



**Yvonne Hunt** now appears to be a normal, healthy, fit, and active person. However, a year ago - before starting hydrotherapy at St George's - this was not the case. Yvonne suffers from fibromyalgia, a common but potentially debilitating condition, which is thought to affect as many as 1 in every 25 people according to Arthritis Research UK. Yvonne recently gave an inspirational speech at the Healthwatch AGM describing how hydrotherapy had enabled her to become fully fit again after

being, at her worst, bedbound. Yvonne has generously agreed to share her story here in the hope it will encourage other sufferers to gain the same benefit that she has from hydrotherapy. Yvonne's problems started in 2010 while caring for her mother. At first, it was back and shoulder pain. X-rays, a course of physiotherapy and a prescription for painkillers followed but things did not improve. Then her knees became painful. Despite more X-rays, more physiotherapy and more appointments with a specialist, Yvonne's health continued to deteriorate. She says, "None of the pain went away – it became worse! I was taking stronger painkillers while rapidly becoming less mobile and very stiff. Physiotherapy did not help; I was not strong enough to do it and in too much pain. I think it often made things worse." If this were not enough, Yvonne's feet then became painful, "I could not walk for more than five minutes." There followed more X-rays and a referral to a podiatrist who referred Yvonne to a rheumatologist. Yvonne says, "I was back and forwards between doctors and appointments. I must have cost the NHS a fortune." And yet, "Still the pain continued - the list was growing..." Finally, in 2012, the rheumatologist diagnosed fibromyalgia, a long-term condition that causes widespread pain. Yvonne describes it as, "Enhanced exaggerated pain - everything is sensitive, even your teeth." However, despite receiving a diagnosis and regularly attending hospital clinics, Yvonne says, "Nothing improved. I was living on strong painkillers – I slept a lot." Nevertheless, during this time Yvonne's GP was "... wonderful, she sat patiently listening to me crying as I felt my world getting smaller. She offered me antidepressants, but I did not want to give up. I was constantly sitting in her office, telling her I could not go on like this." It was after a particularly long session of tears in clinic that Yvonne's specialist referred her to a hospital physiotherapist. Yvonne says, "She was really helpful and advised me on how to cope. She gave me a strict exercise programme; walking only five minutes a day, adding 1 minute a week to my walk." It was at the end of Yvonne's allotted sessions that her physio told her about St George's hydrotherapy pool saying, "Try it, you've got nothing to lose." And the rest is history... "Pat was my physio on that first day; I was tired before I went in the water from getting changed. She was wonderful; she encouraged me and helped me through my water phobia. From the very first session at the pool, I started to hurt less and I was not as stiff. I could do the exercise my body needed without injury and pain; I believe this tricked my body, into remembering that I was fit and strong once. I became stronger very quickly and my life gradually was given back to me. I could arrange to meet friends knowing I would be able to go - it turned my life around. I've started on my wish list: I've travelled to Cyprus to stay with friends; I'm running on my trampoline and now attend the aqua fitness sessions with Tara. I still have fibromyalgia but I'm strong now and haven't had an injury since I started at the pool. I go to the doctor every six months now for a check-up and I haven't needed any pain relief at all. However, if I can't go to the pool for more than two weeks, the stiffness, and aches and pains return. As soon as I get back to the pool, I'm fine again. I don't need to understand why the hydrotherapy works for me, I'm just so grateful that it does."



## **Sophie Utting**

Within just a couple weeks of starting hydrotherapy at St George's, Sophie Utting began to make a remarkable recovery from major hip surgery.

The 34-year-old mother of two, who works as a medical practice manager, is so passionate about St George's and the benefits hydrotherapy can

bring, she was willing to share her very personal story.

