

WALK to CURE ARTHRITISSM



Charley Katherine Wilkens
2014 Walk to Cure Arthritis
Youth Honoree
Wichita, KS

This is a story of true girl power! Charley went from a little girl that could hardly walk around the school, to being the captain of the cheer squad for the school! While she is finishing up for high school years, her experience with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA) has influenced her to become a nurse.

She remembers that she became ill in the first grade, but was not diagnosed until she was sent to KU Med Center in the third grade. She has memories of learning to swallow medications with the nurse giving her different techniques to swallow pills. She remembers the painful shots, and the countless requests for blood work. She was not always able to walk from her classroom to the library or the cafeteria because of the pain and inflammation. She brought a seat cushion because the classroom chairs were too hard and uncomfortable.

Charley and her family immediately plugged into the Arthritis Foundation upon her diagnosis, where Charley and the family felt connected. Charley has participated in many Family Fun Days over the last 10 years. She attended CAMP SPIRIT in Nebraska on a JRA Scholarship. She has been a junior artist at the Art for Arthritis Fundraiser the last three years. Her oil painting "Space Cowboys" with Beth Post was bought at auction by Wesley Medical Center last year.

Charley had not been able to continue with her gymnastics training since she was diagnosed with JRA in the third grade. Upon her diagnosis her Pediatric Rheumatologist encouraged her to do low impact sports such as swimming and golf. Charley was already a member of the Golden Belt Swim team of Great Bend, so she began a year round swimming program.

As a fifth grader, she decided to do cheer, and fight through the struggles. She soon was able to slow down on her medications to the point now of not being on prescription medications at all. Charley has won the battle, as her arthritis is in remission! Charley has been the captain of the High School Football cheer squad all four years. "Living her dream" of being on a competitive cheer team. She tried out for the first time last year to be a member of Cheer Eclipse in Wichita. This young lady is very busy completing her senior year at Clearwater High School. She is in the top 10 of her class and is making plans to attend Emporia State University in the fall to pursue a Bachelor of Science Degree (BSN) in Nursing.

The Arthritis Foundation is proud of Charley's courage and determination, and we are thrilled to recognize her as the 2014 Walk to Cure Arthritis youth 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.