

# UPPER **ThisWeek** Upper Arlington

## Wheelchair doesn't mean Cottie Jarrow is disabled

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**By CATHY WOGAN**

*ThisWeek Staff Writer*

It was 1993 when Jane Jarrow made a trip to Saigon, Vietnam.

Jarrow, a resident of Upper Arlington who began her career as a speech therapist, has a private consulting business called Disability Access Information and Support (DAIS).

She works with colleges and universities to serve students in higher education who have disabilities.

Jarrow made the trip to Vietnam as part of a technical assistance mission to look at state-of-the art facilities for children with disabilities.

"On the last day we were there, we visited an orphanage that was specifically for kids with disabilities," she said.

While the orphanage was not on the itinerary, the group she was with decided to see if it could be added to their free day since they had heard so much about it.

The orphanage had been part of the Catholic charities, according to Jarrow, but was taken over by the government after the 1975 fall of Saigon.

"You had the feeling in Vietnam that things were pretty bad for the first 10 years and had gotten progressively better since then," she said.

In about 1988, someone from the government examined the orphanage and said it was not humane. It was turned back over to the Catholic Church for operation.

"What most people don't know is that although Vietnam is a communist country, they have always had freedom of religion in Vietnam," said Jarrow. "About 60 percent of the people in Saigon are practicing Catholics, and we are talking about 7-million."

A large number of professional people were willing to donate their time to the orphanage.

"The government was giving them \$5 per month per child in support," Jarrow said. "They figured it cost them \$32 per month per child to give the kind of support they wanted, but they were making it because of all the contributions they got."



**By David Rea/ThisWeek**

**Cottie Jarrow, an eighth-grader at Jones Middle School, has organized a fund-raiser for Canine Companions as part of her community service hours.\*)**

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Two hundred and twenty-five children were in the orphanage at the time of Jarrow's visit, and more than 150 were in diapers.

"This was the cleanest place I have ever been in. There was no smell," she said. "I have never been in a residential institution in the U.S. that was as clean as this place was. We're talking 108 degrees the day we were there. It was perfectly clean. The reason it is, is because they have all of this staffing."

Vietnamese women donate their time to the orphanage so the staffing ratio is four children to one adult.

"They took us on a tour and we got in a room where they were doing physical therapy and all of the other kids were lying on the floor on mats, doing their thing," said Jarrow.

"There was one little girl sitting in a high chair by herself over in the corner. She had fallen and broken her leg. Her leg was in a cast, but it was time to be in physical therapy so they had brought her in with all the others to keep things on schedule. I walked over and got down in front of her and kind of coaxed her and held my finger out and she leaned over and grabbed my finger and kind of smiled at me."

In that moment, the child wormed her way into Jarrow's heart.

"Nine months later I brought her home," she said of her daughter, Cottie.

Cottie Jarrow, who was 2 1/2 years old when they met, is now 14 and is a student at Jones Middle School.

Cottie has cerebral palsy. She operates a motorized wheelchair for mobility and uses sign language most of the time. Both her mother and an interpreter at school help convey her thoughts to others, but she clearly understands what others say.

Jarrow said her daughter doesn't think about her wheelchair or disabilities as being the central focus of who she is.

"We have always found ways around it," Jarrow said. "My classic story is about three weeks before the end of fifth grade, we're sitting at dinner one night and she looks at me and signs, 'Can I be sick and stay home from school tomorrow?' and I said 'No.' She said 'O.K.' and went back to eating.

"I said 'Cottie, why did you ask?' She laid down her fork and with great drama signed, 'Because Mr. Long is going to make us run one mile in P.E. tomorrow and I just can't face it.' So about three days later I was talking to her gym teacher and I told him the story and he said, 'Oh that explains it.' I said 'Explains what?' He said when she finished the one-mile run, she sat on the sidelines and panted with the rest of them. He said, 'You know I don't cut her much slack. I said Cottie you were sitting down.'"

Moving her thumb back and forth, she indicated her thumb would never be the same.

"She doesn't see herself as having a significantly different perspective of the world," Jarrow said.

When her daughter's friends first got into playing intramural soccer, Jarrow thought her daughter would like to be the team manager.

"We went out one time and sat there and watched the rest of the kids," Jarrow said. "She said 'Why am I here?' She just had no desire to do anything that she could not do in the same way everyone else did. There are enough things she can do just like everybody else."

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