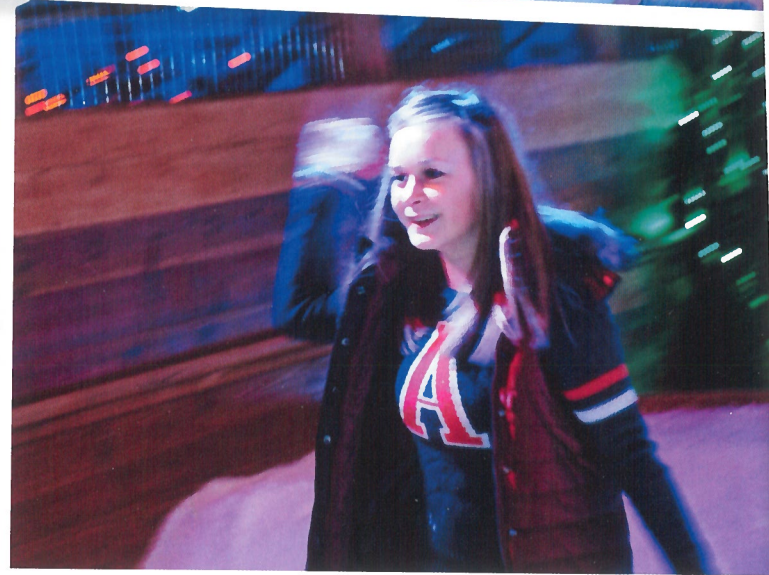




THE TEENAGE YEARS

ACCORDING TO STEREOTYPES, OSTOMISTS ARE USUALLY OLDER PEOPLE. BUT THERE ARE MANY YOUNGSTERS WHO HAVE BRAVED OPERATIONS TO MAKE THEIR LIVES BETTER. LIFE AS A TEENAGER IS HARD ENOUGH SO IN THIS ISSUE OF LINKLINE OUR RESIDENT STOMA CARE NURSE JACKIE CLEMIT DISCUSSES 'TEENAGERS AND STOMAS'.



Now 11, Hannah's procedure has so far been a success and she is getting on with life. She has ups and downs but after not knowing any different, she takes the good days with the bad as well as any adult.

Teigan's story

Hannah's good friend Teigan has also been poorly all her life but has only recently realised what is the matter and her medical team is currently trying to find a cure. Here is her story.

Teigan is 14 and for the first 12 years she and her family couldn't find out why she had chronic constipation, not going to the toilet for up to a month. According to her mum Zoe, the medical staff were not very helpful: "They couldn't work it out and so dismissed Teigan's problems. They said she would grow out of it, that she had behavioural problems and was making herself ill by not going to the toilet properly. How wrong they were!"

As the years went by and the problems got worse Zoe decided enough was enough and after lots of shouting and tears and challenges to her local medical professional they eventually got a referral to Birmingham Children's Hospital whereby the consultants immediately carried out a 'Bowel Mobility Test'; the results showing

a 'slow gut'. She had been permanently using laxatives and so they first performed colonic irrigation for three months and then, like Hannah, she had an ACE. Unfortunately neither treatment worked and after more tests the surgeons have decided to move the ACE to the other side of the abdomen, further along the colon. As you read this Linkline, Teigan will most probably be in hospital waiting for the operation.

So Teigan and her family are still searching for a solution... and until they find one, Teigan has to live with a very unreliable bowel. She leads as normal life as possible and is ready for the next surgery but it takes its toll on the whole family.

Independence

With so many physical and emotional challenges we asked Hannah and Teigan how they cope at school, develop friendships and look after themselves.

Hannah's friends have accepted that going to hospital a lot is part of her life. This is in contrast to Teigan who having only recently realised her condition and is trying, with research and surgery, to get control. Indeed Teigan hasn't told any of her friends, all that they know is that she is poorly and needs to go to hospital a lot. Her teachers know of

her circumstances but she still faces many challenges in the classroom. She said: "I have to have a special toilet pass as the loos are locked during lessons but this is questioned by the other kids. I also have to drink a lot and consequently need to go to the toilet much more than usual. I've had detention because the teachers don't understand even though my stoma nurse has been into see them."

But in amongst such challenges both Hannah and Teigan just carry on as normal. They speak of their desire for independence. They both 'self-care' and are very proud of this. Both mums smile at this point, remembering the weeks of crying and screaming when everything was new. They too are full of pride that their little girls live a near normal life.

When asked for their advice on being a parent to an ostomist both said: "Always challenge and don't be afraid to ask questions as you are looking after children who may not be able to comprehend what is going on at a young age." Interestingly the girls both said: "We're just a little different but we have fun like everyone else."

Well said; indeed, with the right help, support and advice, children can achieve anything they want in life. ●