

Planting Seeds of Hope



From enjoying a home-cooked meal in his first Friendship Ark home to spending time with staff and housemates at area parks and attractions now, Craig has always been able to feel right at home.



As we prepare to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Friendship Ark in 2025, we would like to introduce you to a very special member of the Friendship Ark family, our friend Craig. Craig has been with Friendship Ark the longest and was one of the first residents to occupy a Friendship Ark home when he moved from his hometown to Ames in 2001.

On that day almost 25 years ago, a farm family from southern Iowa planted **Seeds of Hope** when they decided to trust Friendship Ark with the care for their loved one. Craig has been a beloved and valued member of the Friendship Ark family ever since and the bond he has formed with his housemates, other core members and his staff is strong. When Craig moved into a Friendship Ark home so many years ago, he found more than just a place to live and reliable care, he found a place to belong.

For many of our core members, Friendship Ark offers an opportunity to gain growing independence and may result in them moving on to live in their own apartment or home. For Craig, Friendship Ark has been there to help grow his skills while also providing the comfort of a forever home.

Providing personalized, person-centered care is at the heart of our mission. Craig's room, where he likes to pursue his long-time hobby of crocheting long scarves, features a farm mural. Craig also had the opportunity to live his Best Day Ever by visiting a John Deere plant.



During his time living at Friendship Ark, Craig has experienced moving from this first Friendship Ark home, which was an existing house Friendship Ark had bought, to a brand-new house. This house was built specifically with the needs of our core members in mind, featuring private, spacious bedrooms and large and comfortable common spaces ideal for gathering with housemates and staff. Craig loves the farm life and everything John Deere and was able to personalize his room with a farm mural painting and even had the opportunity to tour a John Deere plant and belong to a tractor club for a while. Craig loves to sit outside in front of his home to watch traffic go by, often stating, “there he goes” as vehicles and motorcycles go by. He also enjoys his morning coffee, reading the daily newspaper and feeding the birds and the squirrels.

Craig told us that his favorite part of living at Friendship Ark is that he gets to spend time with people and see his friends every day. His favorite places to go are local parks and the Mainstream Living Center which he has considered to be his work for many years. Craig shared that he enjoys a good tenderloin with fries and 7-Up and when asked what he would like everyone to know about him, he responded that people can just talk to him and learn what they would like to know.

Since Craig moved into a Friendship Ark home in 2001, our staff have been there to help him pursue his passions, explore his interests, learn new skills and make him feel cared for.



We asked Craig's niece, Cindy, who serves as his guardian, to tell us a little bit about Craig's life before he joined Friendship Ark and the family's decision that this move would be right for him. Cindy and Craig grew up together and oftentimes found themselves in a little mischief, which Craig thought was quite funny at the time. Craig's first placement was with an agency closer to his hometown, however, when he struggled after the death of a close relative, this was no longer a good fit for his needs. Coincidentally, someone connected to Friendship Ark knew of Craig and suggested that he and his family take a visit. Upon visiting they discovered the home was more residential in nature and much different from his previous placement, which felt more like a facility. This, combined with the fact that there would be only two other housemates, reassured the family that he would receive the staff support he needed at that time.

Cindy shared that Craig was thrilled with having a room of his own, the idea of getting new furnishings and, most of all, being able to decorate with his favorite John Deere theme. Craig's family liked the staff to core member ratio and the spiritual aspect of Friendship Ark. Cindy wrote, "Friendship Ark offers Craig the best options. He has the highest degree of independence that he can have based on his level of needs and has attentive and respectful staff who truly seem to care. In Andy (Site Supervisor), Craig has found the brother he never had. It is my dream that Craig never has to go through another placement, and it seems this is a priority for Friendship Ark as well. **I know it's their job, but the level of love and commitment that Craig and the other residents share is amazing.**"

Friendship Ark Site Supervisor, Andy, has been a constant in Craig's life for more than ten years. While Craig has a close relationship with many staff members, he and Andy share a special bond.



Of course, we also wanted to visit with Site Supervisor, Andy, who has worked closely with Craig since 2011, about the special relationship he has been able to form with Craig and the ways in which he has seen him grow. Andy's fondest memories with Craig are of going to the Iowa State Fair where they love to see all of the animals, from the biggest bull to the catfish in the DNR building, but Craig's favorite things there are the antique tractors and the big ol' tenderloins.

Andy feels that living in a Friendship Ark home has given Craig the opportunity to choose the activities he participates in. He plays softball in the spring and fall with Miracle League and has won medals in bocce ball in the past. Craig has become close friends with his housemates and has been able to engage in his interests and his staff and peers have become like family to him.

Andy shares that Craig's laugh and smile light up his home and his enthusiasm is contagious. Craig's belly laughs are ever present, and his feisty attitude comes out whenever he is in teasing mode. Craig loves to laugh and spur others on with his witticisms like "Oh you don't know nothin!" or "I'm gonna call the sheriff on you!" Andy appreciates that Craig delights in simple pleasures like his morning coffee or seeing a motorcycle drive by.

**Plant your own Seeds of Hope and
remember to enjoy the simple
pleasures of life by watching them
grow, like Craig would.**



Craig's niece, Cindy, told us, **"I believe Craig has thrived at Friendship Ark. After spending his early life living with others making choices for him, he has lived a life that no one dreamed he would.** He was never expected to survive much past the age of 7, and with the support of the community around him has managed so much more."

It is our hope that Craig's family's brave decision to plant **Seeds of Hope** by moving him into a Friendship Ark home in a different part of the state and trusting us to care for him, like a family would, will inspire you to invest in Friendship Ark. By investing in Friendship Ark you will provide more individuals, like Craig, with the opportunity to find a forever home where they may live life on their terms and develop the skills they are capable of. **We strive to help our core members reach their fullest potential through faith, family and friendship, and we hope that you will join us in that mission.**

With your help we have been able to grow from that first home with three core members to nine homes with the capacity to serve 43 core members. We are also serving 17 core members in their own apartments and homes and 49 core members in our Day Habilitation program. Even with all of this growth, there are nearly 100 individuals waiting for one of the services we provide. Will you help us to continue to grow so we can serve more core members from that waiting list and provide them the opportunity for their forever home? **To make a gift, visit our website, scan a QR code on the donation card or mail a check to Friendship Ark, Inc., 5820 Lincoln Way, Suite 101, Ames, IA 50014.**

WAYS TO HELP OTHERS JUST LIKE CRAIG

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**Be like Craig and
enjoy the simple things in life.**