

Table leader: Tina C.

I live in Sacramento, CA with my husband Rocco and our 2 ½ year old daughter, Gianna, who has JIA. She was diagnosed when she was 14 months old. Her affected joints are her ankles and knees. She is currently in medicated remission and continues to take Enbrel injections once per week. We do a lot of work with the Arthritis Foundation. We participate in the Jingle Bell Run, the Walk to Cure Arthritis and the JA Family day as well as fundraising and advocacy. I am the Volunteer JA Parent Coordinator, which basically just means I help connect “new” parents with each other and help plan the JA Family Day.

Tips to take home

- Don't be afraid to introduce yourself and share your story
- Always exchange email and phone numbers with each parent you meet (you want as many people in your support network as possible) Also: encourage your spouse and children to do the same!
- Make a point to meet the staff at your local AF office. Let them know your story and if you would like to be involved with events or activities or simply just being someone to reach out to “new parents” as they find AF.
- Volunteer to be on the Walk and/or JBR and/or JA Family Day planning committee(s) for your region – it's a great way to represent our kids and also meet other people passionate about the cause
- Some of the most supportive friends you will have in your JA journey– will be found right here at the conference. Did I mention to exchange contact info?
- FACEBOOK – even if you don't use Facebook for any other reason, you definitely want to join the private groups for parents of JA kids. There are many groups – and they are all private so no one outside the group can see your posts. The groups are a safe, private place to ask questions, tell your story, vent and most importantly – give and get support.
- Make sure you “Like” your regional AF Facebook page so you can stay updated on current events.
- Join the Arthritis Foundation Advocacy Network so you know about issues that affect our kids. You can share the alerts with friends and family and with your new parent contacts.
- Consider having “business cards” printed or even print them yourself at home that have your name, phone number, email address and where you live. This makes it easy to share your information with others you meet at AF events as well out in the community.

Want to get involved?

- Reach out to your local staff and ask how you can get involved at the Walk or other events. Let them know you want to help and mark the dates for the next events on your calendar to follow up!
- There are a variety of volunteer opportunities with AF – which require a variety of time commitments from a few minutes to several hours at a time. So even if you are a very busy person, you can still be involved.
- Volunteer to do things you already like doing. There are so many different opportunities to volunteer, from speaking at public events, to working a booth at a health fair, stuffing envelopes, making phone calls...whatever you enjoy doing AF staff can help find something that suits you. You will undoubtedly meet others like yourself!
- If you are interested in advocacy, be sure to sign up for your state's advocacy summit or even the DC Summit – where you have the chance to share your story with our political leaders as well as meet other parents and adults with JA and RA.

Challenge:

I challenge you to exchange contact information with at least five other people you at an Arthritis Foundation event – and reach out to them within a month of returning home.