Sophie's problems first appeared at the birth of her two sons: Archie seven and Charlie four. Both deliveries were difficult and so painful that she required caesarean sections. However, her problems continued and during the following months, she was in so much pain that she was unable to walk. Over the next three years there followed a number of referrals to various back specialists until finally it was discovered that she had a previously undiagnosed bilateral hip dysplasia, a congenital condition where there is deformation or misalignment of the hip joint. Sophie was referred to a leading orthopaedic hip specialist who decided that she required a preventative and corrective operation on her right hip called a periacetabular osteotomy. In this, the pelvis is cut, realigned and then pinned in place so it is in a better position to cover the ball of the hip joint called the femoral head. In Sophie's case, the right side of her pelvis needed to be broken in three places to achieve this.

The full rehabilitation time from this surgery is normally around six months. However, at the end of this time, and despite extensive physiotherapy, Sophie was still in enormous pain, unable to walk and her planned return to work had been unsuccessful. She had also begun to shake. "It was unbearable; nothing helped," she says. After eight months, when there had still been no improvement despite a steroid injection, the family in desperation sought a second orthopedic opinion. It was only then the reason for her distress was discovered: Sophie had been attempting to walk with broken bones; she was shaking because her body had gone into physical shock. It seems the realignment of the hip had been so great it had left her pelvis unstable. This meant her first attempts at weight bearing had caused a stress great enough to break her pelvis in two new places as well as the femoral head. She now had four unhealed fractures.



Sophie first entered St George's pool exactly three weeks after surgery and everyone – including her consultant – has acknowledged that her recovery has been truly remarkable. She first came in using a wheelchair and says, "It took me so long to get into the water. My mum, who came with me, was so worried... I had three exercises; I could do none of them on land, but by the end of my

second session in the pool I could do them all in the water." Sophie came twice to the pool in the first week and three times in the second week. At the end of this, she was able to walk in using crutches. By the sixth week, she was finding her hydrotherapy so beneficial she was attending the pool five times a week. Six weeks to the day after surgery Sophie walked into St George's unaided. It was a thrilling moment for everyone.

It is now eight weeks since surgery and she attends the pool six times a week. What makes this even more remarkable is that Sophie travels from Rutland! "From the very beginning hydrotherapy has taken my stiffness away. It is noticeable if I do not have a session in the pool; it's so different; my pain and stiffness certainly increase. It has also really helped with my strength. I have not had the same muscle wastage in my leg. I am now even starting to recover the wastage that followed the first operation. I can now lift my leg to 45° and I have not been able to do that for the past four years." She says that using the different depths of water enabled her to start walking; firstly in deep water and then progressing to shallower depths. "My consultant agrees that walking and exercising in the water has got me to this juncture so quickly. He wants me to continue with it as I now have arthritis in my back and because I have made such amazing progress. He says swimming alone would not have been so beneficial. I have been off work for a year now. I am now in the best position to return once my consultant gives me the OK thanks to hydrotherapy."



**Sarah Gale** You only have to see the smile on Sarah's face to know how very much she loves swimming at St George's. Sarah is one of 50 adults from a supported living or care home who attend St George's every week. Sarah's home, Laurel House, is a supported living home run by Positive Steps, a local company that provides placements for children and young adults with learning difficulties. She shares her home with seven other service users and 4-6 members of staff. Shannon, Sarah's key

worker says, "We live as family - we share - it's a real home." Promoting independence and self worth is a priority and the work of the house is divided up. Sarah has a number of jobs for which she is responsible. Her favourites include tidying her own room - in which she takes great pride - vacuuming, drying the dishes, baking, and ironing. Of course, leisure is also important and there is nothing more important to Sarah than her swimming...

Sarah has a complex genetic condition that has not been fully diagnosed and probably autism. She has physical problems, which cause some difficulty with walking and has no verbal communication although she can use some Makaton signs and symbols. Sarah's mum taught her to swim when she was two and she can swim up to a mile. Shannon says, "Swimming is very simply one of the main things in her life. It is 100% important. It's her favourite hobby and a main way for her to exercise, to keep healthy, and to relax." Shannon and fellow support worker, Agie, explain, "We can't tell Sarah that she is coming to the pool in advance because she gets just so excited."

