



**Natalie Melliere**  
**Ava Melliere**  
**2014 Jingle Bell Run/Walk**  
**Adult and Youth Honoree**  
**St. Louis, MO**

Hello, my name is Natalie Melliere, and this is me with one of my daughters, Ava. We have been chosen as the 2014 Honorees for the Arthritis Foundation's 2014 St. Louis Jingle Bell Run/Walk. I am so privileged to get this opportunity to share our story and help raise awareness for all those in the St. Louis area living with arthritis.

I was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis when I was 13 years old. I was overweight as a child, but I soon began to really focus on exercise and making a change in myself. That was all put to a halt when my right knee started to swell. I went to the doctor and they drew the fluid off, hoping that would help. Then a few weeks later, my left knee began to swell, and then my right knee again. They drew more fluid, which temporarily elevated the swelling. My left foot followed suit (primarily my middle toe). Unable to put too much pressure on my foot, a puzzled doctor put me in the hospital to figure out what could be wrong. After a week of every test you can think of, they diagnosed me with juvenile chronic arthritis, known as juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) today. While in the hospital, I started to develop red scaly dry spots, which was later diagnosed as Psoriasis. At the time, the two diseases did not have the strong connection to each other like they do today, so they were treated separately.

After being told I would not be able to participate in sports, or be as active as the other kids, my heart was breaking. With the help of the doctors at Children's Hospital and the medicines they provided, I was able to overcome the symptoms of the disease. I started running my sophomore year of high school, and it became an addiction for me. It helped me cope with the pain and embarrassment I was feeling for my joints and my skin. Today, I participate in lots of 5Ks and have run seven half marathons. I want to show my kids and others with arthritis that anything is possible with the right help and support. I started participating in the Jingle Bell Run/Walk six years ago with the hope that the funds raised would raise awareness and find a cure, for my greatest fear was passing this on to my children.

Unfortunately, my fear came true this year as one of my two-year-old twin daughters', Ava was diagnosed with JIA. It breaks my heart to see her in so much pain. At the age of two, she already has to deal with learning new things and working on her motor skills; she has to work harder to accomplish these things. When I watch her play with her twin sister and her older brother, she is always behind, slower to get to things, and unable to bend in ways they can without crying. She is tough, though. She wants to do it and do it by herself, no matter what. "I do it mom," she tells me all the time. She is a beautiful little girl who will grow to be a strong amazing woman. I know this because of the resources and support The Arthritis Foundation has provided. We have a long road ahead of us but with your help and donations, Ava and other children, and adults alike will be able to live vibrant, healthy, active lives. Please support The Arthritis Foundation by participating in the 2014 Jingle Bell Run/Walk and donating to Team Ava's Angels.

The courage and bravery shown by both Natalie and little Ava make us proud to recognize them as the 2014 St. Louis Jingle Bell Run/Walk Honorees.

**About the Arthritis Foundation**

The Arthritis Foundation ([www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)) is committed to raising awareness and reducing the unacceptable impact of arthritis, which strikes one in every five adults and 300,000 children, and is the nation's leading cause of disability. To conquer this painful, debilitating disease, we support education, research, advocacy and other vital programs and services.