

You keep a child living at home through regular respite and independence.

Family Spotlight: Meet Eugene, Jennifer and Zachary



Thanks to Jill's House and Zachary's growing independence, he is living safe at home with his dad, Eugene (top) and mom, Jennifer.

"I will never forget the day Zachary asked, 'Can we celebrate the one year anniversary of me being able to live at home with my mom and dad?'" said Mary Leidy, Jill's House's family support and intern director. Zachary, a teenager currently served through the Weeknights at Jill's House school program, began attending Jill's House when our doors first opened in 2010.

"We adopted Zachary when he was two years old," said Zachary's dad, Eugene. "At first things were easy. But as time went on, the challenges became greater. Zachary was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, and is on the autism spectrum. There have been many bumps in the road through the years. But by the grace of God and his stays at Jill's House Zachary's behaviors are more manageable, he has become more confident and we are now able to keep him at home with us, where he belongs."

"Zachary had significant medical and behavioral issues when he first started coming to Jill's House," continued Leidy. "We worked with his family, the Jill's House medical team and Zachary's therapists to develop a plan that would allow him to live at home safely with his parents.

Part of that plan included a verbal contract with Zachary that if he felt as if his behavior was going to be out of control, he would inform his parents and 'take a break' at Jill's House for 24-48 hours.

"Knowing he was part of the plan helped him break the emotional dependence he placed on longer-term residential facilities. His stays at Jill's House helped Zachary learn to trust himself and his parents and allowed him to get his anxiety under control while learning healthy ways to cope. We have also seen Zachary's spiritual growth over the years as he now has a strong desire to learn more about Jesus as a result of his stays at Jill's House."

In addition to helping Zachary communicate his feelings more clearly and manage his emotions, his regular visits to Jill's House allow him to become more independent and develop strong peer-to-peer socialization skills.

"Zachary has become very independent since going to Jill's House," added Zachary's mom, Jennifer. "He actually serves as a spokesperson at his school, helping to enlighten other families about the benefits of being part of the Weeknights at Jill's House school program. He also makes school-wide announcements each morning over the public announcement system and has made many new friends."

We often hear from parents like Eugene and Jennifer that their children don't receive invitations to parties, sleepovers, or even simple play dates after school. In fact, many of the children we serve have never spent the night away from home with anyone other than a close relative. Independence and peer-to-peer socialization skills are what most families raising children with special needs pray for, as everyone wants their children to fit in, be respected, and have the most fulfilling lives possible. Participation in Weeknights at Jill's House, in partnership with area schools, is a wonderful step towards independence and socialization for these young people, enabling them to connect with their peers the way typical children do when the school day ends.



Watch Zachary share how much he loves Weeknights at Jill's House where he builds friendships, independence and social skills.

Visit jillshouse.org/donate to give the gift of Jill's House to more children and their families. To bring Weeknights at Jill's House to your school, contact dana.hecht@jillshouse.org or call 703.639.5681.

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