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ACCENT HEALTHY LIVING

DEMI'S PROGRESS



Staff photos by RICHARD GRAULICH

PARENTS' PERSEVERANCE: Demi Reilly's parents Simon and Sandy hold hands in the recovery room after the 15-month-old's successful leg-lengthening operation at the Paley Advanced Limb Lengthening Institute at St. Mary's Medical Center in West Palm Beach. Demi was born with a foot deformity.

Weeks after flying across the world to correct a foot deformity, a 15-month-old Australian girl is up and playing, thanks to local doctors, firefighters and two determined parents.

By LESLIE GRAY STREETER
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Demi Reilly doesn't know she's in Florida — "She doesn't know what country she's in," father Simon clarifies.

The smiley, friendly toddler doesn't really get that the nice lady that hangs out and plays with her every day for an hour is a physical therapist, or that all the stretch-

ing and pulling on her leg that makes her cry while she's playing is to help her.

And she probably doesn't know that the metal thingee on her leg, which right now is draped with a SpongeBob SquarePants cover, is called a fixator. Or that, along with a revolutionary surgery, the nice lady physical therapist and time, will help correct the foot deformity she was born with.

If all goes according to plan, she will be able to walk on her own, without holding onto anything. And that's sure to make her smile, even if the physical therapy isn't right now.

"She has her moments with the pain, but she's pretty much back to normal," says Simon, a firefighter from Palm Beach,

See DEMI, 4D ►

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BIG FIX FOR LITTLE FOOT: Toward the end of the surgery in mid-August, a fixator was assembled on Demi's newly lengthened right leg. Doctors hope to remove the device in February.



WHERE'S DADDY?

Demi Reilly, getting used to her new fixator and pain medication, plays peekaboo with her parents before she is discharged from her recovery room at the Children's Hospital at St. Mary's Medical Center in August. The family is staying in a Lake Worth home provided by local firefighters while Demi is in the early stages of her recovery.

Family heads home next month, will return in February

▶ DEMI from 1D

Australia, who earlier this month flew with Demi and wife, Sandy, to West Palm Beach so that their daughter could have bone-lengthening surgery at the Paley Advanced Limb Lengthening Institute at St. Mary's Medical Center.

Other doctors had recommended amputation of the right foot — her leg eventually was projected to be shorter than the left one. But on Aug. 11, Dr. Dror Paley and his team reconstructed 15-month-old Demi's right foot, which from birth was twisted to the side, had only three toes, and was missing a bone that's supposed to form part of her ankle. She's gained about a centimeter of bone growth since the surgery, according to an X-ray.

Every two weeks, Demi's foot will be measured to chart her progress, but Emily Rade, that nice lady physical therapist, says things are going well so far.

Right now, stretching the muscles in Demi's reconstructed foot is important so they don't stiffen up, making it difficult for her to walk in the future. She's getting around pretty well with the fixator, which



RICHARD GRAULICH/Staff Photographer

Dr. Dror Paley greets Simon Reilly after the operation. Reilly says this story is about more than a cute little girl. It's about, he says, an entire team of doctors and medical staff. "Dr. Paley is the big key in the jigsaw. His team is the best." He also praises the network of firefighters who helped.

adds about 4 pounds to her approximately 27-pound frame.

Simon Reilly wants people to know that this story is about more than a cute little girl. It's about, he says, an entire team of doctors and medical staff — "Dr. Paley is the big key in the jigsaw. His team is the best," Reilly says — and a network of

See more photos of Demi's day of surgery at
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firefighters who reached out to help the family of a brother they'd never met.

While researching the surgery, Reilly made contact with Palm Beach

County Fire Chief Steve Jerauld, who got together with other firefighters to find the family a house, a car and, now a commu-

nity. "The firemen's brotherhood extends all around the world," he says.

Right now, Demi's crying a little, but being placated a little with her mom's soothing voice and a toy monkey that plays The Spinners' *Love Machine*.

"She's a baby. She doesn't know what a stretch is, but she knows she doesn't like it," Rade says. "As you work with kids, you know when they mean 'Leave me alone.'"

She leans down to Demi, smiling.

"But the muscles gotta stretch, right?" she says. Demi smiles back, probably because she doesn't know what Rade means. She will in a few moments, and she won't be happy. But then, it's all smiles again.

"She can't tell you what's going on," her father says. "There are different levels of pain, and as her parents. ... But she's doing well. If it were you or me, we'd still be in bed complaining and whining. Two days after the surgery, she was up."

Though mother Sandy says her daughter has been able to "cruise around the furniture" while leaning on something, "she hasn't walked

completely hands-free."

Because Demi is a baby, she has no idea that her visit to Florida isn't like most families', because "we're not on holiday," Simon says. That's why the Reillys' most frequently visited sites are the Lake Worth home they're renting, "the hospital, the hospital and the hospital," he says.

There have been some brief moments of escape, including visiting the beach, and Simon's recent birthday celebration with their new friends.

Hopefully, there will be more time for fun on the next visit. The Reillys are scheduled to be in the area for three months total, headed back to Australia at the end of October, depending on Dr. Paley's recommendations, Simon says. The plan is to return in February to have the fixator removed — "We'd like to stick with the same team," he says.

"We don't want them to go anywhere, do we?" Rade says to her little client, who smiles.

If all goes well with Demi's recovery, she'll soon be able to go anywhere her two little feet can carry her.

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