

# Where Can I Turn? I Need More Answers

## Following the Path to No Limitations

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**When** Kathy Olson's\* daughter Katie\*, failed to walk at age 15 months, it became painfully obvious something was wrong. As other toddlers mastered head manipulation, sitting, crawling and eventually walking, Katie lagged months behind what characterized "normal baby development."

Finally walking by 18 months, Katie's movements were awkward. She habitually locked her right knee. Olson expressed her concern to the family's pediatrician.

"I had my suspicions that something was wrong, but I thought, well, maybe she's just a late walker," Olson says. "When you have a child, you think your child is perfect. When I found out that Katie wasn't perfect I couldn't help but think of the limitations she would face. I worried that she wouldn't be a ballerina or run cross country, and it broke my heart."

Katie was diagnosed with lax ligaments, referring to her low muscle tone, also known as generalized hypotonia. By age 2 she was undergoing physical therapy at the Pathways Center for Children in Glenview, an outpatient program that specializes in treating children with physical impairments. Unbeknownst to Katie, the rumble-tumble play she came to enjoy was really a form of physical therapy.

Meanwhile, Olson, again pregnant, visited the Pathways Awareness Foundation, the Pathways Center's sister organization located in the same building. The foundation, co-founded by Shirley Ryan, wife of Chicago insurance executive Patrick G. Ryan, is an organization that promotes awareness about early detection, early intervention and inclusion of infants and children with physical challenges. These range from delayed motor skills to cerebral palsy. One of the Ryans' three sons was born with cerebral palsy.

At the foundation, Olson learned more about child-development milestones and warning signs. So when her younger daughter Kiley\* was born, she discarded the "wait and see" approach and promptly had her screened. Kiley also suffered from low muscle tone. At 6 months, Kiley began physical therapy and later required speech therapy for her generalized hypotonia, which had affected her facial muscles.

Katie, now 6, and Kiley, 4, have since "graduated" from the program, though Kiley still returns to the center twice a year for checkups.

"Katie is so much stronger, especially in her upper body," says their mother, "and Kiley just talks my ear off."

"Every child is important," say Maggie Daley, the mayor's wife and co-founder and president of Pathways Awareness Foundation. "All children at some point face challenges, but they all have the same enormous potential. We need to make sure we give them all opportunities to lead a successful and meaningful life. If we can spread the word about early intervention –the earlier the better in terms of physical therapy – they will have a much better chance."

"We've come so far, but we have so much more to go," says Maggie Daley. "We need to keep moving ahead so we can let more and more people know the value of early intervention. We want to be able to say, "if your child has these challenges, there are still great possibilities and promises for a wonderful life."

Kathy Olson looks at her own children as proof of just that. "I guess you'd say Katie and Kiley graduated from the physical therapy sessions, and are doing quite well," she says. "They climb and do these flips on the bar where they can bring their legs through their arms. They can do whatever they want without limitation. It's amazing to me."



For information contact the Pathways Awareness Foundation at 1-800-955-2445  
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\* Names have been changed to protect privacy