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Westlake Academy Student Not Deterred by Cerebral Palsy

Oct 20, 2015 08:17AM, Published by Audrey Sellers, Categories: [Life+Leisure](#)

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Miracle mile group (from left): Dr. Andra Barton (MYP Principal), Alyssa Phillips, Dr. Janice E. Brunstrom-Hernandez and Westlake Mayor Laura Wheat

Story submitted by Westlake Academy

“Living life to its fullest” is more than just a phrase for Alyssa Phillips, a 16-year-old Westlake resident and Academy student living with cerebral palsy (CP). Spreading the word about living a full life is her mission. This month, the 10th grader’s event, The Miracle Mile, accomplished that feat. The 1K Family Fun Run & Walk generated \$10,000 for the [Alyssa V. Phillips Foundation](#) to further its mission in support of those impacted by CP.

Phillips organized the event not only to raise money and awareness for the cause, but to educate people about cerebral palsy. She picked October 3 to coincide with [World CP Day](#) on October 7. About 30 volunteers helped Alyssa during the event, held at Westlake Academy, with 110 people participating in the walk.

“I think she accomplished all she wanted to accomplish,” said Alyssa’s mother Michelle Phillips. “It’s not just about the funds, but putting the knowledge out there … Alyssa has always been driven to educate people about this disability.”

Along the walk, there were educational signs about CP and posters with stories about others around the world living with disabilities and accomplishing great things.

“She wanted to show that whatever adversities you face daily with CP, all things are possible,” Phillips said. “And she wants to lead the younger generation and inspire them to do as much as they can.”

One of Alyssa’s biggest inspirations is her physician, Dr. Janice Brunstrom-Hernandez, a board-certified pediatric neurologist with a world-class CP clinic in Plano. She founded and directed the Cerebral Palsy Center at St. Louis Children’s Hospital and has been featured in *People* magazine, *Parade*, *USA Today*, and has appeared on “The Today Show.”

“Dr. Jan” as many families call her, has first-hand experience living with cerebral palsy. She was born three months prematurely and, as a result, has spastic diplegic cerebral palsy and uses a cane to walk.

“Alyssa has such a big heart,” said Dr. Jan. “She is an advocate to show the world what you can do even if you have CP … She really wants to change minds about what it means to have CP, she already figured that out before meeting me.”

Dr. Jan said the biggest roadblock isn’t the physical inaccessibility, but the minds of able-bodied people who pass judgment on those with CP.

“We don’t walk or talk like they do and some make judgments on what we feel or think. But we think just like they do, we can learn and enjoy life just like thy do, we just need to be given the chance,” she said.

As far as being Alyssa’s “inspiration,” Dr. Jan said it’s the other way around and she wouldn’t have missed walking in this event for anything.

“These young people have changed my life,” she said. It’s people like Alyssa that teach me that I am okay with CP, and that has really helped me heal. I’m happy to give back and do as much as I can for them.”

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