

5-year-old Isabell thrives at new pediatric therapy center

Isabell Mondt is a spunky, energetic girl with a contagious sense of humor. After being born prematurely at just 24 weeks, she's spent the first five years of her life working hard to overcome some of the challenges that resulted from her premature birth.

Helping Isabell progress through these challenges is a talented and caring team of therapists at Perham Health. Speech therapist Laura Nyhus, occupational therapist Lacey Thiel, and physical therapist Sarah Gillespie each meet with Isabell once a week to help her accomplish a variety of goals.

"Bringing Isabell to Perham Health for pediatric therapy services is one of the best decisions we ever made," says Isabell's father Al Mondt. Isabell's mother, Kerisa Mondt, was also very involved in her daughter's therapy appointments until Kerisa passed away from cancer two years ago.

Al continues, "Some friends first told us about the therapy services they have here. When Isabell was a little over a year old, we made the decision to start bringing her to pediatric therapy. I can't believe the impact they've made in her life over the past few years."

When Isabell was born, she weighed just 1 pound, 7 ounces. Al explains that when his daughter was just one week old, she had a blood vessel burst in her brain that caused her head to swell. This damaged the frontal lobe part of her brain. As he explains it, the rest of her brain essentially rewired itself so it can function in a different way. After spending six and a half months in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in Fargo, along with time in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area for multiple surgeries, Isabell was released to go home with her parents.

Since that time, Al says she's been doing remarkably well. "This summer I ended up taking her back to the Cities to see a specialist for another eye surgery to help straighten out the muscle. She will occasionally still have appointments in Fargo, but I'm thankful that 99 percent of the time Isabell's appointments are here in

Perham. It is so great to have the services she needs available close to home."

Another thing Al says both he and Isabell appreciate is Perham Health's new pediatric therapy center located on the Perham Living campus. The new facility benefits both therapy providers and patients with added space, inviting colors and lighting, and a main floor location for more convenient access. There is a private pediatric waiting area and the option to utilize the outdoor courtyard.

The outdoor courtyard is especially inviting for one of Isabell's favorite parts of therapy—riding a bicycle. "She looks forward to riding that bike every time she comes here," says Al.

Physical therapist Sarah Gillespie uses the bicycle, along with several other activities, to work on improving Isabell's balance, strength, and coordination. Specific muscle groups are targeted to help Isabell improve her gait and functional mobility. Now she has even mastered climbing on the rock wall in the physical therapy room.

"Isabell has made tremendous progress, largely due to her determination and her family's dedication to therapy and willingness to work on activities at home," Gillespie reports.

"Isabell's biggest accomplishment was her ability to walk. She started with a gait trainer, progressed to a reverse walker, and now does the majority of her walking without an assistive device."

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Riding a bicycle is an activity 5-year-old Isabell Mondt looks forward to every week. With the help of Perham Health physical therapist Sarah Gillespie, Isabell cruises around Perham Living's sunny outdoor courtyard. While on the bike, she practices skills such as steering and stopping.

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The new pediatric therapy space allows Isabell's physical therapy to occur just across the hallway from her speech and occupational therapy appointments. This close proximity allows for frequent communication between therapists. The team of therapists can easily discuss patient progress or concerns, resulting in a more cohesive interdisciplinary team approach.

Occupational therapy and physical therapy also have a joint closet space, which is convenient when utilizing shared equipment. There is no need to interrupt sessions. Having each of the therapy rooms close to one another is also a benefit for clients who are weak or have difficulty with transitioning.

In addition to struggling with certain physical tasks, Isabell also requires special assistance with a variety of speech-related skills such as learning to recognize and name shapes or colors. Laura Nyhus, speech language pathologist, works with Isabell on these skills once a week.

"She has progressed so much in her speech and language skills," Nyhus notes. "Initially, our goals were for her to make noises in imitation, use some sign language paired with vocalizations, and follow directions. Isabell continues to impress me each

time I see her. I remember the first time she imitated vocalizations, we were all so excited! Now, she is answering questions, telling some short stories, and even telling little fibs here and there. She understands different parts of speech and is catching up to kids her same age."

During a typical speech therapy session, Nyhus will incorporate both table top activities and play activities. A structured task is often planned along with a play activity to keep it interesting for Isabell. "She especially enjoys coloring and playing with the kitchen set, dolls, and cards," Nyhus says.

Current speech therapy goals include increasing Isabell's expressive vocabulary skills, comprehending and answering questions, and naming colors. At the end of each session, Isabell is given some homework or home practice suggestions she can continue working on throughout the week with her dad.

Nyhus says, "I have truly enjoyed working with Isabell and her family. Her dad does a great job of following through with my recommendations for home practice. With all Isabell has been through and being born so prematurely, she is doing great! I have high expectations for Isabell and have no doubt she will do well."

Isabell also meets with Lacey Thiel, pediatric occupational therapist, once a week. A typical occupational therapy session consists of working toward improving Isabell's fine motor, visual motor integration, bilateral coordination, daily living, and sensory processing abilities.

"Isabell is working on managing her lower body clothing, completing zipper fasteners, forming letters in her name going from left to right across midline, cutting out simple shapes, finger isolation, and pointing at moving targets," Thiel says, explaining some of the goals they are working toward in therapy.

