

KWANZ's Young Achiever - Jessika

WRITTEN BY Jessika (KWANZ Teenager)

It all started when I was 4 years old. I didn't get an instant diagnosis of Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA), but I kept on getting super painful cramps in my feet for around 20 minutes, several times a day. Then, when I was 6 years old, I started having flares, which meant that my feet would swell up, and it hurt to put any weight on them. I was finally diagnosed with JIA. Unfortunately, at that time, I loved doing gymnastics and soccer, both of which aggravated my feet, so I had to stop those activities.

We bought some crutches and I used those when I had flares. We figured out any sort of running, jumping and even just walking on concrete would trigger a flare. I started Hip Hop and Kung Fu, which were two fairly low impact activities that I could do in trainers. At about 8 years old I was given orthotics to wear and they helped loads, reducing the number of swellings. Although I preferred bare feet, I had to always wear trainers so mum ended up chasing me around the house with them. I didn't appreciate it much at the time, especially in summer, but I am definitely grateful now.

When I first met the Arthritis Specialist, there was a representative of K.W.A.N.Z. at the hospital handing out flyers. I ended up joining and it was fantastic. I've joined in with several social activities in Christchurch and been on camps in Matamata with my Dad. I had such an amazing time it helped make up for all the things I had to stop. K.W.A.N.Z. were looking for volunteers to help run an event in Christchurch so I organised a day at Living Springs for K.W.A.N.Z. families in the South Island. We had a delicious lunch and a special birthday cake to celebrate K.W.A.N.Z.'s 21st birthday and everyone spent the day doing archery, rifles, funfair games and chilling in the pool.

During my time living with arthritis, I've had quite a few x-ray's, MRI's, Specialist appointments, eye checks (Uveitis can be related to JIA) and a biopsy. Although my Specialist has been great, we chose a different path from taking Methotrexate and treated my symptoms naturally though diet (GAPS diet - which seemed to help but I didn't like a lot of the foods), supplements, low impact activities and only using Naproxen when I had a flare.

After 5 years of having arthritis in my feet, I was symptom free for a while, and then one knee after the other became incredibly swollen, so they injected them with steroids, and I've been in remission since then. I do a lot of dance (Hip Hop, Contemporary and Jazz) and I am very active. Earlier this year I was discharged from the hospital, so no more checkups unless things change... which I hope they won't.

Please remember every journey is unique to that person. Sharing a personal story is an act of kindness; it lets others know they are not alone.

Please check with your child's Specialist or GP if this article has generated medical questions for you.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the view of Kids With Arthritis NZ Charitable Trust.

