Special Friends
FOUNDATION
SPECIALIZED SOLUTIONS FOR FAMILIES. FOR LIFE.

The Campaign for Support

One Family's Search for Answers

When Chris and Carol Garavente's son Louis was born with a rare genetic condition in 1994, they found themselves navigating a journey familiar to many families of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities: uncertainty, isolation, and an overwhelming search for answers.

Like countless families facing a diagnosis, they wanted more than services. They wanted opportunity. They wanted belonging. Most importantly, they wanted to know that Louis would be surrounded by compassionate, capable people throughout his life.

Along the way, they discovered something as important as services and resources: they found special friends — people who offered guidance, understanding, encouragement, and hope. Those relationships inspired the creation of **Special Friends Foundation in 1997**.

Louis

Meeting the Growing Need

What began as one family's response to a deeply personal challenge has grown into a lifeline for families with adult children living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Today, the name Special Friends represents not only the individuals served by the organization, but also the community of caregivers, staff, donors, volunteers, and families who ensure no one walks this journey alone.

Over nearly three decades, that founding spirit has shaped a distinctive model of care—one built not around large programs or one-size-fits-all, but around relationships and the needs of each individual. Today, Special Friends serves individuals and families throughout Southeastern Pennsylvania with residential services, day services, in-home supports, job coaching, behavioral supports, and family services. The true power of Special Friends lies in its model that focuses on each individual.

And the need for this model has never been greater.

Our Mission:

To ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities live lives marked by dignity, purpose, and joy. Founded in 1997, our work is rooted in the belief that every person—regardless of ability—deserves to thrive in a community that embraces their humanity, honors their potential, and supports them and their families across adulthood.

Buey

The Campaign for Special Friends

Across Pennsylvania, more than 13,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have already been approved for services and funding yet remain on waiting lists for the support they need. For these individuals and their families, approval does not necessarily mean access. It can mean months or years of waiting for residential services, day programs, behavioral supports, and other resources that make fuller, more independent lives possible.

Special Friends has the experience, expertise, and proven model to help close that gap! We need increased capacity to meet this growing need.

Through a $15 million investment, **Special Friends** will acquire and transform a 25,000-square-foot facility into a center for care, learning, training, and community, while establishing a $3 to $4 million endowment to provide ongoing support for programs, staff, facilities, and needs not fully covered by Medicaid and annual operating revenue.

The new center will do more than allow **Special Friends** to serve more people directly. It will:

- **Expand day services and community programming**, creating more opportunities for individuals to build skills, relationships, independence, and confidence.
- **Create opportunities for residential growth**, extending Special Friends' small-home, highly individualized model to more people and families.
- **Strengthen behavioral supports**, with dedicated therapeutic spaces and greater access to individualized services for skill building.
- **Provide more support for families**, including resources, guidance, connection, and opportunities for respite.
- **Develop more providers and caregivers,** sharing Special Friends' experience and expertise with those seeking to create high-quality, community-based services.
- **Invest in the people who provide care,** through training, professional development, leadership development, and efforts to retain skilled, committed staff.
- **Build long-term financial capacity**, through an endowment that can support programs, staff, facilities, and needs not fully covered by Medicaid and annual operating revenue.

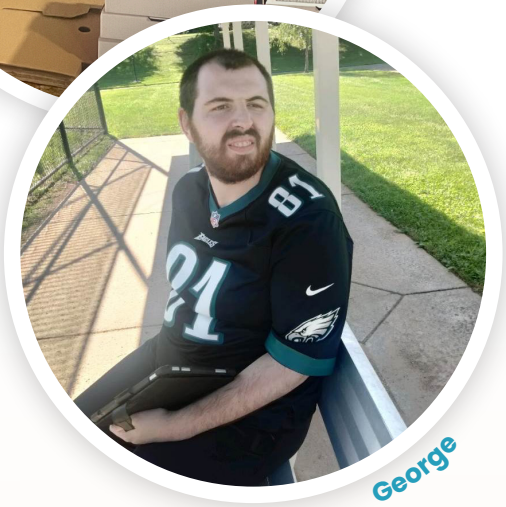
The **Campaign for Special Friends** is an opportunity to expand a deeply personal model of care—reaching more individuals, strengthening more families, and extending the impact of Special Friends far beyond its own walls.