Sarah began attending public sessions when St George's opened in 2011 and she has been coming, with her support workers, regularly ever since. Other pools are not always appropriate for her needs and can make her anxious. However, St George's staff and users understand. Sarah attends either twice a week, or once a week if there is a trip to the cinema. She is a very familiar and popular user who is always extremely friendly and polite. Those of us who have enjoyed sharing sessions with her during this time have delighted in her blossoming confidence and her obvious joy at the thrill, freedom, and accomplishment that she gains when swimming, using various strokes, or elegantly performing challenging under water tasks. Sarah likes to finish her session with some relaxation in the spa. Shannon would definitely recommend St George's. She says, "Sarah never goes without when she comes here." She thinks that it is during her time in the water that Sarah probably experiences the most independence in her life.

We would like to thank Positive Steps and Sarah's parents for generously agreeing to share her special story but most of all to Sarah, for brightening St George's with her warmth, smile, and charm, and for being such an education and inspiration to others.



**Rachel Thomas's** hydrotherapy story began in May 2014 when she volunteered to take part in the Fane Road archaeological dig. The excavation, organized by Oxford Archaeology East and supported by Peterborough City Council, was to unearth a Roman Villa that had remained undisturbed under some allotments in Walton for 1,700 years. Rachel, who had been keen to take a part in such a dig for many years, took holiday leave in order to volunteer. To her disappointment, on her first day no digging was possible owing to heavy rain. However, on her second, the weather was good enough to proceed. Rachel would be allocated her 'own' part of the site to excavate. Full of enthusiasm, she followed her archaeological lead to start work. It was on this initial journey that she stepped down onto the archaeological surface and slipped... Rachel found herself sitting on her left leg; she instantly knew she had done 'something.' Fortunately, the archaeological team who were experienced, professionally trained first aiders, ensured that she did not get up, but supervised a trip to A&E. Rachel says that they were "wonderful."

At hospital, Rachel learned that she had spiral fracture of her left fibula. The fibula is one of the bones in the lower leg and a spiral fracture refers to a break where the bone structure cannot handle a twisting force and breaks open in a spiral fashion. The treatment was to put Rachel's lower leg in an initial plaster of Paris cast or "in stookie" as Rachel, who comes from Scotland, calls it. The cast was removed and replaced a couple of times in nice 'fetching' colours but she was not permitted to bear weight for six weeks and had to keep her foot elevated above her heart to reduce the swelling. Rachel who lives in a two-storey house with no adaptations describes the whole experience as "very restricting and debilitating."

Fortunately, due to modern information technology she was able to continue to work from home – she kept her leg raised on a stool under the desk!

After six weeks, Rachel's fracture had not healed sufficiently for the plaster to be removed but she was allowed to begin some weight-bearing using her crutches. Two weeks later, now in August, the plaster finally came off and Rachel found herself discharged. Unfortunately, that was not the end of Rachel's story. By autumn, she was not only still experiencing pain in her left knee and ankle but also muscle loss, weakness and mobility problems. She decided to visit her GP who prescribed physiotherapy. Rachel undertook an eight-week course of land-based physiotherapy but by the end, in December, she still "wasn't right." As Rachel's problems had not improved by spring 2015, she returned to her local GP Practice. This time she saw a different doctor who sent her for an X-ray of her knee (which showed osteoarthritis), prescribed painkillers and suggested that Rachel might benefit from referring herself to St George's for aquatic therapy.

Rachel knew about the hydrotherapy pool because her daughter had used the pool in the past when in a "Splash Group," for babies with special needs. She wasted no time in self-referring to the pool and began an exercise programme with aquatic physiotherapist Pat (Baker) in May.

Rachel attended fortnightly aquatic physiotherapy with Pat between May and August. Rachel says, "It made a tremendous difference. I was so pleased. The pain in my left knee was gone and the musculature improved - it returned to normal. I was very impressed; I would unhesitatingly recommend it." Rachel is

also extremely complimentary about all the staff and describes Pat and colleagues as "very professional."

She also took particular inspiration from St George's volunteer Andy King, who staffs the reception desk with his Circles Network support worker. She says, "It gave me sight of the opportunities for my daughter when she reaches adulthood."

