

Jill's House Offers Respite to Families of Disabled Kids

Jill's House is offering hundreds of families in the Washington, D.C. area what they need most this Thanksgiving season—a break.

Jill's House is an overnight respite “resort” for children with special needs. The 42,000-square-foot house offers 45 beds for children ages 6 to 17 with intellectual disabilities. Children can stay there with their siblings.

“The idea of respite—of just getting a break for one night to be with other children and sleep through the night—is critical to give families the ability to keep going,” says Lon Solomon, co-founder of Jill's House, which opened its doors in October 2010 and has provided more than 40,000 hours of much-needed respite care to children and their families.

The issue is real. The 16.8 million U.S. families caring for children with special needs frequently face financial burdens, spend hours each week coordinating basic care and have to be strong advocates to ensure their children get the education and services they desperately need.

Although respite care is most frequently cited by caregivers of children with physical and intellectual disabilities as their number one need, it remains in critically short supply. As a result, family caregivers suffer a chronic condition at more than twice the rate as non-caregivers and the stress from providing daily care can take as much as 10 years off a family caregiver's life, according to *Caring Today* magazine.

“My husband and I are so grateful for the chance to take a break from the 24-hour care Waverly requires and focus on each other,” says Shannon McNeil, mother to two children with Sanfilippo Syndrome, a rare genetic degenerative disorder.

“But more than that, we are thankful to Jill’s House for giving Waverly the summer camps and sleepover experiences we thought she lost.”

The idea for Jill’s House began in 2003 after Solomon, senior pastor of McLean Bible Church, and his wife, Brenda, experienced the difference that having a break made in their own lives, while caring for their daughter Jill, who has a severe seizure disorder.

With the opening of its third wing, Wilderness Exploration, on Dec. 2, Jill’s House will have a total overnight capacity of 30 children, enabling some of the 300 kids currently on the waiting list to experience a Jill’s House weekend.