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# The Wolfpack Word

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## JCHAI: Empowering Lives of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

By: Molly Goodman

In 1987, Judith Creed founded JCHAI (Judith Creed Horizons for Achieving Independence) in Bryn Mawr after her son, Jonah, was diagnosed with developmental disabilities. Judith had high hopes that Jonah would lead a fulfilling life like anyone else. Her vision was to provide individuals with developmental challenges an equal opportunity to thrive.

JCHAI is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people with developmental disabilities. It offers them the chance to live independently, secure employment, and care for themselves—opportunities that many individuals with disabilities often do not receive. The organization aims to ensure that these individuals are recognized as valuable contributors to their communities.

Judith reflects on the inception of JCHAI, stating, “I started JCHAI because my son, Jonah, had a developmental disability. When he was aging out of high school, no programs were available. I feared he would spend his life sitting on my sofa watching TV due to the lack of acceptance for individuals with disabilities.”



JCHAI is here to empower independence.

In search of programs for Jonah, Judith and her son toured various facilities across the country. However, she was disheartened by what they found. “When Jonah and I visited a program in Chicago, I was sick to my stomach; it felt like a factory for zombies.” Recognizing a gap in available support, Judith and a group of parents came together to form a group home, ultimately leading to the establishment of JCHAI.

The initial fundraising efforts were challenging, but with determination, they opened their first group home with six families.

Judith recalls, “It was a real slog; it was very difficult.” As time passed, they hired staff and began to see remarkable growth. “Once we had our children living independently, they learned much more than we initially thought possible.”

As JCHAI evolved, it became clear that individuals did not require constant care. This realization led to the creation of apartments for those wanting to live independently. Today, JCHAI serves around 300 individuals having transitioned from group homes to independent living arrangements.

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Judith's journey has taught her about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. "I learned how capable people with disabilities are. Initially, I created this for Jonah, but now it's about the children born today into a world that can work for them."

However, the journey has not been without its challenges. Judith faced community resistance when they chose to establish JCHAI in her neighborhood. "We thought they would be the most accepting, but they weren't. I was horrified to see how un-accepting my community was. They heard group home and thought of drug addicts. I remember going to the zone meeting, and someone threw an egg at me, screaming. I was horrified to see how unaccepting my community was."

I saw that repeatedly, and it was a real eye-opener. Despite these obstacles, Judith encourages skeptics to "look and learn" and give individuals with disabilities a chance.

The current political climate poses additional challenges, as funding for JCHAI relies heavily on government support and fundraising. Judith expresses concern: "If the new government dismantles Medicaid, we may face significant issues."

Community involvement is crucial for JCHAI's success. Judith invites others to participate through volunteer opportunities, such as teaching and driving individuals to appointments. "Businesses that want to hire someone with a disability can engage with us through job coaching, ensuring a good fit for both the employee and employer."

Through JCHAI, Judith Creed has transformed her vision into a thriving organization that empowers individuals with developmental disabilities to lead meaningful, independent lives.

Today, JCHAI serves around 300 individuals, and has transitioned from group homes to providing supported independent living.



JCHAI residents are given the opportunity for success.