



Sharnikya Howard says the children Jill's House serves give back hope, love and encouragement.

SERVING

Volunteer shares, "Serving children with special needs is the greatest gift of all."

"I grew up in Ayden, North Carolina, with my grandmother," shared Sharnikya Howard, a Jill's House volunteer. "I didn't always have everything I wanted growing up, but I was surrounded by love and an understanding that it is better to give than to receive."

Sharnikya works with [Kelli Lozada Reese](#), whose daughter Anna attends Jill's House. Kelly shared with Sharnikya the need for volunteer support at Jill's House, and

Sharnikya began serving last summer at Jill's House Blue Ridge. "What an amazing experience!" shared Sharnikya. "The first night I served, I had dinner with all the children and was then paired with my 'buddy,' Tommy. What a blessing he was to me! He taught me sign language, and I taught him to dance! We read books, sat outside by the camp fire, played games, sang songs and learned about the love of Jesus."

Sharnikya says she signed up to serve the children and families because it's an opportunity to serve as we are called by God in order to impact the lives of such amazing people. Surprisingly, Sharnikya says serving at Jill's House impacted her life in ways she never imagined. "I thought I would be the one providing all the help and support," said Sharnikya, "but it was quite the opposite!

"One day, Tommy and I had the chance to walk on the ropes course. I have to admit that I was a bit nervous because I had never walked on a rope before. Tommy went first, and I held his hand until he was comfortable enough to let go. When it was my turn, Tommy could sense that I was a little nervous. OK, I was extremely nervous! Tommy obviously sensed that because he placed his head on my forehead in the gentlest way to reassure me that I would be just fine. He can't talk, but I understood him. He was communicating 'Sharnikya, you can do this. I've got your back!' It was a moment I will never forget. Even now, when I am feeling a little bit uneasy about something, I reflect on Tommy's sweet gesture and I am reminded that everything will be just fine."

To learn more about opportunities to serve at Jill's House, visit jillshouse.org/serve, email maryrachel.robbs@jillshouse.org or call 703.639.5660.

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Sharnikya and Tommy supported each other on the low ropes course at Jill's House Blue Ridge.