



Friendship Ark
HOMES & COMMUNITY SERVICES

FAITH • FAMILY • FRIENDSHIP

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The Very Best Christmas Gift

In late December, Friendship Ark staff members Breanna and Gene had a very special surprise in store for one of our core member families. We were so touched by this story, that we asked core member Tay's mom, Pam, to tell us about the experience in her own words so we may share it with you. Here's her response.

Honestly, I've been struggling to put into words how much Gene and Breanna have impacted our family. As Tay changes and his "will do's" and "won't do's" keep changing, we can't really remember when he started refusing to go to restaurants. Actually, his refusal was preceded by several months of clearing off the entire table, throwing things onto the floor, and/or lunging at family members or other patrons in the restaurant. After several months of many bad experiences, he decided that he wouldn't even get out of the vehicle when we pulled up to a restaurant. We were figuratively and literally beaten down, and we stopped even trying.

Tay's sister, Savana, says she doesn't remember EVER going to a restaurant with Tay. We know he did, but it may have been over 20 years ago when she was an early elementary age.

Gene and Breanna had both mentioned that they were getting him more comfortable in different settings, but I was not prepared to get a particular message on my phone in early November. It was a photo of Tay, sitting in what was clearly a restaurant, eating lunch. Then another message popped in with him posing for a picture outside a restaurant in Des Moines. I was incredulous and immediately questioned where they were and if they had a "stunt double" who just happens to look exactly like my son. They responded that it was indeed him, he had the best time, and he sat during the entire meal, enjoying his Mexican feast! I dropped my phone and cried like a baby.

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Savana, Tay and Pam

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Recruiting and Community Engagement Corner



Before the snow finally hit us this winter, we were able to have a lovely holiday party with core members, staff, everyone's families and faithful Friendship Ark volunteers. We were blessed by our friends at St. Andrews Lutheran Church who welcomed us into their space. Not only did they welcome us, they also volunteered that evening and helped us by surprising the core members with an appearance from Santa. Also in attendance was the Grinch. Fun was had by all.



This quarter we stayed active in the community by attending chamber events such as 1 Million Cups, Leadership Ames, and Business After Hours and being a part of various committees and organizations such as Rotary and the Transportation Collaboration. We were thrilled to hear that three of our board members were honored this past January at the Ames Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet. Congratulations to Jon Sargent, Luke Jensen and Melissa Muschick!

In late January and early February we attended two of our annual events, ISU Welcomefest and the ISU People to People Career Fair. These events help to educate attendees about Friendship Ark and showcase employment, volunteer and internship opportunities. Another way we do this is by inviting Iowa State HDFS classes into our homes, giving them a tour and sharing about ways to get involved. On January 31st, we welcomed close to 40 students and teachers into one of our homes. In the past this has resulted in some amazing interns and volunteers.



Finally, one of the highlights this past quarter was having an Administrative Team Retreat which included a Bloom Bar, to help celebrate our longest tenured employee: Martina Luppen. Martina celebrated 20 years with Friendship Ark in January.

Other staff with milestone anniversaries include: Eugene Larson (5) and Anne York (5).

This quarter we added the following staff to the Friendship Ark family.

Please help us in welcoming: Katy Corburn (JOH Coordinator), Emmy Hein (VAL Coordinator), and Callista Webb (Spring Intern).

By Beth Lucht, Marketing Manager

Our Business Partners

Help us to thank our 2024 Business Partners at the Family Level of \$1,000 and above for their generous support of adults living with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our community. Business Partners at this level are recognized in various ways, including a quarterly mention in our newsletter. If you find yourself interacting with them or visiting their offices, let them know you appreciate their contribution.



Food is Love - Meals that Spread Joy and Build Community

Core member parent, Sarah, prepares and delivers lunch to one of our homes for core members and staff to enjoy several times a month. These lunches are open to any staff and core member who is able to attend. Sarah cooks for a crowd. Even before starting this tradition, Sarah was known for the amazing desserts she often brought to the house and sometimes our office, for everyone to enjoy. As a matter of fact, "Sarah Ross Cake" as it's known at Friendship Ark, has been famous and highly desired by staff for many years. We recently caught up with Sarah to ask her about her motivation for bringing food and what it means to her, and with staff to find out the impact her kind gesture has on them.



