

KWANZ's Young Achiever—SARAH

BY KWANZ Mother— Jackie



Sarah has just turned 18 years old and her journey with Juvenile Arthritis began at 2 years old, well actually 18 months. She was diagnosed at 2 years old but I knew something was wrong at 18 months, but due to her presenting differently from the normal (which when you get to know Sarah is her, she never does anything normally she is quirky), where most kids present with major joint like knees & ankles first, whereas Sarah had minor joints like fingers and toes and her behaviour was put down to terrible 2's. I knew it was not just terrible 2's and child with terrible 2's does not scream and cry for

hours and hours.

During this time doctors made me feel like a neurotic mother but I carried on fighting for my child. I still remember the first day we meet Dr. Susan Rudge a Paediatric Rheumatologist at the Starship Children's Hospital in Auckland, she was one of the first doctors who reassured me I was not a neurotic mother that something was wrong even if we didn't know what that was yet.

Diagnosis day came after Sarah was unable to walk due to her knees being sore. That day I cried but not tears of sadness but tears of relief, vindication. Relief that finally we knew what was wrong and could start treatment and vindication because I was not one of 'those mothers', and so began Sarah's journey with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis. What a ride, just like a roller coaster she has had her ups and downs.



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.

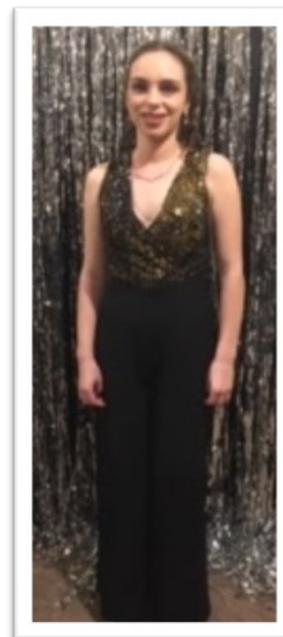


Yes, Sarah has arthritis but she is strong and resilient and determined to not let arthritis affect her or choose what she can or can't do.

She sees arthritis as something of a challenge. She believes that challenge is not letting it hinder her. Arthritis does not stop her from doing what she wants to do. Sarah overcomes obstacles rather than

letting her JIA being a barrier, and does this with her wonderful sense of humour.

Sarah has a passion for dance, Tap and Jazz and her feet very rarely stop. She has been dancing since she was 6 years old and hasn't stopped since. She has not just passed her dance exams but passed with high marks. One year just 6 months after knee surgery to correct an Osteochondral defect of the tibia, she would still attend weekly classes and sit and watch, most kids would stay at home. Week after week, month after month she would go and watch finally, after 4 months she had permission to dance again, she leant in 2 months what others took 6 months, and passed her dance exams to a high standard



Sarah has recently been asked to help teach younger students and I know she will be a role model for them.

Sarah recently finished year 13 and passed all NCEA levels with merit endorsements and not because learning comes easily but through determination and hard work. She is now beginning a new chapter studying at AUT in a bachelor of education early childhood. I know she will continue to use her resilience and determination and hard work to be the best that she can be.

She is an inspiration to me, when I am having a bad day I use her determination, knowing if she can get up on her worst day and live life and laugh, then so can I.