

ORANGE GROVE CENTER TESTIMONIALS

“I would like to thank Darcy Owens for making my son’s, Fred Blackburn’s, dream come true. He has been a volunteer in the radio station at Chattanooga State for the past seven years. He has made a lot of friends, and it has been so good for him to be out in the community.

Thank you, Darcy, for a job well done!”

Tina Blackburn

(Mother of Fred Blackburn)

“I love Orange Grove Center. It’s the only place I’d place Ben!”

Janet Daniel

(Mother of Ben Daniel)

WHAT ORANGE GROVE MEANS TO ME

I first started at Orange Grove Center almost 20 years ago. My Mom can hardly believe it has been that long. She was pretty nervous when I had to move from Signal Center when I was 6. But I knew pretty quickly that I was in a really special place.

Let me tell you why. I found out I couldn't be lazy in my very first class. My teacher was determined to teach me all she could! She had me doing things I never thought I could do. It was just always so nice having other people do everything for me. But my teacher would have none of that. I'm a little on the lazy side but during that first year I was toileting on my own, putting on socks and shoes, shirts and pants (although sometimes I got confused and took them off when I wasn't suppose to) That always gets everyone all excited! My mom was so proud of me that first year when she saw me carrying my lunch tray to the table. I felt pretty proud myself!

I've had lots and lots of kind and patient teachers at the Center. The assistants are just as important as the teachers. I think I may have scared a few of them off but many of the good ones have been at the Center for lots of years. Sometimes even I wonder how they do it! If you like to be active, Orange Grove has lots of places to do that.

There is a huge swimming pool that I love! I have to wear a life jacket and there is always a lifeguard just in case. I like to splash and move around on my own. Some kids jump and dive and even compete in races. There are even therapy pools for the kids that need help relaxing their muscles. There is also a big gym where there is always something fun going on. I'm not much for playing ball but some people love it. We even have Game Days when we get to do all kinds of fun activities. They also have a track for walking that is great to enjoy on a sunny day. I stop a lot when I go walking but that seems to be okay. I also get to ride, a tricycle that is almost, as big as a small car! I can go pretty fast and everyone knows to get out of my way.

Just like my two brothers, Luke and Alex, I love music. I spend a lot of my time just listening and rocking out! We have music classes at the Center and the teacher makes it so much fun! Some kids sing and play instruments.

Sometimes we even have musicals with lots of kids performing. Once I got to ride a tricycle across the stage wearing a black leather jacket! I had my hair spiked up and I looked so cool!

We even get to do art at the Center. If you come to Orange Grove you will see lots of pictures on the walls. These were all made by our art teacher. Lots of kids like to draw, paint and make things with clay and he shows them how to do this. He thinks of many ways for us to be creative. My mom wishes I could slow down long enough to make something but I'm always on the move!

Lots of kids that go to my school need special help moving, walking, and talking. Orange Grove sees that we get what we need! There are all kinds of therapists doing all kinds of things to help us. Some of my friends are in wheelchairs and learn to get around the Center on their own. Some other friends use special machines to talk for them. It is so amazing!

Another great thing about Orange Grove is the medical center. I have spent a lot of time there. I don't mind going because I don't have to wait a long time to see the doctor and no one stares at me like they use to do. I get to see all kinds of important people. My ears get checked a lot and other body parts, too but usually I don't mind. The people who work there are nice to me and aren't mean to me when I am grumpy. Sometimes I get medicine that helps me get better. They even have someone to go with me when I have to go to a special doctor outside the center. The people that work there work hard to try to keep all of us healthy.

Oh! I can't forget my very favorite place at the Center-the cafeteria! I love to eat and I am good at it! They make lots of good food. All the helpers work hard to fix healthy food for us and some of us even have special diets. I'm kind of known around the Center for "sneaking" food (someone once called it stealing which my mother didn't like!) I just see something I want to eat or drink and I just take it without thinking. I am really fast! I get A's in eating!

Because of Orange Grove, when I was around fourteen, I got to move into my own room at my own house! They have lots of special houses with special people to help us become as independent as possible. I love my room. My mom painted it blue because I like water. It has sailboats and fish for the decorations. (Also, a Britney Spears poster) My mom has trouble understanding why I went from watching Barney videos to Britney videos!

I have my own DVD player which is usually going full blast! I have three roommates which I get along with most of the time. We go out to eat sometimes, to the park, or to the mall when everyone is having a good day. We even took a trip to Florida and went to Gatorland! I go home to see my mom and dad several times a month and I love that, too. Sometimes my dad picks me up in his convertible. I love to ride with my arms in the air and the wind blowing in my face. They live about 10 minutes from my house so it is nice for them.

So, as you can tell Orange Grove means everything to me. It gives me a place to go where almost everyone knows my name. Even though I don't talk back, I like being talked to. I can be myself there and feel appreciated for the unique person that I am. My Dad says my school is known throughout the southeast for its services for the handicapped. I feel lucky to be living in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

A friend of my mothers once told her "Jordan can't do much, but he sure can smile." Orange Grove helps keep the smile on my face!

Jordan LaGraff

(Son of OGC Board Member, Dan LaGraff, and wife, Karen)