

Rachel Williams

Rachel Williams has faced many challenges in her life. She was born with a rare spinal condition called sacral agenesis which meant her legs and feet failed to develop properly. By her late teens, she was using walking aids to get about.

Despite impressing doctors by being able to walk at all, and even being the first person in the UK with the condition to give birth, Rachel woke up one morning completely unable to move her legs. This was a crushing blow for her, made worse by the death of her unborn daughter at 38 weeks pregnant. All of this trauma triggered mental health issues, including severe depression and anxiety. As she couldn't walk anymore, she wasn't exercising and ended up gaining three stones in weight. Over the next three years, she was in and out of mental health units, even attempting to take her own life at one point.

In February 2018 she learnt about Cheshire Change Hub and the services that were available to her. She was sceptical; she didn't think the staff would be able to cope with someone in a wheelchair. Thankfully, they proved her wrong! She absolutely loved the team at Ellesmere Port Sports Village, and said they "have an attitude which encourages you to focus on what you can do, rather than what you can't".

Starting at three visits a week, she progressed up to six. She's rekindled her love of swimming and is a familiar face in the gym and aqua classes too. "When I'm in the gym, I can tell that people are genuinely happy to see me. It's made me feel like an equal for the first time", said Rachel. She's even got her husband in the gym too! They're both so passionate about staying active that they can't see themselves ever stopping.

Her success doesn't stop there though. She's been active as a 'Community Inspirer', working with the Poverty Truth Commission to encourage other people in similar positions to hers and show them that there are always ways for them to improve their lives and wellbeing. Rachel has been through some truly dark times, but physical fitness was the thing that kept her going so she wants to spread that message far and wide!

You can see Rachel on this video from the Poverty Truth Commission and hear her speak passionately about the benefits of healthy living: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yd1W23-1SDQ>