A Person-Centered Model of Care

In a system often defined by waiting lists, limited capacity, and services designed to meet the needs of many, Special Friends has built a deliberately personal model of support. Every individual served by Special Friends is recognized not simply as a diagnosis or a service recipient, but as a person with unique strengths, interests, relationships, goals, and potential. That philosophy shapes every aspect of the organization's work.

Louis

Nasser



George

Care Built Around the Individual. Special Friends begins with the individual. Services are designed around each person's needs, abilities, goals, and circumstances. Staff members take the time to understand how an individual communicates, what creates anxiety or confidence, what skills they want to build, what brings them joy, and what support will help them participate more fully in daily life.

In its behavioral services, Special Friends provides customized 1:1 support to individuals living at home or in the community. Specialists work consistently with individuals and families to develop practical, individualized strategies that improve communication, strengthen emotional regulation, build skills, and reduce behaviors that can interfere with daily life.

Small Homes That Foster Belonging. Special Friends intentionally operates small, family-like residences that typically serve just two or three people per residence. The small scale matters. It allows routines to reflect the needs and preferences of the people who live in the home. It gives staff the opportunity to get to know residents well. It creates an environment where relationships, stability, personal attention, and a sense of belonging are part of everyday life.

Support for Every Stage of Life. The needs of individuals and families change over time. Special Friends has developed a continuum of services designed to respond to those changing needs, including:

- **Family Services** helps families navigate complex systems, identify resources, connect with therapy and other supports, access financial assistance where available, and find guidance and peer connection.
- **Services** creates opportunities for continued learning, life-skills development, community participation, employment support, social connection, in-home supports, and greater independence.
- **Behavioral Supports** provides tailored interventions that strengthen communication, emotional regulation, social interaction, self-care, and other skills that improve daily life.
- **Residential Services** provides safe, stable, small-scale homes where adults receive the assistance they need while participating fully in the life of their communities.

"When we used to think about moving our son George from the education system to the adult disability system at age 21, we worried that we would not be able to find a day program that would allow him to keep learning and enjoying all of the kinds of activities that he participated in during his school years. George has an intellectual disability and profound autism; he is non-verbal and so communication can be a challenge. He is a very happy person but really needs to be in a setting where staff can understand and support his needs. We were so grateful to discover Special Friends! If we had to design a program for George, this is what we would imagine."

— Gabrielle, George's mother

The Challenge: Servicing the Need

For thousands of Pennsylvania families caring for individuals with developmental disabilities, the need for support is immediate, but access is not. The waiting list is long, and the burden of caring for their loved ones is an ever-present source of struggle.

But the need is not simply for more openings in more programs. The need is for **quality**.

Families are looking for services that recognize the **individuality** of their loved one. They are looking for **consistency** in a field often challenged by staff turnover. They are looking for people who will listen, adapt, and build relationships.

Special Friends has demonstrated that this kind of care is possible. Demand for its services continues to grow. But the organization has reached the limits of what it can accomplish within its current footprint.

The challenge is no longer proving that the model works. The challenge is creating the capacity to extend it to more people.

The Solution: Building on What Works

As an investment in a model that is already changing lives, Special Friends plans to acquire and transform a 25,000-square-foot facility in Delaware, Chester or Montgomery County into a center for care, learning, training, and community.

The center is not an end in itself. It is the infrastructure Special Friends needs to serve more people, strengthen families, invest in caregivers, develop future providers, and build the capacity required for responsible growth.

Planned spaces include areas for day programming, therapeutic and sensory supports, activities, family resources and respite, outdoor gardens, job skills, and training for caregivers and future providers.

Together, the facility and campaign investments will advance the following four closely connected priorities.

1 Expanding Direct Services.

Thomas

The most immediate impact of the campaign will be the ability to serve more individuals and families. The new center will significantly expand day services and community-based programming, creating more opportunities for continued learning, life-skills development, social connection, recreation, employment support, and greater independence.

Dedicated space will also strengthen behavioral support services. Individuals and families will have access to environments designed for therapeutic work and individualized support, helping people strengthen communication, emotional regulation, self-care, social skills, and other abilities that improve daily life. The goal is not simply to create more program openings. It is to make more of the right kind of support available: personal, flexible, consistent, and built around the individual.

