Serving one’s country proudly as a U.S. Marine is a difficult enough assignment. However, also being a single Mom with a special needs son is indeed an act of courage.

The local story began when “Jay” (name changed) and his Mom moved back to West Haven from North Carolina in 2011. Mom was serving in the U.S. Marines, and had just completed a tour of active duty and was returning home.

The plan was for Jay to stay with his grandmother while Mom spent an extended period of time in California training as a U.S. Marine recruiting officer. Mom noted that as a recruiting officer she would have the opportunity to be based locally, close to family and not have to spend extended periods of time away from her son, who, having been born with Trisomy Syndrome, was a special needs child.

The grandmother worked outside of Jay’s school hours and therefore needed to utilize the Community House’s School Age Child Care (SACC) after school program.

Mom provided the SACC program with information about the syndrome. She also gave staff a very accurate assessment of his developmental levels and needs, all of which enabled us to ascertain that serving Jay successfully would present a few challenges. However, we were optimistic that we would be able to provide the family with the care that they urgently needed.

That was nearly two years ago, and Mom has completed her training and is back in West Haven. Jay remains in our before- and after-school program as a fully integrated and much loved member of the group. During school hours, he is in a special needs classroom. In the after-school program, he is fully integrated with other children attending 1st through 4th grades. This has provided Jay with opportunities to socialize, interact, play, and share in activities and enrichment experiences with children of diverse developmental levels and abilities.

In the mornings in the before-school program, Jay is often sleepy, taking some time to gear up for his day. But in the afternoon after school, he hits the ground running. Jay loves to sing and dance and can be heard singing “Old MacDonald” repeatedly.

He loves physical activities and outside time, with “tag” and “wonderball” clearly his favorites. His high energy level, sunny nature is enjoyed by staff and other students. Older students in the class take a proactive role in assisting Jay with a positive direction, reinforcement and encouragement. Under staff supervision, some of the older children like to help him with his homework, which he enjoys immensely.

Jay has made progress in all developmental areas and contributes to a positive, happy and fun environment within the program.

Mom is very happy with the program, too, particularly on how everyone was willing to work with her son. She never felt uncomfortable with him in our care, even with his communication problems. She is pleased that he his getting along with everyone and he enjoys the program and the staff. She is grateful that he receives homework assistance and that the staff values her opinion.

Everyone in the SACC program is happy to have been able to assist this single Mom – a military hero during this time of war, attain peace of mind while she has been away from her son for such an extended period of time.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

~ Henry Ford