

## **Janna Murrell**

Janna Murrell has been married for 36 years and has three kids – Lydia (32 years of age), Tucker (26), and Sydney (24). Tucker introduced the family to the disability world when he was born three months early and, on his last day at the hospital, Janna and her husband were told that he had a brain injury called Periventricular Leukomalacia (PVL) with the likelihood it would result in cerebral palsy (CP). Sydney was a surprise addition to the family and was also three months early, but there were no lingering effects from her early birth. Sydney is an opera singer and is Tucker’s “partner in crime.” Janna and her family live in the Superstition Mountain Foothills, east of Phoenix.

Janna became a volunteer with Raising Special Kids in 1998, after experiencing firsthand the value of parent-to-parent support when Tucker was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. After working with families in the nonprofit arena for 12 years, Janna joined the staff at Raising Special Kids in 2008 and has worn several hats: Family Support Specialist, Director of Family Support and Education, and now Assistant Executive Director.

Janna is a self-described sunshine bully who loves gardening. She grew up in east Tennessee on a dairy farm, so one would think that she would be able to pick up gardening with ease. However, gardening in eastern Tennessee and gardening in Arizona are completely different. Janna also loves going RVing with her family; they have an RV with a lift, so that Tucker can also enjoy the trips. (Side note: staff member Jason Snead plans to borrow that RV someday.) If Janna had a magic wand and unlimited funds she would buy a gigantic house in South Carolina next to the beach.

Janna believes that one of the biggest barriers for the disability community is societal indifference, meaning that some people in the community at large (outside the disability community) perceive that people with disabilities are less-than or forever childlike. She also believes that as our children with disabilities grow into adulthood, there are fewer opportunities for meaningful and inclusive employment and recreational experiences. Janna speaks about the generational barriers she sees in her own family with her parents and grandparents. It should not be “inspirational” if somebody with a disability is out enjoying their life, doing such things as working, being married, having kids, or attending a baseball game.

Janna hopes to accomplish two primary things with the Council: First, she wants to be a part of the solution in moving the goals and objectives of the Council forward. Second,

she feels that it is her responsibility to ensure that parents/practitioners have higher expectations for children with disabilities because the system is too deficit-based and it is necessary to set the bar high from the beginning of their lives. Janna feels honored to serve on the Council and takes it very seriously. She appreciates so much the Council staff as they are, she says, the most professional, passionate, and intelligent team. Janna says, "It is a joy to work alongside each and every one."