

Our dream of having the twins together in a high-quality program, specializing in the needs of adults with autism, came true!

Annual Appeal 2021

As we look back on the last 23 years, we could never have imagined Jared and Jonathan would complete the New York City Marathon. And yet, it feels like our family has been training for this journey our whole lives. Our boys were both fun, energetic, and joyful babies — identical twins — who had a special bond from the start. In fact, their twinship was so strong that we were not terribly concerned with delays in their expressive language, because they clearly had their own way of communicating with one another. However, after they stopped responding to their names and following directions and it seemed as though they could no longer hear us speaking to them, we sought answers. We received an autism diagnosis right around their second birthday.

We knew that autism could be a lonely place, but we found comfort that Jared and Jonathan had each other. Our goal as a family was to always have them together — learning and growing alongside each other. We were lucky enough to have them placed into a school program when they were three years old, where they remained until they were 21. Growing up, Jared and Jonathan enjoyed drawing, design, and building. They started with Tinker Toys, and K'Nex and over time progressed to creating their own structures. They have a huge love of amusement parks and fast roller coasters. And they enjoy playing sports with their Challenger teams. In their high school program, they were introduced to running through cross country which began their interest in the sport — something we tried to foster, even though we were not runners ourselves. We were fortunate to find an organization that paired Jared and Jonathan with runners to help them in their training so that they could participate and succeed in mainstream sports. We wanted them to continue to explore these interests — and find new ones — as they grew into adulthood. And we wanted them to be able to do that together, if possible.

Although we were lucky with the boys' education program, we knew that aging out of the educational system was akin to falling off a cliff. Other parents and professionals had warned us that there were few adequate adult programs, so we began our research three years prior to their graduation. We knew that the programs we felt would be appropriate for Jared and Jonathan would be selective in their choosing of learners and might not have room for both boys once they graduated; in fact, it would be a longshot. **Some programs stood out from the others — Alpine Learning Group was a standout.** When we submitted our intake request, we let them know we were willing to separate the twins if only one



spot became available. We hoped that if at least one of our boys could gain entry to a quality program, at some point another opening would be available and they would be together again. Unfortunately, there were no available openings at Alpine, and we were forced to look elsewhere for both boys.

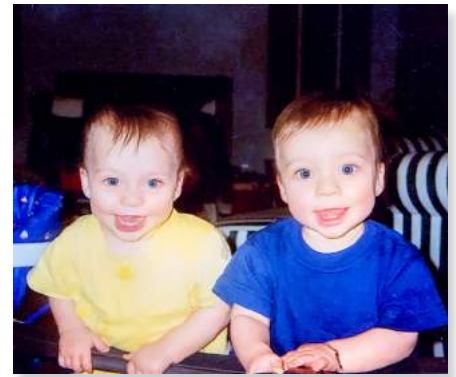
About a year later, in January 2020, we were contacted by Alpine Learning Group. They were anticipating an opening in the spring and would like to consider either Jared or Jonathan. Over the course of the next few months, both boys would be accepted into Alpine's Adult Program; they both started during the pandemic with a virtual program. Our dream of having the twins together in a high-quality program, specializing in the needs of adults with autism, came true!

Although our family's relationship with Alpine began only recently, the impact it has had on our family has been life changing. Alpine's program maintains a low client-to-staff ratio, which allowed the staff to focus on getting to know and support Jared and Jonathan's interests and strengths. Alpine continues to foster their independence and interdependence. In such a short time, they've accomplished incredible things. Jared got a job at Moe's a few days a week. So far, he has prepared the individual salsa cups that go with each order—filling them, securing the lid, and storing them neatly in the bins that go in the refrigerator. He has also helped to organize incoming deliveries. We are hopeful that Jonathan will soon follow with a job of his own! Alpine has helped them adjust to new routines, including the transition out of virtual learning and into the (new-for-them) building. Alpine also provided daily support in recent months as Jared and Jonathan took on an incredible physical challenge. In early November, they ran and completed the New York City Marathon, together! We are so proud of them and this huge accomplishment!

Adult services in New Jersey are underfunded, making it necessary to fundraise in order to provide the specialized support and programming we have found here at Alpine Learning Group. **We are truly grateful that Jared and Jonathan have this opportunity to continue to grow as individuals alongside each other throughout their adult years, and to do so as part of the Alpine Family.**

Fundraisers like this one ensure that Alpine continues to provide uncompromised programs and services for learners of all ages and their families. Your participation will help provide truly unique opportunities for everyone in the Alpine Community. Can we count on your donation to make it possible for other families to have a story like ours?

Sincerely,
Paola & Joseph Yammarino



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