

A Father's Love Stretches East to West

Family Spotlight: Meet the Harms Family



Derek and his family are grateful for his overnight stays at Jill's House.

ns, "If you have never been close to a person with special needs, it can be hard to understand how much good there is to outweigh any bad. Being Derek's dad has taught me the many positive things about it."

For example, Derek is a helper. One of his favorite things to do is collect trash around the house and bring it outside to the bin. Then he'll grab a rake and attempt to clear the lawn. "He likes to mimic the garbage men and gardeners he sees around town--anybody and everybody who's working," says Greg.

Even though life would be easier and potentially more fulfilling for Derek if he were typical, Greg is grateful to know Derek as he is. "I don't want him to be different," shared Greg. "He's so lovable the way he is, and I wouldn't change that."

The Harms are grateful Jill's House is a place that sees Derek the way they do and understands him despite his difficulty communicating. "Derek understands almost everything and has a fairly large vocabulary," said Greg. "But his mouth can't form words, and he gets frustrated when he wants to communicate something but can't." This makes it difficult for Derek to enjoy close friendships, like his twin brother Geoffrey does. "Most of the kids at Derek's school are nice to him," said Greg. "But Derek doesn't have best friends, and he rarely has play dates or sleepovers." Jill's House provides a safe place for Derek to be himself and enjoy time with new friends.

The Harms are also grateful for the overnight breaks Jill's House provides for their family. Derek's twin brother, Geoffrey, is extremely patient with Derek and sympathetic to his needs. But when Derek is at Jill's House, Geoffrey can be the center of his parent's attention. "Geoffrey is an excellent athlete and plays soccer and baseball," said Greg. "When Derek is at Jill's House, Dawn and I can go to Geoffrey's game and watch the whole thing without chasing The Great Eloper."

Greg and Dawn know Derek is likely to live with them long after Geoffrey moves out on his own, but that thought does not worry Greg. He says, "In a way, it's nice to have an eternal kid."

When Greg and Dawn look at their son Derek, they see an empathetic and inquisitive eleven-year-old who loves to help. They see a gentle comforter and courageous explorer.

But the rest of the world is more likely to describe Derek according to his disability. They would say he has a rare condition called Baraitser-Winter syndrome, an intellectual disability, a developmental delay, a seizure disorder, a visual and hearing impairment, and a speech and learning disorder. These words may describe Derek but they come nowhere close to defining who he is.

Greg explains,



Derek liked "driving" the police car at the 7th Annual Ride for Jill's House.

Sometime this summer, Dawn's job will move the family to southern California. "We'll miss Jill's House when we move, but we're hoping Derek can attend Jill's House Lake Arrowhead." Our staff at Jill's House in Tysons enjoy caring for Derek and will miss him when he moves, but we look forward to continuing to serve this family in southern California. We are grateful that a cross-country move will not mean the end of respite for this family.

To sponsor a child's overnight stay at Jill's House, email danielle.whitty@jillshouse.org or visit jillshouse.org/sponsor.

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