



Olivia Patten at her weekly physiotherapy appointment with physiotherapist, Lin Arthur, at the Belleville General Hospital. New exercises are introduced regularly to ensure her progress.



Olivia was fitted for ankle foot orthosis when she was 16 months old.



Lin Arthur adjusts Olivia's legs as she uses a walker at physiotherapy.

Olivia's Reality

Photos and story by Myriam Lublink

Rachel and Brian Patten had no idea that when they went into the doctor's office in December 2010 that they'd come out with life-changing news.

Rachel Patten is a 31-year-old stay at home mom who is married to Brian Patten, 29 and a member of the Canadian Air Force.

Olivia Patten, their daughter, was diagnosed with a profound sensory neural hearing loss when she was about four months old. Just two months later, she was diagnosed with a severe brain disease called semilobar holoprosencephaly.

"She hadn't been acting like other babies. She was quite different and we were starting to guess it was beyond deafness. It was very traumatic and also very confusing," explains Rachel. "It was completely shocking but completely not shocking. We knew something was wrong. We just didn't know that it would be that severe."

Olivia also has high muscle tone in her legs, because she's got a brain disease. Olivia, now two, has already been attending weekly physiotherapy appointments for more than a year to work on her legs and to help her learn to walk.

"It's promising to watch because we know that she's got the drive to want to do these things, but it's still tough to see your kid doing exercises knowing that they have some limitations."

Lyn Arthur is the physiotherapist that Olivia sees every week. Rachel explains that Lyn has worked very hard to build a positive rapport with Olivia so the

appointments tend to be a positive experience.

"When Lyn is doing some her Olivia's stretches and working her to the point that it hurts or causes her severe discomfort, it's very difficult. However, because Lyn and Olivia get along so well, it's usually a positive experience for them both."

Rachel stays at home with the kids while Brian works at CFB Trenton. She says that raising a child with special needs can be lonely sometimes as you have different things to talk about than other parents might.

"When you are spending time with other parents and you're talking about what your child is doing and what your hopes for your child's future are, you realize just how different the experience is."

Rachel says that life can be a rollercoaster. She finds some days to be really lonely while other days to be so filled with joy.

"When she learns to walk, that's going to be huge. The joy we feel will be significantly greater than if she had learned to do it normally."

It is clear to family and friends just how much Rachel, Brian and their daughter have gone through over the last couple years, but they stay positive and have high hopes for the future.

"That girl is awesome," says Rachel. "She's defeating all of the odds. They told her she wouldn't do anything and they told us that she wouldn't do anything. She's completely persistent, she works hard at something and she's going to get where she needs to go and where she wants to go."



During a physiotherapy appointment, Rachel takes a moment to reflect on what her daughter is going through.



Rachel encourages Olivia as she walks towards her reflection.