



Jessi steps up for Starlight

Student with Cerebral Palsy pledges to walk independently to raise funds for the charity that granted her wish

While her contemporaries only have to worry about getting good grades, twenty year old Jessica (Jessi) Parrott is a very special student who is using her degree as impetus for an incredible personal challenge to raise funds for charity.

When Jessi was just under a year old she was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, which is a congenital condition that causes problems with the neurological pathways to her muscles, especially in the lower part of her body. As a result of her condition, Jessi uses a wheelchair and has to regularly undergo treatment involving acupuncture, physiotherapy and botox injections to reduce the painful spasms.

Despite the challenges she faces, Jessi has never let her condition stand in the way of her goals and she is currently fulfilling one of her dreams, studying English and Theatre at Warwick University.

Jessi will complete her course next year and, demonstrating her incredible determination, she has pledged to walk independently to collect her degree certificate when she graduates. As if the personal challenge wasn't enough, brave Jessi has chosen to use her blog, 'Walking By 2013', to raise funds for Starlight Children's Foundation, which is a charity that is very dear to her.

When Jessi was sixteen, she was referred to Starlight, which is the UK's leading wish granting charity for children with serious and terminal illnesses, for a once-in-a-lifetime wish. Jessi had been having a really difficult time physically and the film of Pride and Prejudice, starring Keira Knightley, had become a source of great inspiration to her. As a result she chose to meet the actress as her wish, which Starlight duly arranged for her in January 2010.

After watching Keira star in the remake of The Misanthrope, Jessi and her mother Beverley were invited backstage to meet the actress. Jessi and Keira instantly hit it off and they had a wonderful time talking about all their mutual interests like drama, writing, old movies and even Katherine Hepburn!

Jessi says that her wish gave her the boost she desperately needed and she is asking people who would like to sponsor her to make a donation to Starlight via her online giving page (<http://www.justgiving.com/walkingby2013>). By raising funds for Starlight, which grants wishes and provides hospital entertainment, she hopes to help the charity being fun, laughter and distraction to other children struggling with a serious condition.

Having used an electric wheelchair for most of her life, being able to walk independently has been a lifelong dream for Jessi. However, an enormous amount of hard work, determination and bravery will be needed to attain this goal and it is remarkable that Jessi is, quite literally, putting her best foot forward to raise funds for charity.

Since her most recent round of injections on 5th May this year, Jessi has been practicing daily, supported by a walking sling attached to a track hoist. Whilst she was, at first, barely able to shuffle along, she has now developed enough muscle strength to take proper steps. She has begun to shift her weight again, and her (slightly weaker) left leg is nearly as engaged as her right, so she is standing straighter. She will be home from university soon and hopes, over the three month summer break, to make even more significant strides (pun intended) once she returns to the more relaxing environment.

Jessi comments, "It is the very definition of a dream come true that I am able even to contemplate walking to collect my degree next year, because there was a time when I'd lost all hope of taking any steps whatsoever. I truly wouldn't be where I am today without the wonderful work of Starlight, and want to do everything in my power to help them grant the wishes of the brave children who deserve some magic in their lives, so what better way to do it than whilst working to fulfill the dream of which the charity have been such a crucial part?"

Neil Swan, Chief Executive of Starlight Children's Foundation, added, "Jessi is a complete inspiration and we will be supporting her incredible challenge in every way we can. It is very rewarding to see the positive impact that a Starlight wish can bring to a poorly child's life and Jessi's story is a wonderful example of this."

Information

To support Jessi's 'Walking by 2013' challenge, please visit <http://www.justgiving.com/walkingby2013>.

To hear more about the challenge and her progress, read her blog at <http://www.walkingby2013.blogspot.co.uk>.

For more information, please contact Henny Breakwell at henny@starlight.org.uk / 020 7262 2881 # 231.

Starlight grants once-in-a-lifetime wishes for seriously and terminally ill children, restoring the magic and fun of childhood and giving the whole family happy memories to share, whatever the future holds.

Starlight also creates entertainment in every hospital and hospice throughout the UK. Sick children go to Starlight parties, laugh their way through pantomimes, go out on Starlight Escapes, play games and watch films on the Starlight Fun Centre, and enjoy the toys and puzzles of the Starlight Distraction Box. Happy children respond better to treatment and Starlight helps children to forget about their illness and simply have a bit of fun.

To refer a child for a wish or to make a donation, please go online at www.starlight.org.uk. For every £1 you donate, Starlight can assure you that 91p goes towards helping Starlight's very ill children.