

Riverside CARE Awards

Jaime, Mackenzie, and Arron O'Donnell Needham Community Service Agency



More often than you'd think, there are people we work with who actually become role models and inspirations to us, the caregivers. The O'Donnell family – mom Jaime, and kids Mackenzie and Arron – stands head and shoulder above the crowd in that company.

We met the O'Donnells almost three years ago through the Needham-based Community Service Agency. At that time, Jaime was caring for Mackenzie who struggled with school, substances, and a mood disorder; and after an uphill battle to find support in the school system for all three of her children, Jaime home-schooled older brother Paul who is autistic, and younger daughter Ava, who was diagnosed with autism and anxiety.

Jaime is a military veteran, and lives with post-traumatic-stress disorder, a trauma history from childhood, depression, Parkinson's disease, and a brain tumor. Her ex-husband and her son also have chronic tumors, and her son underwent surgery in December to have a tumor removed. Even through the unrelenting challenges of health crises and financial insecurity, during the time she received Riverside wrap-around services Jaime completed her undergraduate degree at BU and applied to grad school.

Through her commitment and determination, today we are happy to know that Mackenzie has finished school, lives independently, and has a loyal clientele as a dog groomer at Petco. Ava came out as transgender and became Arron. With Jaime's unwavering support and advocacy, he found his way to LGBTQ groups and welcoming communities, and to a therapeutic school program in Medfield. That transition was a big challenge and still is, but Arron slowly began to connect with teachers, peers, and clinicians, and now takes mainstream classes, successfully advocated for a gender-neutral bathroom, and started a Gay Students Alliance at school.

Jaime, Mackenzie, and Arron – thank you for inspiring us!!