What made you want to start preparing lunches for the house? You take such good care of Nick (Sarah's son). Food is love. You love Nick and I want to give you a break. I love seeing people's faces.

What are some of your specialties that you bring over? Pistachio Cake, Texas Brownies, Mac 'n Cheese.

What does Friendship Ark mean to you and Nick? It's a blessing for Nick to be here. It's close to my house and I can come here any time.

How often do you make lunches for the house? A couple of times a month.

What is your favorite part about doing the lunches? I get to see all of the core members and I get to see their faces. They are so appreciative.

Responses from staff:

What are some of your favorite meals that Sarah brings over? Mac 'n Cheese, Spaghetti, Ham.

What does it mean to the Johans House that she does this for you? It really makes for a fun day when staff don't have to worry about cooking. Having other people come over and socialize creates a unique environment at the house where it doesn't feel like a work environment but time spent with family and friends.

Anything else you would like to add? Sarah is a member of the Johans House family and everyone here loves her visits.



FA Earns Platinum Seal

We are proud to share that we have earned our 2023 Platinum Seal with Candid.



You can learn more about the work our nonprofit does through our Non-profit Profile at <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/42-1489488>.

Save the Date

Please plan to join us on April 20th, 2024 for our second annual Tropical Sangria Escape fundraiser. We will be welcoming you to our tropical oasis at the CPMI Event Center in Ames with entertainment by Dueling Pianos. New this year: Gala Games! Watch your mail, our social media channels and website for ticket information to be released soon. Silent Auction will open one week prior to the event.

Supported by:



The Very Best Christmas Gift, continued



Pam, Tay and Savana

That was the beginning of several ventures to restaurants in Ames and Des Moines orchestrated by Breanna and Gene. They always sent photos, and I always dreaded the next time they would try it and perhaps experience nuclear melt-down. That has not yet occurred.

In mid December, Gene asked what my days off were over the holidays and suggested that they meet our family out for lunch. Since Tay's dad was recovering from ankle replacement surgery, Tay's sister Savana served as his substitute. We carefully planned the location, time and strategies to get us all together. After we received the "all clear" text

from Breanna, Savana and I joined Tay and his miracle workers at an out of the way table at Hickory Park. He seemed mildly surprised to see us, but also slightly irritated as he was intent on coloring the Blue Bunny placemat with incredible zest.

They had ordered for him; his food came out quickly, and we sat for over 45 minutes, even after our food was gone, simply relishing this experience. Several photos were taken; Tay tolerated those in the way celebrities tolerate paparazzi. Being a big deal is tough, evidently. We even got a couple of shots of him in front of the Cy statue outside the building.

Of all my Christmas gifts, this was one I could never have asked for. Yet it was the very best.

A quote from Savana, "I'm so grateful to Tay's staff for their patience, determination, and encouragement to push Tay out of his comfort zone. Their commitment to Tay and doing what's best for him allowed us one of the very best afternoons at a local restaurant, an experience that has not occurred in 20+ years!" (She also included a long string of heart emojis here!)

One of the many things I love about Friendship Ark in general and key staff members in particular is that they don't accept status quo. We can tell them that he doesn't like something or would prefer to do something, and they ALWAYS work to expand his world. One of the most frustrating parts of having a family member with significant disabilities are the artificial walls they create for themselves. When his team is willing to create opportunities for him to experience a larger world, we are always on board to try to make it possible. It would be so much easier for Breanna and Gene to simply sit around the house with him, allowing him to watch "Walker, Texas Ranger" all day! Instead, they have always had "wild" ideas for him, and many of them have been successful! It means the world to us that they don't overlook him for the activities so many of us take for granted, whether it's going to parties, going shopping, participating in games or recreation, or attending community events.

When we asked Gene about the day and the work it took to prepare for it, he stated: "It all comes from the heart so it makes it easy. I give Breanna so much credit. She worked so hard getting him out and about so when it came time to add the restaurant, he had built so much trust. Breanna and I have worked together for 5 years and we kind of know how to read each other and we know the teamwork it takes to have this amazing story to tell. It is so great to go on an outing knowing the person you are with knows exactly what to do so it works like clockwork."

