

Leo Vanskiver Youth Honoree Bio: Wichita, KS Jingle Bell Run:

In the 3rd grade, Leo Vanskiver joined the running club at his school. Up to that point he never really complained about any unusual pain. Leo's family always talked about how he inherited the family genetics: thin legs and "knobby" knees, so the mild swelling wasn't very noticeable at first. After being in running club for a few months and a rough upper respiratory infection, his symptoms emerged. Leo was at the end of his illness when one night, his mom noticed one of his knees was swollen, red and warm. His mom treated his symptoms and they receded quickly. Within 2-3 days his knee was completely normal again. So, they went on about life. A month later the symptoms returned but in the other knee. At that point, the family knew something wasn't right. Leo had an appointment with the pediatrician 2 days later. Leo's doctor sent us straight to a rheumatologist. Leo's mom recalls, filling out the new patient questionnaire with Leo broke her heart. At that point, she realized how many symptoms Leo had been having but not complaining about all this time-- from his knees to his neck, low back, and hands. Leo was diagnosed with Juvenile Arthritis on May 10, 2022. He started taking medication and it did help some, but not enough. The family has recently decided to increase his medications because Leo still had evidence of consistent mild to moderate swelling of his knees especially.

Because Leo was just diagnosed 6 months ago, he is still adjusting to his new normal. It has been physically and emotionally draining on him. Luckily the more severe symptoms seem to be coming under control. Having a strong medical team and family support system has helped to ease some of his worry. He has said "I wish I was just normal" but instead he is learning that he is a **brave warrior**.

Leo is excited to become a part of the JA Community through the Arthritis Foundation. Initially he was feeling very alone, but finding out there are resources like the Arthritis Foundation has made him feel like he is part of an exclusive club with lots of possibilities. Without events like the Jingle Bell Run, it wouldn't be possible to provide the resource so many children and adults need.