Since being discharged from hydrotherapy in August, Rachel has enjoyed an energetic holiday in Uganda, "Something I would not have been able to do otherwise." She has also found the physical demands of her work in nature conservation easier travelling between offices and meetings in Peterborough, Cambridge, London, and making site visits to woods and farms. Unfortunately, at the end of 2015 she has begun to experience some foot problems that she hopes will be solved with orthotics but says, "If there is any suggestion that further hydrotherapy would help - I would be back!"

We would like to thank Rachel for generously sharing her story, which illustrates that anyone can develop a need for hydrotherapy and wish her all the best in future.



### **Wendy Hannan**

“I was diagnosed with primary sclerosing cholangitis in January 1995 and had a liver transplant on Christmas day 1995 at Addenbrooke's Hospital. The tablets that I need to take to keep my liver working give me quite a lot of problems.

I have osteoporosis and after many fractures in my ribs and my left foot, I was diagnosed as disabled.

In 1999, I had to use a wheelchair, as I was unable to walk. I was told I needed a new knee and went into Addenbrooke's Hospital for this operation. Then I had to learn to walk again. I rely on an electric scooter when

out and about. Then in 2009 was diagnosed with polymyalgia rheumatica. I had to take steroids for 4 years and I put on weight. Therefore, when I heard about the St George's Community Hydrotherapy Pool, which is only 5 minutes away, I joined last October and it is fantastic. I can do exercises in the pool that are too painful to do out of it. I am building my leg and arm muscles up for getting myself out of chairs etc. The pool has made my mobility so much better; it helps with my pain and saves me going to doctors for painkillers, saving the NHS money. It is also helping me to lose weight. I am so thankful to use this vital community asset and to the lovely people who run it.”



### **Tom and Arthur Bailey**

Tom and his son Arthur regularly travel from one of the Peterborough's outlying villages to use the pool on a Saturday morning.

Three year old Arthur is deaf, has balance difficulties and autism. Tom says Arthur really looks forward to his weekly pool sessions and gets excited when he sees

his swimming shorts. “It is one of the few things he likes and can do. It gives him freedom and confidence in a safe environment.”

Tom also explains how important the pool is to him and his family. Not only does it provide a sensory experience that his young son really enjoys but Arthur is also much calmer after his hydrotherapy session, which allows the family to enjoy other activities together the rest of the day. He says, “Saturday is good day, an active, happy and content day.”



## Tim Brawn

In May 2013, Tim was single-handedly managing the family's 400-hectare (just under 1000 acres) arable farm in Alconbury, when he suffered a major stroke. This was followed by a further stroke in hospital.

Tim's sister Sarah, who acts as his carer at the pool, describes the strokes as life threatening; the family were not sure if Tim would pull through - but he did. However, the strokes left him with severe left-sided upper and lower limb weakness and balance difficulties. Tim spent four

and a half months in hospital but left in a weak state.

It was only later that a Consultant Orthotist at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital called Chris Bracknell suggested hydrotherapy as treatment. Chris had received hydrotherapy himself some years earlier after a motorbike accident and thought it would benefit Tim.

In late January, Tim, accompanied by Sarah, arrived at St George's for the first time. They started with one private session with aquatic physiotherapist Patricia Baker every week. By March, Tim had made progress and gained enough confidence and strength to enable the pair to come twice a week: a private session with Pat but also a public session. In fact, hydrotherapy came to play such a critical role in Tim's rehabilitation that family say that they now base their entire week around their sessions at St George's; all other appointments have to fit around these. Sarah feels that her brother has made more progress in the past six months since he has begun hydrotherapy than he appeared to make in the first few months after his stroke, a time when faster progress is normally expected. When Tim started, he required a great deal of support and was wholly dependent on flotation aids. However, since beginning aquatic physiotherapy he has gained movement in his left leg and improved strength and movement in his left arm, with which he can now reach out. He has now progressed to the point where he can swim independently too. Tim has continued to work on his land-based physiotherapy but explains that he has encountered problems when attempting to weight bear. This has caused a painful problem in his left knee. He says, "It is so much easier and less painful when attempting this in the warm water." Both would definitely recommend hydrotherapy at St George's. Sarah says, "This is an excellent place to come and improve mobility. We have found it very useful. The staff are all so helpful; they are hands-on and cope with such a wide range of users yet still manage to give the personal touch."



