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Local girl ready for a big step

BY ALLISON FASHEK

afashek@nwitimes.com

219.662.5333

CROWN POINT Like many 5-year-old girls, Kailee Erdelac wants to be a ballerina when she grows up, sometimes gets annoyed with her little brother and loves princesses.

But perhaps unlike them, Kailee also is incredibly strong.

In physical therapy since she was 9 months old, she has had multiple surgeries to combat the affects of cerebral palsy. This spring Kailee, who walks with braces that stretch from her knees to her feet, spent three weeks in therapy in Pontiac, Mich.

Christine Erdelac, Kailee's mother, hopes it will help her daughter get ready for a big step - - walking the halls of Winfield Elementary School this fall for kindergarten.

"If she does fall, she'll know how to fall," Erdelac said.

Born premature, Kailee Erdelac was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at 14 months old. When doctors didn't provide Christine Erdelac with a plan for helping Kailee, she researched the options and created one of her own.

She and her husband, Ken Erdelac, have gotten Kailee Botox injections to reduce spasticity in her muscles continued her physical therapy and started her on occupational therapy at age 3.



But when she struggled with balanced they took her to St. Louis Children's Hospital for a selective dorsal rhizotomy, which involves the cutting of sensory nerve fibers that come from the muscles and enter the spinal cord.

Afterwards, Kailee's ability to sit and walk improved, but she still was walking on her tip toes.

So, in late 2004 and this year the family took her to Euro-Peds (www.europeds.org), a nonprofit clinic in Michigan offering the only hospital-based intensive physical therapy clinic for the condition in North America.

The therapy is intensive, said Anne Mancour, communications coordinator for Euro-Peds. Kailee spent five days a week doing four hours of therapy, gaining strength through repetition of movements. She also used a tool called a Therapy Suit, a concept based on the design of Russian cosmonauts' spacesuits that creates alignment and strength through resistant bands.

Back home, Kailee has an exercise program to keep up the benefits of Euro-Peds, on top of regular physical and occupational therapy.

The Erdelacs would like to take Kailee back to the clinic, but because Suit Therapy is considered investigational in the United States, their insurance doesn't cover it and they can't afford another trip. They try not to focus on the cost of helping Kailee, though. As her preschool bus pulled up last month, Kailee showed one of the skills she's working hard to master—walking down the bus steps to jump into her mother's arms.

She's very tenacious," Christine Erdelac said.