

## Military Families Raising Children With Special Needs Encounter Unique Challenges Family Spotlight: Meet the Works



*Jill's House provides the Work family with frequent breaks that help keep them focused and strong.*

Jill's House serves over 40 military families raising children with intellectual disabilities, with more on our waiting list. While all families raising children with special needs experience higher stress levels than the rest of us, those who are dedicated to serving our country encounter additional complications such as deployments, scheduling logistics and frequent moves.

"We are a Military family that has moved a total of seven times in 15 years," said Pat Work, father to Jill's House guest JP, 12. "Our country has been at war for 13 of those years and we've been deployed back and forth to Iraq and Afghanistan a total of 10 times. So for us, it has been quite a commitment both trying to serve our country and staying a close-knit, nuclear family that continues to move our marriage and the children we're raising forward."

JP has an 11q chromosome deletion that has resulted in a series of cognitive and physical disabilities. The deletion he has is so rare that at the time of his birth there were no other children diagnosed with the same deletion.

"My first deployment to Afghanistan was in 2002 when JP was born. During the first phone call I made to my wife, Mara, after JP's birth, she assured me that he was perfect. Eight hours later, she learned a whole lot more. Mara went through the first several hard days alone with JP because I was gone."

"Since Pat was deployed, I was very nervous handling this on my own," shared Mara. "I had not spent much time around children with special needs, so I didn't know what to do or how to act, I just kind of powered through it. Pat was able to come home six days later, but JP was in the neonatal intensive care unit for two months. I had a lot of people telling me what my son should or shouldn't be, and over time I have realized that my son is his own person. His diagnosis is very rare, so there is no text book to go on. Since his birth everything has been about us trying to do what's best for him."

"Most military families raising children with special needs live a different existence than those who can stay put in the same communities while they raise their children," Pat continued. "Being a military family requires some sacrifice because of the demand to change locations frequently. One of the hardest things to do when you have a child with special needs is to ensure continuity. For example, at just nine years old, our daughter Sally Ann has lived in six different homes. That's hard enough for a typical child, but imagine what it's like when you have to change doctors and find good schools and the right support for a child with special needs, like JP. As a father, and as the soldier who drags this family around, that is one of the greatest challenges we have in terms of understanding resources, researching doctors that can address our child's unique diagnosis, and finding the public school that will ensure JP fits in and the teachers understand and can provide an Individualized Education Program that is tailor-made for him."

The Works learned of Jill's House from another parent at JP's school, and while they are relatively new to the Jill's House family, they are already enjoying the benefits of regular respite.



[Watch](#) this video and meet Pat Work, a defender of our country and a Jill's House dad.

"We are one very grateful family," said Pat. "Jill's House has really helped all of us. I commend the entire Jill's House team. I commend the donors. I cannot express my gratitude enough for those who chip in with their volunteer work. Jill's House makes a difference for us. We can slow it down once in a while and truly have that respite that's so necessary to focus on ourselves. Jill's House is a wonderful service made possible by extraordinary people."