Malcolm is pictured with his son, a paramedic, Matthew.

**Malcolm Green**, When visiting the pool you are bound to meet an inspirational user. One such person is Malcolm Green. Malcolm (61) is a retired police officer who enjoyed excellent health. Then six years ago, he suffered a heart attack, followed by two strokes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and Type 2 diabetes. When he is well enough, Malcolm attends St George's twice a week. This is to improve his health through exercise and for the "feel-good factor," he says his visits bring him. He is enthusiastic advocate for the facility and says, "I find it so beneficial and refreshing; I am always really pleased that I have made the effort to come. It's such a happy place. All the users and staff are so cheerful and supportive and there is such a relaxed atmosphere. I am given time; I have freedom and I enjoy it immensely. The water is such an inviting

temperature and I love the spa!" Since Malcolm first began using the pool six months ago, he has says he has noticed improvements; he finds he can now do more and has gained confidence. "It has been so worthwhile; I have 100% positive sense of achievement. People who have not endured a chronic illness cannot truly empathise. I would definitely encourage anyone in a similar position to try it. Once you have, you will not regret the day. It's just positives upon positives."



**Joy and George Kitchen** have been coming to the pool from Eye every week for 18 months. George feels that hydrotherapy has done him the world of good. He no longer wears a support belt for his back and does not need to take painkillers anymore. Before coming to the pool, George tried sessions with a chiropractor but that did not help: within two weeks of coming to the pool, his condition had improved.

The spa has also helped George, he says, "It is the best massage you can get, so gentle on your muscles". Before he started coming to the pool, George could not lift his arms above his head; now he can do this easily.

Joy has hip trouble and her physiotherapist recommended she try St George's. She can do exercises in the water that she cannot do on land. The hydrotherapy is enabling Joy to reduce her painkillers. Because the regular pool sessions help her to manage her condition, Joy has declined to have hip surgery for the time being.

Both Joy and George say they enjoy their sessions at the pool. "It is the best exercise we have and we would recommend it to anyone."



**Kim Clayden**, as a child, Kim put her natural flexibility to good use when she began ice-skating aged nine. However, following a car accident aged nineteen she began to experience pain, firstly in her shoulders and then all over. The chronic pain and joint problems continued for ten years until February this year rheumatologists finally diagnosed Kim as having Joint Hypermobility Syndrome (JHS).

Joint hypermobility, or flexibility, is quite common in the population. In many, being hypermobile gives rise to little or no problems. However, when it causes pain or injury, such as in Kim's case, it may be an inherited connective tissue disorder. JHS is the most common of these. Kim understands that the accident may have been the trigger for her symptoms. As well as causing chronic pain, Kim's lax joints are more prone to injury and fatigue. She also has difficulty knowing where parts of her body are in space. This is known as poor proprioception.

In April Kim began to receive the help of a general physiotherapist who advised hydrotherapy. (She has recently received the support of an additional physiotherapist who specializes in her walking – feet, ankles and knees - too.) With the help of a friend, Kim found and referred herself to St George's. Since then Kim has attended the pool every week for an aquatic physiotherapy session with Pat Baker. She obviously finds these sessions to be extremely beneficial and she is full of praise. "I come every week to see Pat. She is brilliant and inspirational. I find hydrotherapy really useful, especially when I am having a bad day. The heat particularly helps and I can do so much more in the water than on land. I leave feeling revitalized. I feel tired but in a good way. It also makes me feel good knowing what I have achieved. The pool is vital to keep me going. If I hadn't have discovered this place I don't know where I would be now."

