

Shawn & Adrianna

“ Through the years, we formed amazing relationships at Valley Children’s. We always want to support them any way we can. ”

- Dianne, Shawn & Adrianna’s Mom

Dianne Vanaman is a proud parent of two children with special needs, Shawn, 20, and Adrianna, 17. Adopted separately at very young ages, Shawn and Adrianna were both born with spina bifida, a birth defect in which a baby’s spinal cord fails to develop properly. Because of the developmental challenges of spina bifida, the children have been patients at Valley Children’s Hospital since they were babies. “We have spent a lot of time at the hill,” Dianne says, referring to the Hospital as the “Castle on the Hill.”

The siblings have some differences on how the disorder has affected them. Shawn has mobility with the help of leg braces, while Adrianna is not mobile at all, with no feeling from the waist down. They see multiple specialties from neurology to orthopaedics, nephrology and urology. Dianne says they are faced with random incidents all the time, such as accidental skin burns to unexpected infections so there are often visits to wound care specialists and to their pediatrician. Dianne admits she doesn’t always have “nerves of steel” to take on the everyday challenges of caregiving. But she says she is just like any other parent who has real moments of struggles and triumphs, stating, “The kids are troopers. If I could take this for them, I would.”

Both Shawn and Adrianna are involved with Valley Children’s Adaptive Sports Program, which provides free recreational and athletic experiences for those with disabilities. Shawn participates in rock climbing, wheelchair basketball and track and field, but his favorite of all the activities is water skiing. Adrianna enjoys doing the shotput, javelin and discus.

Over the past 20 years, the Vanamans have established so many close relationships with Valley Children’s staff, including the therapy dogs. Dianne recalls one of her son’s surgeons even taking time to attend Shawn’s basketball tournament when it came through his city. Dianne also remembers a nurse who went above and beyond caring for Adrianna during an inpatient stay. The nurse prepared a special setup for Adrianna’s room, then washed and groomed her hair so attentively.

Dianne reaffirms, “We’ve always had such positive experiences at Valley Children’s. We’ve met many wonderful people. It is top-notch. They truly care.”

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