



November 20th, 2021

Dear Friends,

“You’re almost there. You got this!” These are the lies shouted by my cross-country coach running alongside me in the first half mile of a 5K race. Recently, I repeated these words running alongside my youngest. On the way home from the race, he gave me a speech about how frustrating it was that my words were so obviously false. Are they, though?

As we wrap up our 25th anniversary celebration, many have asked: How do you keep doing this work in a state so hostile to your clients, with limited resources, and unlimited need? The answer is people like my coach, who every day across a quarter century have provided us encouragement, solidarity, and hope. Sometimes in order keep going we need someone to remind us of how far we have come, because it gets overwhelming to think about how far we have to go. The story of TJC is thousands running with us or providing support, reminding us when we feel worn out that we are not alone. Investing their time, talents, treasure and goodness, a host of clients, staffers, volunteers and collaborators have echoed this truth: **because we are together, we ARE almost there.**

This year our clients needed TJC more than ever. And when we needed it the most, TJC had the village that is always there to run with us and sustain our work. Two stories demonstrate just how richly blessed TJC has been.

The year began with our offices being demolished by an Atlanta developer who figured that what our pandemic-stricken city needed most was another luxury hotel. His plan was to make the demolition around us so intolerable that we would leave before our lease was up. He would call to ask, “Have you had enough yet?” I gave him the endurance runner’s reply: “We’re makin’ it okay,” then asked in return, “Would you like to make a donation to our capital campaign, so that we can leave?” Eventually, he did, so we did. TJC’s village kicked into action, enabling us to buy a derelict liquor store to become TJC’s permanent home. We are excited that when we move in next year, our renovated home will be a community asset and a landmark celebrating justice.

The other story involved the Trump Administration’s agreement with our state to convert TennCare into the nation’s first Medicaid block grant. A Molotov cocktail tossed at the Medicaid program on the way out the door, the scheme would allow Tennessee to siphon money out of TennCare into other state “projects.” The block grant threatens not just the 1.6 million Tennesseans enrolled in TennCare but creates a precedent that imperils the other 81 million Americans who also rely on Medicaid as the nation’s health care safety net.

We believe in the adage, “if you want to get something done, ask a busy person.” That’s why, when we were looking for a way to deal with this new threat, we turned to the busiest people we know — parents caring for children with special health care needs. Among them were Linda and Andrew Morgan. After raising their own kids, Linda and Andrew took in foster children, like Kelton, who have special health care needs. Kelton, now 8, is nonverbal but has a million-dollar smile. The Morgans fell in love with him and say matter-of-factly, “so, of course, we adopted him.” He requires a ventilator, tube feeding and nursing care. The state promised that TennCare would be there to meet Kelton’s needs, but that’s not how it turned out. Having had to battle TennCare’s HMO to maintain his care, Linda and Andrew know that the last thing children like Kelton need is a block grant that rewards TennCare and its HMOs for cutting corners on patient care.

The Morgans joined several other courageous TJC clients and a dedicated pediatrician in a lawsuit that TJC filed with the help of generous co-counsel, seeking to strike down the block grant. In August, the Justice Department asked us to pause the lawsuit, to allow the new administration to take public comments and reconsider the approval. The agreement gave Team TJC just 30 days to generate public comments that would comprise the administrative record on which federal officials will base their new decision. Our clients, friends and partners submitted nearly 3,000 comments opposing the block grant, with state officials and their contractors only able to muster 25 comments in support. A long list of national health organizations like the American Cancer Society and American Academy of Pediatrics answered our call. Civil rights groups explained how the block grant would worsen racial inequities. Rural leaders warned of the impact on their communities. That kind of response makes us hope that “we’re almost there,” and that the block grant will be rescinded. If it is, it will be because of TJC’s many friends, like the Morgans, who don’t just cheer from the sidelines, but jump in to run with us.

During a year uniquely filled with fear, suffering and division, but also goodness and hope, we at TJC feel so blessed to be able every day to keep running the race. The finish line may not be in sight, but because of you, we know we are almost there. We will keep moving forward with your transformative encouragement and support.

Warm regards,



Michele Johnson
Executive Director