

Samantha Stalnaker

Age 6



West Virginia

West Virginia University Children's Hospital
Spina Bifida

Melissa Stalnaker was part-way through her pregnancy when she learned her unborn daughter would have Spina Bifida. Suddenly the future of her baby's life seemed bleak. Spina Bifida occurs when a baby's spine fails to close during the first months of gestation. The effects of spina bifida can include difficulty standing, walking, or urinating. Many children are even permanently paralyzed.

All the worst-case scenarios the family had prepared themselves for turned out not to be the case. Samantha's spine was not exposed, and she was only paralyzed from the ankles down. However, she did have hydrocephalus, a dangerous buildup of cerebral-spinal fluid around the brain. There was a great fear that Samantha would suffer brain damage as a result.

Five years and six surgeries later, Samantha walks with the help of a walker and the hydrocephalus is under control. Thanks to the mental, emotional and physical stimulation she received from her loving family at home, she has no mental impairment. Though the paralysis from her ankles down is permanent, Samantha works with an exceptional team of physical therapists who help her progress farther each day.