

My name is Katie Arends (22) and I was born with CMN covering both my arms, shoulders and head. Between the ages of two and four, I had several operations to remove some of the larger moles from my arms and shoulders. My mum has always worried whether it was the right decision but I believe that it was. At the age of 11, I also had laser treatment for around two years on my arms to reduce the appearance of the pigmentation.

My mum was introduced to Jodi and her family when I was a few weeks old through the help of Consultant dermatologist Dr Julian Verbov. Throughout the time I had my operations, Jodi and her family provided invaluable support to my parents for which myself and they are extremely grateful.

When I was growing up, I found that younger children were always more accepting of my CMN than the older children and adults. During primary school, if someone would ask why I had marks on my arms I would say that I was born with them and they would just say ok and no more would be said. However, with older children and adults, they would stare and whisper things. My mum has also told me when I was a baby she experienced more problems with adults than anybody else. When I moved to secondary school, I was worried that it would be difficult to make friends, but the school were extremely supportive with any problems I experienced and I enjoyed my time there.

As a child, I was always shy about showing my birthmark and scars, but as I got older, I stopped being bothered about what others thought and I am happy with who I am today. My parents have always been very supportive of me and have encouraged me to believe anything is possible. My mum once said to me 'Shoot for the moon and if you fail at least you will fall in the stars'.

Now, as an adult, I have a good group of friends who are the same friends I made in secondary school. They are very supportive and understanding. I am currently training to be a secondary school teacher which I find to be a very rewarding career to be able to help children succeed.

I am privileged to have been given the opportunity to work with everyone involved with caring matters now and I hope that I can make a difference.