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PENDLETON, OREGON

Nicholas progress

11-year-old making great

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Nicholas Seggerman, an 11-year-old from Pendleton who traveled with his family to the Midwest for a special therapy for his cerebral palsy, has been making fantastic progress, according to his parents.

It's wonderful, something I've always dreamed about, him taking these steps.

Naomi Seggerman, about her son, Nicholas, who has cerebral palsy.

Nicholas Seggerman, 11, works during a Euro-Peds physical therapy session
Contributed photo

Young Nicholas has been attending Euro-Peds, an intensive physical therapy program for children with neuromuscular disorders available only at North Oakland Medical Center, a non-profit hospital in Pontiac, Mich.

Although he was not able to receive "suit therapy" (a tight-fitting cloth suit that is suspended from a large cage-like structure, which helps with alignment and range of motion) because of recent surgeries on his hip, Nicholas' therapists at the clinic have been using TheraTogs, a full-body elastic suit that is less intense than suit therapy, but also helps Nicholas stretch his muscles and work on proper alignment.

Nicholas' father, Michael, speaking from the Euro-Peds clinic on the family's last day in Michigan on Friday, said his son has started doing things he has never done before. Nicholas' arms, which he used to keep folded up against his chest, have been down and relaxed since day three, Michael said.

"And he's been reaching with his right arm, and grabbing, and he never used to use his right arm," Michael said.

Nicholas also never used to be able to sit by himself, his father said. But after two weeks of therapy, Nicholas is able to sit with just a little bit of help or no help at all.

"Last night he actually sat up for 45 minutes on his own," Michael said. "That alone is just huge progress."

Each day for the past two weeks, the Seggermans have been traveling to the hospital from where they are staying with family, about an hour and a half away, for Nicholas' therapy sessions, which lasted up to four hours a day.

The first thing the therapists did each morning, said Nicholas' mother, Naomi Seggerman, is lay

Nicholas on a table and put sandbags and heat wraps on his arms and legs. Then, working from one limb to another, they massaged and stretched his body before replacing the sandbags, which weighed down his limbs and further lengthened and relaxed his muscles.

"The first week was really, really rough," Michael said. "He cried for the first three or four days."

The therapists told the Seggermans that it was normal for the children to cry at first, but still, Naomi said, it was very difficult to see Nicholas cry. But by day five, she said, he was getting used to it and enjoying the new things his body was starting to do.

"When he moves his right arm, he kind of gets this grin on his face - it's like, 'Look at me!'," Michael said.

After he was massaged and stretched, the therapists took him to a play area where they let him play with toys while helping him adjust his alignment and practice movements to help him function better, Naomi said.

Naomi said she's learned a lot of techniques for continuing Nicholas' progress at home, and the family also wants to purchase the TheraTog suit.

"It's wonderful," Naomi said, "something I've always dreamed about, him taking these steps."

The clinic's therapists told the Seggermans that Nicholas has the potential to walk and, next year, he will be able to receive suit therapy.

Michael said they have already signed Nicholas up.

"We're just thankful we had the opportunity to do this," Michael said, "and we're just hoping and praying that we can come back next year."