2 Supporting Families Across a Lifetime.

Danny

Disability affects an entire family, and families' needs change over time. The new center will provide a more substantial home for family resources, guidance, education, and connection. It will create space where families can find practical help, learn from experienced professionals and one another, and build relationships with others who understand the journey.

This work reflects the founding spirit of Special Friends. Chris and Carol Garavente began by searching for answers for their own family. Along the way, they found people who shared knowledge, offered encouragement, and helped them move forward. The new center will make it possible for Special Friends to provide that same sense of connection and practical support to many more families.

3 Investing in Caregivers. Developing Future Providers.

Kiki

Exceptional care depends on exceptional people—from the professionals who provide daily support and behavioral services to the managers and leaders who help ensure quality and consistency across the organization. The campaign will invest in training, professional development, leadership development, and the organizational systems needed to recruit and retain skilled, committed caregivers.

Special Friends' commitment to developing people extends beyond its own organization. Drawing on nearly three decades of experience, Special Friends helps individuals and organizations navigate the process of becoming licensed providers. The new center will create greater capacity for training, mentorship, and practical guidance—helping more providers develop high-quality, community-based services.

4 Securing the Future.

Nasser

Growth requires more than space. It requires the financial capacity to maintain what is built and respond to needs as they change. Of the Campaign for Special Friends' $15 million goal, $3 to $4 million will establish and grow an endowment that will provide an ongoing source of support for programs, staff, facilities, and needs not fully covered by Medicaid and annual operating revenue.

Public funding can pay for many direct services, but it does not cover every cost required to maintain strong programs and facilities, invest in staff, respond to emerging needs, or adapt services as individuals' and families' circumstances change. The endowment will give Special Friends greater financial stability and flexibility as the organization grows. Together with the new center, it will provide the physical and financial infrastructure needed to serve more people while maintaining the personal, individualized approach that defines Special Friends.

Building More Than a Facility

Nearly three decades ago, Chris and Carol Garavente began searching for a better future for their son. Today, that search has become a source of hope for many other families.

The Campaign for Special Friends will allow that hope—and the practical support behind it—to reach many more. Together, we can expand access to individualized care, strengthen families, invest in caregivers, develop future providers, and create more opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live lives marked by dignity, purpose, and joy. The Campaign for Special Friends is more than acquiring and renovating a building. It is about expanding a proven, deeply personal model of care and giving Special Friends the capacity to respond to a need that is already here and growing every day.

> Kiki has been involved with many service providers both day and night for several decades. Of all the service providers we have used, Special Friends is the most professional, empathetic, and knowledgeable of all these. This includes both the direct care staff and the administrators. Our daughter is thriving and her anxiety is significantly less than it has ever been. She is the happiest she has been in decades."
>
> — Larry and Andrea, Kiki's parents

One Campaign. Maximum Impact.

By investing in expanded space, people, programs, provider development, and long-term financial capacity, the Campaign for Special Friends will directly benefit people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families—while strengthening the entire organization's ability to serve them.

Your Participation Matters. Medicaid provides essential funding for many direct services, but it does not cover every cost of expanding and maintaining strong programs and facilities, investing in caregivers, supporting families, or responding to needs as they change. Your philanthropic commitment will provide the flexibility to make those investments possible.

There are many ways to support The Campaign for Special Friends, including outright gifts, multi-year pledges, appreciated securities, donor-advised funds, qualified charitable distributions, matching gifts, and planned gifts.

Campaign Goal	$14.2 Million
$10.2M	*Facility Acquisition and Transformation.* Acquire and transform a 25,000-square-foot center for care, learning, training, family support, and community.
$4M	*Endowment.* Ongoing source of support for programs, caregivers, facilities, and needs not fully covered by Medicaid and annual operating revenue.

Scan the QR code for more about the Campaign and ways to give or visit us at www.specialfriends.org.

To discuss your gift or learn more about the campaign, please contact:

Chris Garavente, *Campaign Chair*
EMAIL: chris@specialfriends.org
PHONE: 908.295.0441

Marc Greenberger, *Campaign Co-chair*
EMAIL: marc.greenberger@mpgllc.com
PHONE: 609.658.3260

All building images utilized are renderings for representation only.