

Case Study– Kirsty Taylor

Kirsty Taylor is 27 years old and grew up not far away in Darlington. Kirsty worked for a time as a Phlebotomist at James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough.

It was early in her pregnancy during the routine 20-week scan that medical staff identified there might be a problem with one of the babies' arms. It wasn't clear whether the arm was missing altogether or just that it wasn't showing up on the scan because the babies were lying on it. It was suggested that Kirsty have a 4D scan. It was then that they could say for definite that the arm was not there and was not likely to develop.

As is sometimes the case with twins, Brooke and Kallum were born early and between them weighed very little over 8lbs, with Brooke being the smallest at only 3lbs 5 oz. It was then that it was discovered that Brooke only had one kidney and the one kidney that she had was not fully functional. The remaining kidney could well develop, but the reduced functionality placed Brooke at serious risk should she develop a water infection and, as a result, Brooke could be admitted to hospital at any time - without referral, to avoid any costly time delays.

Kirsty had to make regular visits to various hospitals across the region so that Brooke could have regular tests. The absence of the arm caused Brooke problems with her spine and she could not move her neck and so from the age of 8 weeks old she had to be taken for regular physiotherapy, or a member of the children's physiotherapy team would come to the home each week. Kirsty was told that Brooke would probably not walk until she reached 4 or 5 years old. She did however go on to overcome this assumption and walked at 15 months old.

Kirsty was now living in Kirk Merrington to be closer to family after becoming a single mother and had no chance of returning to work; a decision that was not difficult for Kirsty in the circumstances. Her priority was always going to be the care of her twins. It was incredibly stressful for Kirsty in the first year of the twins' life. Backwards and forwards to hospital with two young babies took its toll. As well as this, there were regular home visits from health professionals 'there just wasn't a week went by without either a visit to a hospital or a visit from someone to the house'. Kirsty always managed to muddle through as most parents do; it's something you instinctively develop after your children are born. However, Kirsty wasn't well, suffering from on/off flares of Ulcerative Colitis and she recalls at times simply breaking down and crying because she felt she couldn't cope any more with the stress of not only raising two babies but the added pressure of Brooke's care, hospital appointments etc. Brooke's lack of movement meant she would often wake up regularly during the night and being on her own it was always down to Kirsty to get up and see to her. The stress that she was going through would cause colitis flare ups to the point where she was admitted to hospital, leaving her mother and grandmother to look after the twins at home and her father to visit Kirsty in between his shifts at the hospital.

Kirsty said "if it wasn't for my Mum, Dad and also my Grandma, I don't think I could have coped the way I have. Kallum is a great help, he looks after or simply just plays with his sister while I am busy preparing food and doing housework. Brooke gets so much attention I have to make sure I make an extra special effort with Kallum to make sure he feels included. Being twins I think has helped Brooke, as watching her brother makes Brooke so much more determined not to be held back, she started walking at 15 months proving everyone wrong, nothing will hold her back"

Kirsty did not know where to go to for help, she tried to look up parent groups that she could attend to see if she could find people in similar circumstances but there was nothing in the area. It was her GP who gave her the name of Durham County Carers Support, so she contacted us and a Support Worker was allocated to her.

Kirsty's Support Worker helped her to find and fund a special car seat suitable for Brooke, helped her to apply to The Family Fund which has paid for her and the twins to go on family holidays to Berwick and to Flamingo Land and, this year, they hope to be taking a break in Haggerston Castle. Kirsty also makes good use of the Carers Discount Card. She says 'I have found Durham County Carers Support a massive help, I knew nothing when I moved here and I was glad to find that there was someone out there to help.'

The twins are now three years old and are attending nursery which gives Kirsty some time to herself, however Brooke still does not sleep right the way through the night; and she is still at high risk of infection and still attends many regular hospital appointments. Kirsty would like to put some of her spare time to good use by helping to set up a support group in her area for parents who struggle with similar problems.