Kim is certainly managing to keep active despite her condition. She not only continues to work full-time as an ice-skating coach at Planet Ice, "It's the job of my dreams; ice-skating is my walking," but she also volunteers for The Hypermobility Syndromes Association (HMSA) where she is Peterborough Group Leader. When Kim joined the Association, she discovered there were no local branches so she trained and successfully applied to set up a branch in Peterborough herself.

The HMSA is charity run by and for people diagnosed with any of the hypermobility syndromes. The aims of the HMSA are to provide support and information to those affected and to the professionals who work with them. The website <http://hypermobility.org/> has an NHS England Information Standard Certificate.

One of the HMSA's honorary medical advisors, Professor Rodney Grahame CBE MD FRCP FACP, a leading authority on hypermobility syndromes, encouraged and supported the local drive for access to hydrotherapy in Peterborough. St George's opened to the community in 2011. The professor described hydrotherapy as "essential" for some hypermobile patients.

For further information on hypermobile syndromes, please contact the HMSA

Website: <http://hypermobility.org/>

Telephone: 0845 3454465

Email: [info@hypermobility.org](mailto:info@hypermobility.org)

The Peterborough Branch of HMSA meets on the second Thursday of every month at 6-8 p.m. Each meeting has a different theme and is in a different location. For further information, please email Kim on [peterborough@hypermobility.org](mailto:peterborough@hypermobility.org) or telephone 07738 873410



**Kate Harwood** says in August 2011, I was involved in a road traffic accident in which I fractured my back. The accident came at the worst possible time, as I was only a week away from starting my sixth-form education. For the last year and half, all of my energy has gone on getting better. I've had to leave school, and leave my social life behind. In all honesty, I never thought I would break apart as much as I did, and getting better, and

becoming strong again has been a never ending uphill battle. All the doctors told me was to "take things slow" and "exercise". However, for those who know me, exercise added to me is never a good combination. Physical exercise at school was a battle of wills, hockey was violent and athletics? 100 meter fall would be more accurate than a sprint. About six months into my recovery, a rheumatologist diagnosed me both with Fibromyalgia and Hypermobility Syndrome. Fibromyalgia is a condition where the body expects pain. We are covered in nerve endings, and when we experience severe trauma or shock, the pain system can go into overdrive. For me, every touch hurts. Clothes against my skin are uncomfortable and receiving a hug from a family member is a delicate process.

Then I met my current physiotherapist and one of her specialties is dealing with trauma related conditions, including FM and one of the first things she asked is; "Do you do any exercise?" As I answered no, she passed me a small, square card, and written on the front with an image of the pool was; "St George's Hydrotherapy Pool". For those who live in the Peterborough area, they know that in the old City Hospital there was a pool of this nature, but when it was closed and the new facility opened, there was nothing for those who relied on hydrotherapy for regular exercise. After discussing the possibility of trying hydrotherapy with my parents, we decided, what harm can it do, and if it helps, then we've found something that might ease my discomfort.

As with every client, each hour block costs £4.00, or you can book ten sessions for £35. The first thing that surprised me is how reasonable the prices are. This is a commercial pool, run for the public, and I expected something considerably pricier. However, on entering, I was greeted warmly by the Senior Lifeguard and filled in a selection of forms detailing my medical conditions and then after a little health and safety talk, I was allowed through. The warm air is instantly relaxing, and stepping into the pool for the first time was nothing but bliss.

I am currently on my fifth session, and despite my short time of attending, I can already feel my body strengthening. The beauty of hydrotherapy is that the warm water relaxes your muscles, but because you are free of your body weight, you work more and gain more positive exercise benefits than you would in simply running. The life guards are friendly, the fellow swimmers are equally welcoming and kind, the water is blissfully warm and there are always a set of interesting questions written on the whiteboard to keep us pondering whilst we swim.

The management team are highly organised and I must decree, it is a very well run establishment. Thanks to hydrotherapy, I can see my chances of recovering in time for college in September (to hopefully realise my dreams of Medicine) getting closer and becoming an easier hill to climb every week, and if it wasn't for my physiotherapist, St. George's Hydrotherapy Pool would still be a great mystery."



