

# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Following 15 years of weekly visits with my son in his second home at St. Mary's and watching him grow physically into his adulthood, I was heart-broken as he was transferred to a group home that was incapable of providing the level of care his medically-fragile condition required. St Mary's was a blessing neither he, nor his family, was able to keep forever.

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My daughter is a resident of St. Mary's, the most wonderful place imaginable for her. She has friends, is stimulated with fun activities and is being educated and cared for in a manner appropriate to her severe disabilities. This is something her father and I tried to do for her in her 15 years at home and were not able to accomplish. I am constantly searching for similar places for her to live when she becomes 21. There are none.

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Those of us with children who are too severely involved to ever join the work force or live in a group house don't know what our children will do when they reach 21. Having St. Mary's expand to meet this need is a perfect beginning to a solution of a very real problem.

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Even though our son will turn 21, it has virtually no meaning in terms of his condition and needs which will remain the same as they were when he was nine.

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There is so much in my heart to say that is not possible to convey in a letter so I'm willing to offer my abilities in any way necessary to make this dream a reality; whether it is speaking, fundraising, assist in grant writing, whatever it takes to make this happen as soon as possible for my son and his St. Mary's siblings.

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The point is how very difficult it is to find appropriate care for a young adult like our daughter who just turned 19 in May. Group homes are in our area, but require a large degree of self-sufficiency for their clients and have extremely long wait lists. Our daughter's needs are 24/7/365. Even a dedicated family with no other children would be severely challenged to provide for the needs of a child like ours. To extend her residency at St. Mary's beyond age 21 would be a Godsend. It would quite literally give her a new lease on life and a level of care that can be offered nowhere else. We implore you and the Board of Trustees to move forward with your plans to expand the St. Mary's facility and staff to accommodate these older children who have ever-increasingly demanding needs.