

## Learning Independence at Jill's House Spotlight: The Cutler-Parsons Family

Jason was a guest of Jill's House the very first day we opened our doors. Two and a half years later, Jason now visits on Tuesday nights with his friends from school.

"Tuesdays are the only times Jason has ever experienced sleepovers with his friends," shared Jason's mom, Paula Parsons. "He comes home and can't stop talking about the staff, the fun he had with his friends, and how much he loves swimming in the pool. His time there helps him become much more independent, teaching him to take direction, learn self-care, and even how to pack his own bags for his visits."



Jason with the "Mickey" drawing he created at Jill's House and displayed at the Wonderfully Made art show in 2012.

Jason was adopted by the Cutler-Parsons as an infant, and was seemingly healthy. Soon after the adoption, however, Paula realized something was not quite right. "He had a keen sense of smell, sight, hearing, everything," continued Paula. "He was overwhelmed. It was as though the entire world was setting him off. When he was diagnosed, they were just starting to talk about autism. His case was very complicated, so they just diagnosed him as 'multiply disabled.' "

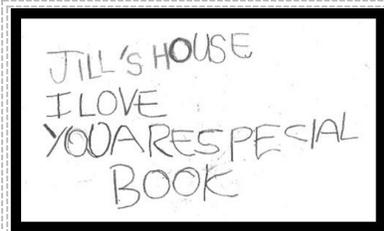


Jason's visits to Jill's House allow the Cutler-Parsons family to focus on themselves, and each other.

Jason is autistic and developmentally delayed. He is extremely verbal and active, but needs continual coaching and supervision to perform daily tasks. "We constantly need to guide him," said Paula. "It's exhausting. It affects every moment of our day. He didn't sleep through the night until he was six, and it's not easy to guide a child with special needs when you can't get a good night's sleep."

Jason's health issues have been all-consuming for the Cutler-Parsons. "Jason's medical problems are somewhat under control now," said Paula, "but earlier in his life it was always something. For years he had to go for blood work every four weeks. He was terrified of the doctors, so that was an additional stress. But he's a trooper. He is so used to it now, that he just sticks his arm out!"

"Jason is very smart, and also witty," said Paula. "Recently I was on a diet. Jason told me 'Mom, you'll always be skinny in my heart!' He brings us so much joy, and is unbelievably generous. We recently had a friend visit who had just lost his job. Jason heard the conversation and said 'Oh no! You have a daughter, right?' He then ran to his room for his wallet, and said, 'Here! Take my money!' That's just who he is. And while it's lovely, he also needs to be protected from people who would take advantage of him."



Jason's thank you note for the You Are Special book he received from Jill's House at Christmas.

"Jason understands what he should be doing as a young adult, and he is also very aware of how dependent he is. He knows that other people his age are dating, going to college, and getting married soon. He sees the disconnect, and it is very frustrating for him. It's so difficult. One thing that has helped immensely, however, is a book that he got at Christmas from Jill's House called *You are Special* by Max Lucado. I can't tell you how much he responded to that book. Every time something negative happens in his life, he now refers to that book. It made sense to him, and to me. It gave me a tool to help him with his self-esteem, to get us through another day."

"We also have a daughter, Jessica, who is now 23. Early on, when Jason would go to Jill's House for the weekend, Jessica would almost panic, because she wanted to

make sure our time was spent well. She would ask, 'How do you want to do this? Do you and Dad want to be alone? Should you and I do something? Dad and me? All of us together?' Jason's stays at Jill's House are such a breather for all of us. Before, Jessica always had to step back because of the constant attention put on Jason. But now we have time to spend quiet moments together, and really think about what's next for our daughter, our marriage, our family, and even for Jason. It also allows me to be there for our parents. During one of Jason's stays I was able to fly up to Massachusetts to spend some time with my mom. That was truly a gift."