



Lincoln, NE
Jingle Bell Run/Walk Honoree
Kathryn

Kathryn had always been active in sports. A high school senior, she's played softball and basketball for ten years; and spent a year as a bowler. When her foot became swollen after a softball game she assumed it was broken. She sought answers from her trainer, but kept playing. With no relief from the pain she was seen by her doctor who thought she could be suffering from a broken 5th metatarsal. Kathryn spent time in a cast, but two months later she was still unable to walk. That's when she was referred to a rheumatologist and was diagnosed with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA).

As she faced try-outs for senior year softball her pain was increasing. She made the team, but only played three innings. Kathryn later learned her arthritis had become Ankylosing Spondylitis. To her dismay, her athletic career had come to an end.

This extremely active teenager found herself slowing down a bit after her diagnosis. Getting up in the morning has become a painful routine, often resulting in many tardy days at school. Other students have been unable to understand what she is going through; and even the school staff has had trouble understanding the dramatic changes in her life. It took several emotional meetings with different coaches and other staff before they could come to terms with the fact that "Wheels" their fastest runner was now struggling to move without pain.

Kathryn has remained positive and proactive through it all. She is always seeking out knowledge, information and resources to share with her teachers and peers. She has displayed a rare grace and patience in the face of her trial; something difficult for most, especially for someone still in high school!

When asked about the challenges she has faced over the last year Kathryn said, "I can't just be a stick; I have goals and I am going to college. I know what I want to do with my life. I want a job where I can be active and healthy; and being a paramedic will allow me to do that. I won't be sedentary; this illness helped me plan out my future."

Kathryn has a message for those who want to know what arthritis really looks like, and how it impacts the lives of those who suffer from it, "First, provide people with the facts. Get the information out there and educate people. Secondly, use relationships and stories with people like me to encourage and inspire others."

Kathryn's bravery and courage leaves us in awe. We are proud to have her as the 2012 Jingle Bell Run Honoree.

About the Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation (www.arthritis.org) is committed to raising awareness and reducing the unacceptable impact of arthritis, which strikes one in every five adults and 300,000 children, and is the nation's leading cause of disability. To conquer this painful, debilitating disease, we support education, research, advocacy and other vital programs and services