**Gary Owen** On Sunday 13th July 2008, Gary Owen's life was quite literally shattered. The 42-year-old long distance HGV driver from Peterborough was working on the Olympics project in London at the time. However, on 13th he was riding home on his Aprilia RSV 1000 Tuono from Mallory Park, when he was involved in a high-speed crash.

Paramedics rushed him to Coventry Hospital where he remained unconscious for three days. Gary had sustained a number of serious injuries, especially to his left leg, which had four open fractures below the knee and one above. He also sustained extensive skin loss to his right thigh.

The fracture to the bone above his knee (the femur) was pinned and plated, but the open wound breaks below (the tibia) were so severe and complex that an external fixator was required. Around 50% of his right thigh needed skin grafts. Gary remained hospital for four weeks.

There then followed six months of rehabilitation at home in Peterborough. Unfortunately, at the end of this it was



a year and a half after his accident, Gary's skin grafts had largely healed. However, the fractures in his left leg were still only showing signs of some initial healing. They were not correctly aligned either. Gary has type 2 diabetes, which can delay and make healing more difficult. It was therefore decided to remove the fixator for six months to see if this would encourage healing. There then followed two years of various leg casts, trips to orthopedic specialists in Sheffield

and Peterborough and extensive physiotherapy. At the end of this, the plate in the upper half of Gary's left leg was removed and the femur was re-pinned. More walking to improve the strength and circulation in the left leg to aid healing was prescribed, but this was without effect.

Finally, in December 2012 Gary was referred to Addenbrooke's Hospital.

It was then found Gary's attempts at walking might have actually been aggravating the problem, as his bones were still soft and unhealed. Gary was given three choices:

1. To have an amputation above the knee.
2. To have a full knee replacement that would give him half his original range of knee movement back. This, however, was a risky option because it involved a site where there had previously been an infection. Any reoccurrence of this could lead to full leg amputation.
3. To clean out the knee and to insert a solid rod running from his hip to his ankle.

Gary chose this final option. He had his operation June 2013. He says, "Things have moved forwards so much since then; I have made so much progress. I can now walk short distances without crutches."

Of course, such a major operation has complications. As expected, Gary is unable to bend his leg at the knee. However, he has also lost 2 inches in leg length and been left with a very stiff ankle meaning he is unable to place his heel to the floor. He was receiving physiotherapy for this at Peterborough City Hospital in January when he saw a card advertising St George's Community Hydrotherapy Pool and decided to refer himself.

He says, "I wish I'd known about St George's and been able to come earlier. On my first session, I was able to put my foot flat to the floor. In the pool, I can walk about; I have freedom of movement for the first time in five years. It's so much easier and less painful in the warm water. It gives me respite and relaxation too." Gary now attends the pool weekly. His physiotherapist at the hospital noticed an improvement after just a few sessions. However, more than that Gary says that since coming to the pool he has a new positive frame of mind. "I have the confidence to walk and attempt more, such as the stairs. I feel able to do more for myself and more positive about moving towards going back to work and about the future."

After six years of rehabilitation, most recently at the pool, Gary has now returned to work. He is a full-time lorry driver for Chiltern Cold Storage, Peterborough. Gary says he is thoroughly enjoying his new busy life. Hydrotherapy is still important though and he makes time to attend a weekly pool session.



**Emma Franklin and Shay** “I started bringing my grandson Shay to the hydro pool about two years ago. He was three at the time. He has a few problems: hypermobility, low muscle tone, and a suspected autistic spectrum disorder. I couldn’t take him to the Regional Pool as he did not like a lot of people and would not speak to women, and if they spoke to him, he would scream and cry.

On our first visit he was a bit shy, but soon got chatting to Ashley and Josh, the lifeguards, who made both of us feel very at ease. Every week we would go and the same people would be there. They were very friendly and did not mind if he was loud or upset. One lady spoke to him every week and he would hide behind me, but as the weeks went on, he started to get closer and closer to her and then he slowly started to speak to her. After a few more weeks, he was racing her up the pool and it was fantastic for me to see, he would still hide from other women but it was a start and he looked forward to going and asked if she would be there. He built up a fantastic relationship with staff and other users and this has helped his social skills a lot. He started to have physio at the hospital and she said I would need to take him to the hydro pool to which he replied, “I go to Ashley’s pool!”