Since Isabell first started occupational therapy, she has developed from a fist grip to a fine tip



Occupational therapist Lacey Thiel encourages Isabell Mondt as she passes through the steam roller deluxe. The device is designed to provide the body a sense of position and location and tactile input, along with helping to assist Isabell with strengthening and back extension.

grasp on small toys, from needing support in sitting to transferring from laying on her belly and completing different animal walks, from startling at typical environmental noises to attending to tasks even with those noises present, and from crying when touching dry rice to finding objects within a large tub of rice.

Another important development is Isabell's ability to use both hands when working to complete an activity. When she first started therapy, she would only use her right hand and would keep her left hand clenched in a fist.

"I have seen a lot of progress with Isabell's left hand because of what Lacey does with her," mentions Al. "Lacey will have Isabell pick up



Isabell Mondt concentrates on pouring the perfect cup of coffee for speech therapist Laura Nyhus. Play activities are incorporated into speech therapy sessions to keep pediatric patients engaged and entertained.

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Nurse-Midwife Tonya Diggins will soon see patients in Perham

Perham Health is excited to announce that Tonya Diggins, nurse-midwife, will soon start seeing patients at the Perham clinic. Having a nurse-midwife on staff provides women with another choice in their care.

"In addition to her role as a nurse-midwife, Tonya is also a family nurse practitioner. This means she will also see women and their children for illness and well visits, allowing for a better coordination of care for her patients," explains Perham Health Clinic Director Beth Ulschmid. "As a family nurse practitioner, she can also see men for a variety of illnesses."

Diggins will first start seeing patients in Perham on November 27, 2017. She recently moved to the area from Montevideo, MN, where she was working for the past 22 years. During that time, she says she enjoyed the opportunity to provide nursing care in a rural Minnesota health care setting. For the past six years, she focused primarily on obstetrics and newborn care as a nurse-midwife.

"My husband, Troy, and I are both from small communities and we appreciate that about Perham. It is such a beautiful area and the community seems very friendly and supportive of each other," Diggins says.

The couple has five children—Kelsie, Tia, Troy Jr., Finn, and Cate. The two youngest kids, Finn (9th grade) and Cate (5th grade), are already attending school in Perham. With her children very active in sports, Diggins enjoys attending sporting events and other community activities. In her free time, she likes to garden and spend time outside.

Diggins received both her Master of Science in Nursing (Family Nurse Practitioner Program) and her Post-Master's Certificate (Nurse-Midwifery Program) from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. She is licensed as a Board Certified Nurse-Midwife with the American College of Nurse-Midwives, Board Certified Family Nurse Practitioner with the American Nurses Credentialing Center, Registered Nurse with the state of Minnesota, and Public Health Nurse with the state of Minnesota.

"I am very excited that Perham has had a midwife in their community before and that everyone here seems very supportive of that role," Diggins says. "I love to educate my patients and teach them how to care for themselves and their families. Watching families evolve with adding a new member into their family is very rewarding. To



At the end of November, Tonya Diggins, nurse-midwife and family nurse practitioner, will start seeing patients at Perham Health. Diggins brings with her 22 years of experience providing nursing care in rural Minnesota.

observe the transition to parenthood is truly a blessing."

"We are all so excited to work with Tonya," Ulschmid remarks. "She is such a warm person and you can just tell she is going to be a great provider who patients will love."

To make an appointment with Tonya, call the Perham Health Clinic at (218) 347-1200.



Al Mondt, pictured with his daughter Isabell, says he is thankful for Perham Health's new pediatric therapy center and the wonderful team of therapists who have made such a positive impact on his daughter's life. Isabell's hard work at each of her weekly physical, occupational, and speech therapy appointments has resulted in a much better quality of life for the five-year-old girl who was born prematurely.

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things with her left hand and really works a lot on her mobility. She will give her obstacles that help her to use her hands a lot."

"She has had significant improvement in the mobility of her upper and lower extremities since I first started seeing her," agrees Annalise Shippee, PA-C, who is Isabell's primary care provider at Perham Health. "Specifically, her left hand has improvement in dexterity and decrease in spasticity with the use of Botox injections and continued water therapy. Her speech and communication have also improved over this time."

Shippee receives periodic updates from the therapy department so she can follow the progress Isabell is making and review any suggested changes to her therapy plan. Shippee adds, "It is always a pleasure to see Isabell's smiling face in the clinic. She is a real

trooper when it comes to all of her appointments and continued therapy. She has been working hard with our amazing therapy department and has made great strides in the last year and a half."

Isabell's father agrees, "I don't think she would be as advanced in life as she is right now without the therapy services here. She wouldn't be able to talk as well or use her left hand. She would probably still be crawling around on the ground, but now she's able to walk. At home, she loves playing outside with her brother Jack, fishing, and being on the boat. She has her own pole, will catch fish, and even reel them in."

Al continues, "Isabell is such a determined little girl. Nothing that comes in her way is able to stop her. It has been really awesome to see all the different therapists work with Isabell and to watch her develop. She looks forward to her appointments every week and just loves it here."



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