



*Debbie Rivers was the first guest at La Jolla Family House, which opened in October 2020. The house provides guests a supportive place to stay while their loved ones are in the hospital and offers several services and resources. Instead of driving nearly four hours round trip every day, Debbie was just walking distance from her husband in the hospital during her stay at the house.*

## **A New Home Away from Home**

### **La Jolla Family House provides refuge and respite for families with a loved one in critical or long-term care at UC San Diego Health**

Debbie Rivers describes walking into the new La Jolla Family House at UC San Diego Health as a warm hug. “I was hesitant at first because I didn’t really know what to expect, but when I walked through those doors, I was welcomed with open arms.”

Rivers' husband had been admitted to Jacobs Medical Center. The couple live in Irvine, and Rivers was driving back and forth nearly four hours round-trip every day, while also trying to work remotely as a math professor. "It was really hard and exhausting."

A week into this grueling routine, a nurse manager recommended the [La Jolla Family House](#) to Rivers. The house was opening its doors for the first time, and Rivers would be its first guest.

The house opened in October.

"It was a great honor to have Debbie as our first guest in our home," said Denise Capozzi, director of the Family Houses at UC San Diego Health. "The La Jolla Family House was in development for nearly seven years, so when Debbie walked through our doors, there was a lot of pride in seeing our vision come to life and knowing we were providing her with a safe and supportive environment during a difficult time.



*Denise Capozzi is the director of the Family Houses at UC San Diego Health. Her team works closely with guests to make sure all their needs are met throughout their entire stay.*

"We have guests who come from several miles or several states away. Many tell us that our housing was a key part of being able to access care at UC San Diego Health, our region's only academic medical center."

The La Jolla Family House is within walking distance to clinical facilities on UC San Diego Health's La Jolla campus, such as [Jacobs Medical Center](#), [Moore's Cancer Center](#) and [Sulpizio Cardiovascular Center](#).



*A glimpse into the living room of a two-bedroom apartment at La Jolla Family House. These 15 apartments include a full kitchen. These apartment amenities allow for families who may need to be isolated from other guests, such as in the case of bone marrow transplant patients with immunosuppressed health, to have a safe environment.*

"Numerous research studies have shown that having family nearby and able to participate in care plans leads to better clinical outcomes as well as overall satisfaction for patients and their loved ones," said Capozzi. "Our housing gives guests like Debbie a place to sleep or rest, a kitchen, which we call 'the heart of the house,' to prepare meals, a spot to do laundry and time to process all the emotions that come with having a family member in the hospital."

The La Jolla Family House includes the following amenities:

- 25 guest rooms
- 15 furnished two-bedroom apartments with full kitchen

- Community lounges
- Community kitchen
- Laundry and shared community areas
- Tranquility garden and patio
- Supportive services

“As soon as I arrived, it felt like a home away from home,” said Rivers. “There was a handwritten note and a welcome bag with special soaps and lotions. It made a world of difference. For the first time in what felt like a long time, I could exhale a bit. I was in a loving environment and just a short walk away from my husband in the hospital. I even had everything I needed in the house to bake my husband a cake on his birthday.”

The La Jolla location is an extension of services that also include Bannister Family House in Hillcrest, which has been serving guests for 26 years. Approximately 6,500 families have called it “home” over the years.

“The trip from Hillcrest to La Jolla is nearly 14 miles. Now, it is even more convenient for these families with a loved one in La Jolla because they are just minutes away and within walking distance,” said Capozzi.



*One of 25 guest rooms at La Jolla Family House where guests will find a home away from home.*

Philanthropy plays a key role in the La Jolla Family House, with more than \$200,000 in gifts to support its programs to date. While a \$10 million naming opportunity for the entire facility is still critical and vital for continuing this program, the many smaller gifts being made to support the program have helped to continue to keep the doors open for families in need.

The La Jolla Family House is part of a collaborative environment that includes student housing, fitness centers and dining options. There are also community spaces to interact with other families facing similar challenges.

“Some of the most common feedback we receive from guests is that it was incredibly impactful to be surrounded by other people going through the same experience,” said Capozzi.

Due to the global pandemic, safety measures, such as masking, social distancing and increased sanitizing and cleaning are in place, but that doesn’t prevent bonds from forming.

“There was one night when I came back from the hospital really late, and one of the staff had packaged up a dinner plate, waiting for me in my refrigerator,” said Rivers. “That act of kindness meant so much to me and will stick with me for a long time. In speaking with other guests that I had met



*The community kitchen at La Jolla Family House. It is referred to as the 'heart of the house'.*

during my stay, they shared similar stories with me. There was a special connection that we all had for each other stemming from the challenges we were all facing. We were a support group of strangers who quickly became friends.”

“It really is a team effort to ensure each family receives the comprehensive care and resources they need—every day at any time,” said Capozzi.

In addition to housing, the program also offers resources like an onsite social worker to help with many of the challenges a family might face, as well as hosted meals and virtual experiences to help brighten the day of all the guests.

Rivers is back home now but will always remember her time at La Jolla Family House. “The house and staff were there for me when I really needed them. They helped me navigate an overwhelming period and I will always hold them close to my heart.”



*The team at the La Jolla Family House celebrating the opening of the house to guests.*

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