Michelle Ballasiotes' mother was told weeks before she gave birth that her baby had a brain abnormality, which turned out to be due to paediatric stroke. She is a lucky survivor, who benefited from early diagnosis and access to great care.

"Your baby has a brain abnormality." Those were the chilling words my parents heard when my mom was 29 weeks pregnant with me. Seven anxious weeks later, I was born and doctors determined that I had hydrocephalus. At three days old, during a surgery to place a shunt in my brain, the doctor discovered my brain abnormality was the result of a hemorrhagic stroke. To this day we still don’t know what caused it. However, I was lucky to have been diagnosed so early because I was able to start occupational and physical therapy at just a few months old.

As a result of my stroke, I have right hemiplegia (a form of cerebral palsy). I continued weekly therapy for over 10 years. I also wore an AFO (Ankle Foot Orthotic) on my right leg to help me walk better and I always had to explain to everyone what it was. To further improve my gait, I had surgery on my right foot. All of this was possible because I had a wonderful team of doctors and therapists, as well as access to healthcare insurance. I don’t know if I would be as functional as I am today without all of the treatments I received.
I am able to drive a car, swim, play a musical instrument, and I will be going to college in the fall. Not everything has been easy though. I still struggle with some aspects of school, including finding friends that will accept me for who I am. Even everyday tasks require creativity since I only have full use of my left hand. People are surprised at how fast I can type with one hand!

My mom will tell you that it’s stressful having a child with a disability. Those hours of therapy and doctor’s appointments were time consuming and it impacted my entire family. There were a lot of unanswered questions about my stroke. What caused it? What is the best therapy? Because of the lack of information, resources, and support, my mom founded the International Alliance for Pediatric Stroke (IAPS), a member of America’s NCD alliance, NCD Roundtable.

I started advocating with my mom when I was just eight years old and I enjoy sharing my story to help other kids impacted by stroke.

Because of my experience, I want to major in occupational therapy or public health in college so that I can positively impact the lives of babies and children who suffer strokes.

International Alliance for Pediatric Stroke [1]
NCD Roundtable (USA) [2]
American Heart Association [3]
Panel Image Link Text: [International Alliance for Paediatric Stroke]

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