Thank you for making Christmas dreams come true, Breanna and Gene!



Gene and Breanna with Tay

Employee of the Year



Congratulations to Friendship Ark's Employee of the Year for 2023, Judi Meinhardt. Friendship Ark would like to thank Judi for

all her hard work and years of dedication. Friendship Ark appreciates Judi's commitment to our core members, fellow staff, and organization as a whole. In recognition of her award, Judi received a gift of \$250. Nominations for Employee of the Quarter awards can be submitted by any staff of Friendship Ark and winners are selected by a diverse committee of staff peers. All Employee of the Quarter winners for a year are eligible to be selected as the Employee of the Year.

The Sweetest Valentine's Day Date Night

Keith and Jessica allowed FA staff member, Marisa, to tag along on their date to Texas Roadhouse. The group talked about why it is that we celebrate Valentine's Day (to celebrate love) and Marisa asked the couple what it is that they like about each other. Keith shared that he loves that Jessica loves and cares for him and that she is beautiful. Jessica told Marisa that she loves how funny Keith is and that they have been dating since October 1, 2021. When you spend time with the two of them together it quickly becomes apparent that they really enjoy each other's company.



Volunteering for SouperBowl Drive

The core members love to give back to their community. In February, we had the opportunity to collect donations for Lutheran Church of Hope Ames' SouperBowl Drive at the Downtown Ames Fareway



Store. Four groups of core members collected seven grocery carts of supplies to be distributed to local food pantries.

A Night to Shine 2024



Core members from our Supported Community Living program loved getting dressed up and dancing the night away at Night to Shine this winter. Just like every other prom, getting ready and taking pictures



with family and friends was one of the most fun and exciting parts! Don't they look nice?

Employee of the Quarter

Congratulations to Friendship Ark's Employee of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2023, Kashia Tuel. Kashia's nomination recognized her for being dependable and consistently amazing. She



treats every core member with respect and dignity, and advocates for them consistently. When it comes to this work, she just gets it, and knows how to set the bar high! Thank you, Kashia, for your faithful commitment to the core members and to Friendship Ark. In recognition of her award, Kashia received a gift of \$100 and was eligible to be selected for the Employee of the Year award. Nominations for Employee of the Quarter awards can be submitted by any staff of Friendship Ark and winners are selected by a diverse committee of staff peers. All Employee of the Quarter winners for a year are eligible to be selected as the Employee of the Year.



Friendship Ark

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Yes, I/we would like to help Friendship Ark continue to serve persons with intellectual disabilities in a faith-based family home environment.

Amount donated: _____

Please apply my/our donation to the following:

- General Operations
- New House
- Core Member Outings
- Transportation Fund
- Rose/Lois Johannis Educational Fund (Staff Training and Education)
- I would like to learn more about making a planned gift.
- Friendship Ark is a part of my estate planning.

You may use your credit card to make a one time or recurring monthly gift by going to our website and clicking the "Donate" button.

Donations to our Endowment Fund should be made out to Story County Community Foundation and sent directly to SCCF at P.O. Box 1666, Ames, IA 50010-1666, indicating Friendship Ark Endowment Fund in the notes section of your check.



This newsletter provides limited space for us to share all of the exciting things happening at Friendship Ark. Find more stories, news and pictures on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Don't miss a thing, follow us today!

Wish List

- Battery Powered Electric Shovel for Snow
- Battery Jump Pack for Starting Vehicles
- Battery Powered Drill
- Four Sturdy Office Chairs (see Amazon list)
- Two L-Shaped Desks (see Amazon list)
- Raised Garden Beds
- New or Gently Used Recliner
- Colored Pencils and Adult Coloring Books
- New Set of Pots and Pans
- Houseplants
- Curtains for Living Room Window
- Steam Mop
- Halloween Costumes, Unique Clothing Items, Dance Costumes (for our Halloween Bootique)

For your convenience, we have created a Wish List on Amazon. You may select the items you would like to donate and have them shipped directly to us by using the QR Code.

