

### **Table leaders: Sara C. and Danielle V.**

We met in school in first grade and became best friends. Sara was diagnosed with JIA when she was two and Danielle was diagnosed when she was five. This is our third conference and we have made so many friends from all over the country. We also go to a camp for kids with arthritis and we can't say enough about what a great experience it is to meet other kids with arthritis.

Last year we decided to become Arthritis Advocates. First we contacted our Congressman, Brad Schneider, and met with him to tell him that kids get arthritis too and that our country needs to fund research for a cure and more pediatric rheumatologists. He was very interested in our story and invited us to visit him at his office in Washington DC. Congressman Schneider said he never knew that kids also could have arthritis and he wanted to help us and other people with arthritis. We also invited him to attend our local Walk To Cure Arthritis, and we were excited when he joined us at the walk!

In March, we traveled to DC for the Arthritis Advocacy Summit. After our training session, we met with Congressman Schneider again and the Health Legislative Assistants for our two Senators. We asked them to cosponsor three bills that benefit people with arthritis. We were thrilled when Congressman Schneider called us personally to let us know he decided to cosponsor two of the bills. Both our Senators were very interested in helping support the bills too. It was a great experience, and we are proud to have helped get more support for people with arthritis.

### **Tips to take home**

- You don't have to wait for the Advocacy Summit in DC; sometimes it is best to contact your Member of Congress' local office to set up a meeting or phone call.
- August is a good time to schedule meetings. Members of Congress are usually home in their district and meeting with constituents.
- You may not meet directly with your Congressman or Senator, but it can be just as effective to meet with their health care legislative aide.
- Meetings are usually short; plan on around 15 minutes.
- Make sure you can tell your personal story and what you are requesting within ten minutes.
- Ask to take a picture with your representative and ask if it is ok for you to post on social media.
- Dress nicely.
- We took a picture with our Congressman and then used the picture to make a thank you card, which we sent to his office after our meeting.
- Bring something to leave with your Representative. We brought a card (that we made online) with our picture and inside we asked him to sponsor the specific bills. That way he had a reminder of who we were and what we wanted.

- Don't just meet once with your Representative; try and develop a relationship. Invite them to your Arthritis Walk or Jingle Bell Run. Attend one of their town home meetings or walk with them in a parade. The more you see them, the more they will remember you and want to help.
- If you can't meet in person, send a personal email to your Legislator. They have staff that read all emails and they should contact you back. The more we get the message out about arthritis, the better!
- The Arthritis Foundation Advocacy staff will give you all the information you need for your meeting.

## Want to get involved?

- Become an Advocate for the Arthritis Foundation.
- Encourage your teens and tweens to get involved. Help them practice telling their story so they are comfortable speaking to others about how arthritis has affected them.
- Children and teens with arthritis can feel more empowered when they take action by doing things like forming a team for the Walk to Cure Arthritis or talking to their Representatives.
- Send your kids to camps for kids with arthritis or attend a local Arthritis Foundation get-together. Other children with arthritis can give your child support and understanding and they can form life-long friendships.
- Call your local newspaper to tell your child's story, especially if they have met with their Representative or are attending an event like the JBR or Walk to Cure Arthritis. Make sure you have a picture for the story.
- Don't forget to contact your State Representatives, along with your Federal Representatives. Many people are not aware the kids get arthritis too and will be more likely to help once they hear from you.
- Attend the Arthritis Foundation Advocacy Days along with your family. It is a terrific experience and you can really help to pass legislation to support people with arthritis.

## Challenge:

**Get in involved in advocacy – and then invite your child to get involved along with you!**