

Alex's Path to Freedom

Sunday 27th June

was the moment everything started to fall into place for Alex, as she looked back at everything she had accomplished since her operation. When Alex was born, she was diagnosed with arthrogryposis, and she had to rely on a wheelchair and crutches to get around. She had both legs amputated through the knee when she was thirteen, and with the help of her Steeper Prosthetist, Nicky, she has now accomplished her ultimate goal of walking on her own.



Case Study Alex Wood

The story

A year on from her bilateral through-the-knee amputation, Alex has achieved her ultimate goal of walking on her own, tackling new hobbies, and has even completed her Duke of Edinburgh bronze award!

Before Alex was born, doctors diagnosed her with arthrogryposis, a joint condition that made it difficult for her to walk normally; as she got older, Alex often relied on a wheelchair and crutches to get around.

When Alex was just thirteen years old, she made the incredibly difficult and brave decision – with the support of her mum Mandy and stepdad Shane – to have both legs amputated through the knee. Without it, it was likely Alex would never be able to walk. “I was told that this would give me more options when it came to walking and when my Prosthetist, Nicky, told me about microprocessor-controlled knees, I was excited to find out more.”

When Alex came out of surgery, she learned to walk without support for the first time. “Walking was completely alien to me; I didn't want to go back to school in a wheelchair after the summer, so I practiced on my new prosthetics every day until I could walk naturally. In just a few weeks, I was able to walk further and quicker than I ever had before and without using my crutch as much.”

The solution

At first, Alex used a mechanical prosthesis with a basic knee joint before being fitted with the Plié 3 Freedom by Proteor microprocessor knee. “I managed on my basic legs, but something still wasn't right, and it didn't feel natural to me. When I tried the microprocessor knees, I made it a goal of mine to walk with ease. One major benefit of the knees is the anti-stumble feature as I feel much more stable and safer knowing that I'm less likely to stumble or fall.” Alex has also been fitted with two Pacifica LP feet from the same manufacturer, allowing her to flex her ankles, and with the help of insoles she's even able to wear different shoe styles.

Prior to meeting Steeper Prosthetist, Nicky, Alex struggled with her confidence, expressing: “Nicky was really supportive and helped me every step of the way, she gave me the

confidence I needed to walk on my own, which is something I struggled to believe I could do.”

Nicky, Alex's Prosthetist from the Prosthetic and Wheelchair Centre in Liverpool, added, “Having been on the journey with Alex from the pre-amputation consultation through to today she has been nothing short of amazing! She is such a determined young woman and has worked so hard learning to walk. As my first bilateral Plié 3 patient, she has by far exceeded our expectations. Plus, she's a Bolton girl like me so it's been lovely helping a local girl.”

The turning point

A year on from receiving her Plié 3 Microprocessor knees, and Alex has overcome a significant challenge. “I've never been able to go up and down stairs properly,” she says, “I used to have to swing my legs around so it would take a long time to get up or down just a few steps. It used to take me a lot longer to walk places and to meet with friends, but now I can walk pretty much anywhere and much quicker too.” She adds, “I remember this one particular day when my mum came home, I gave her a real fright as I was stood at the top of the stairs. It was the first time that had ever happened as I'd always relied on others to help me up.”

Since receiving her Plié 3 Microprocessor knees, Alex's confidence has come on leaps and bounds and she's not afraid to show off her colourful prostheses. “It helps that they're patterned – I'm not afraid to wear cropped leggings and trainers. I am feeling a lot more confident out and about which I wouldn't have ever dreamt of before.”

With her newfound confidence, Alex has not let anything hold her back, saying, “I've just received a bronze award for the Duke of Edinburgh, which has been a massive confidence boost. It's nearly a year since I had my operation, so doing the DofE was a true test to see if I had what it takes. It turns out that I did, as for part of the award we went on an expedition for about 6 hours! I had to manoeuvre steep hills and walk on difficult surfaces. I also had to work in a team with 5 other people, some of whom were complete strangers! Overall, it was a great experience and I'm so proud of myself.”

To find out more about Alex visit www.steepergroup.com