Shay’s social skills are still not great and he does not like to go to the park or any play area and we struggle to take him to parties etc, but he will happily go to the pool and even had his fifth birthday there. Shay loves the staff and cuddles them all, which is great, as he does not like being touched. I cannot praise the staff at the pool enough. They have not only helped with Shay’s physical needs but with his emotional needs too. I love the fact that other users in the pool all have different needs but no one notices, no one stares or makes remarks. Everyone is equal and it helps. Shay realizes that everyone’s disabilities are OK and he does not notice. This is a life skill that cannot be taught.”



**Darren Towell** was knocked down by a car in September whilst walking on the pavement over the town bridge in Stamford. He broke both legs and severely damaged both cartilages and ligaments in his knees.

After 3 months of bed rest while the breaks healed and the swelling to both knees subsided, he lost most of the muscle tone in his legs and gained quite a bit of weight.

He started land based physio but could not weight-bear unless he used a walking frame, Eventually he was able to weight-bear long enough to build up enough muscle tone to walk very short distances and tackle a few stairs using crutches.

He was then advised to try the hydrotherapy pool which he says “ has been an absolute godsend, it has enabled me to have a lot more movement in my legs and has also built up my muscles again.

The hydrotherapy pool has also been a very good meeting place to talk to people who have similar conditions.

The staff are very friendly and there is always a good atmosphere. I would recommend this to anyone who has had an operation, got poor circulation or who has got limited movement with aches and pains. It has definitely speeded up my recovery. Before I started using the pool my consultant and physiotherapist thought I was going backwards with my rehabilitation.



**Connor Ruddell**, aged 15, is pupil at Samuel Pepys School in St Neots, which provides specialist education for a wide range of special educational needs. Connor's health problems started at age four months when he began to have seizures. These become so severe that at six months he was referred to Great Ormond Street Hospital. It was here, when aged 11 months, the decision was made to perform a hemispherectomy.

This is a rare surgical procedure, used to treat epilepsy. In Connor's case, this resulted in the disconnection of half his brain and the removal of a third. As a result, Connor was seizure free but the medical prognosis was that Connor would be unlikely to learn to walk or talk.

All hemispherectomy patients suffer at least some weakness or paralysis on the side of the body (hemiplegia) opposite to the removed portion of the brain and often visual impairment too. Connor had both. He was left with deep left sided hemiplegia and a serious visual impairment. However, he and his family were resilient. He began to learn Mackaton, a language programme that uses signs and symbols to help people communicate. Nonetheless, despite a number of other serious health complications, at age two and a half Connor began to walk and at five he began to talk.

However, distressingly, it was at this age that the seizures returned. Over time, these seizures have become more severe and more common; the anticonvulsant drugs able to control them have become exhausted. This means that the family need to be on a constant vigil to ensure that Connor is safe.

If this was not enough, there have been other difficulties too. Connor's mobility has deteriorated, requiring him to undergo corrective orthopaedic surgery at Addenbrooke's Hospital. He now requires a wheelchair when outside. The family also noticed Connor's intense fascinations with specific things. At first, it was vacuum cleaners and then it was tractor chimneys. At age 11, five years after Connor had begun to display these signs, he was diagnosed with autism.

Connor now has a profound interest and great knowledge of projected light effects. He even has a very impressive sensory room of his own at home.

Connor now loves attending St George's when it he is not at school. It is a vital but enjoyable means of exercise, relaxation, and socialization for him. He often comes with his cousins Joe and Josh. As well as his favourite sensory experiences - the music and lights - he also enjoys the 'lovely warm spa with all the bubbles.'

**Each week, around 65 other young people under the age of 25 with complex needs, like Connor's, similarly enjoy and benefit from St George's.**