

Table Leader: Allie A.

I live in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, with my husband, Greg, and our four kids, Owen (16), Ross (14), Aden (10) and Meili (8). I am a physician, but not practicing for the last few years. Ross was diagnosed with polyarticular juvenile arthritis in December of 2011, when he was 11 years old. We had such a hard time getting him the proper diagnosis, treatment, and support. After months, we finally took him to Kansas City, where there are several pediatric rheumatologists. We quickly received the diagnosis, started treatment, and also found much education and support for Ross and our family through the Arthritis Foundation there. We wanted this support in South Dakota!

In April of 2012 the Arthritis Foundation started an office in Sioux Falls, and our family has been very involved in its activity and growth since the beginning. I chair the Board of Directors and started the Juvenile Arthritis Family Network (JAFN) of South Dakota. In addition, I chair the Art for Arthritis Gala committee, an event that started with the Kansas City Arthritis Foundation, and our family decided to bring to South Dakota. We will be having our second annual event this October!



Our family is passionate about educating our community about all forms of arthritis. I also put much effort into educating and supporting the local medical systems about juvenile arthritis and helping our physicians understand the resources available to them to better care for the JA kids in our community.

Tips to Take Home:

- The Board of Directors is the Arthritis Foundation's connection with the community. It's purpose is to take the lead in fulfilling the mission of the AF in the state in many ways, including: securing needed funds for arthritis support and research; seeking opportunities for growth and change that benefit arthritis sufferers; and educating the local community about all faces of arthritis, which creates more arthritis knowledge and understanding, as well as connects us with more passionate people who can help champion our mission!
- It's astonishing how many people are uneducated about juvenile arthritis. This includes the medical community! Don't be afraid to share what you know, get people involved in the fight, and advocate that arthritis gets the attention it deserves!
- Once you start sharing your JA story, it's amazing how many people have a connection to arthritis!
- It's important to recruit passionate, involved, and diverse members to the Board of directors. We are the AF connection to the community and we want to have our reach be wide and effective!

- Parents of JA kids are vital to any AF Board! We are passionate about helping our children live their best lives. We want a cure! You have so much power in your JA story!
- Always look for ways that you or your Board can help the Arthritis Foundation have a more significant reach... to make a more significant difference!
- AF staff like having JA parents at funding request meetings or educational opportunities. Your story is key in the fight for a cure!

Want to Get Involved?

- Become an AF member, e-advocate, or ambassador. Help at a local fundraiser or event. Join an AF committee. Become a Board member of your local AF. You can find something that fits your schedule: help for a few minutes, a few hours, or a few days!
- Connect with other JA families. Reach out to your local JA family support group. Or if there isn't one... start your own! Give out your information to physicians (I made cards with my info on them) so they can share your info with other JA families they come across. Get the word out about what you are doing... families will find you!

Challenge:

Reach out to your local AF office staff or any of your local Board Members and express interest in joining the Board of Directors or find out other ways you can get involved.... you all have unique gifts to share with the organization, but your experience as a JA parent and your passion to find a cure are your biggest strengths that empower you to make a difference!