulness in trusting The Lord with Jill's life.

God IS good, and He has a plan! **Life can be hard, and we don't always understand what is happening, but when you step back and trust that He is faithful, you can see that He is working.** Brenda's words really touched my heart and helped me to trust that God is working in our lives too.

Kate started going to Jill's House when she turned six years old and has been going there for the last 10 years. When she was younger, Kate was quite active. So, we found it hard to do our daily chores or even take her to the park. We would often avoid engaging in certain outings as a family because it was such a challenge. Kate is 16 years old now and full of life! She has a wonderful sense of humor, and she loves her family. She enjoys going out to eat, playing basketball, and putting on dance shows (for us) at home and Jill's House.

Kids with special needs might be overwhelming or intimidating to some people. But everyone at Jill's House sees these kids for who they are. God doesn't make mistakes, and He has a plan for every single person on this planet. Everyone at Jill's House seems to know that; they embrace that, and they love and serve our kids and families so beautifully! Also, from a practical standpoint, we can truly rest knowing that while Kate is in Jill's House, there are on-duty nurses and excellent staff to tend to her medical needs and any situation that may arise. Everything about Jill's House is such a blessing to our family!



Rest, renewal, and relationships  
for children with intellectual  
disabilities and their families

Scan to read Jill's House Family Stories  
[www.jillshouse.org](http://www.jillshouse.org)

