

How little Olivia has overcome problems to be an inspiration to others

BABY, JUST LOOK AT YOU NOW...

● Before surgery: How Olivia used to look.

PREGNANT Jo Watson's heart chilled three years ago when a radiologist scanned her unborn baby over and over again.

Jo had asked for an extra ultra sound picture showing a front view of her baby's face — but she soon realised all wasn't well.

"I just knew something was wrong. She carried on and on scanning," recalled Jo, who was in Birmingham, where she worked as a corporate lawyer.

"It was atrocious, the way the radiologist dealt with it. I was just told matter of factly: 'It looks like your baby has a cleft lip and palate. There's nothing we can do now. We will see you in a few months' time,'" said Jo (31).

"There was no support, no counselling. I was in shock at the time. I went out to the phone box, phoned my mum — and my mum came from Chesterfield to Birmingham."

It was minutes later that Jo — currently covering maternity relief as a personal assistant



and personnel co-ordinator at the *Derbyshire Times* — began to muster her fighting spirit.

"After I'd broken down, I went back into the maternity department and said I needed to see someone. I'd got my lawyer's head on by this time. I hadn't a clue what cleft lip and palate was but I knew it wasn't very nice."

But things were to go from bad to worse when the consultant she saw left her even more alarmed.

"I was shown medical photographs of newborn babies with cleft lip and palate — very stark black and white close-ups of faces. They were even more shocking," said Jo.

It was what happened from then on that will make Jo and little Olivia, who was born in Chesterfield Royal Hospital, among the stars of GMTV's Get Up and Give, which runs from July 16-20.

Jo traced the CLAPA charity and was reassured her baby's lip and palate would be surgically 'mended' soon after her birth.

And she passionately believes that CLAPA's relentless work in providing information leaflets, reassurance and specialist feeding bottles, warrants all the help that being nominated by the Get Up and Give charity can bring.

Toddler stars in TV show

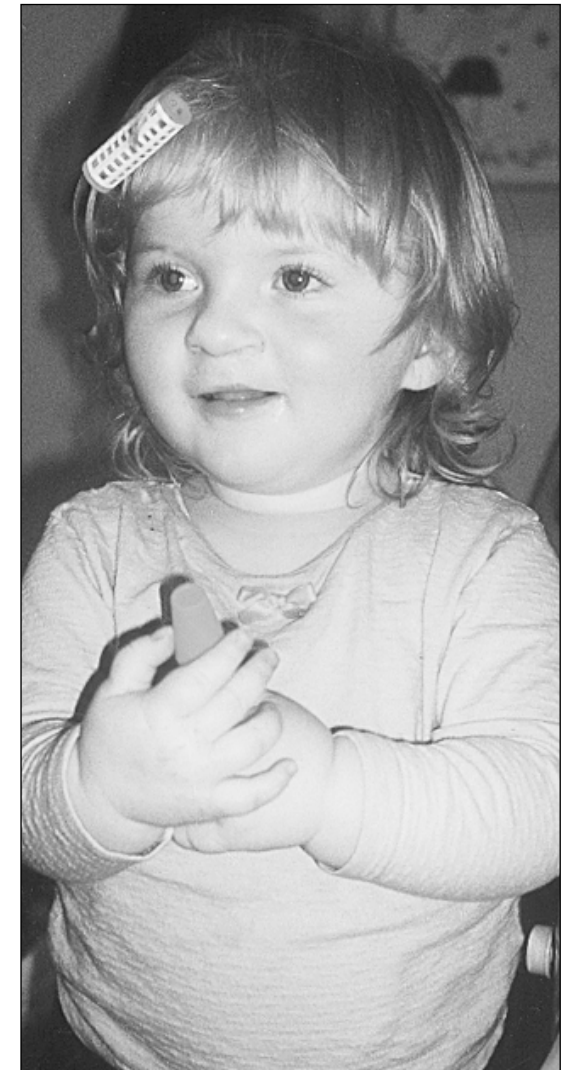
Film crews have already visited north Derbyshire to capture Olivia ahead of the toddler's appearance on GMTV.

They shot footage at her home and at the Playbox Nursery she attends at Newbold.

Her story will be told on GMTV's July 19 broadcast but clips may be shown throughout Get Up and Give week from July 16-19.

Jo is trying to think of fund-raising ideas to support the charity and anyone who would like to help should phone her on (01246) 297612.

● To find out more about cleft of the lip or palate and the work of CLAPA, visit the charity's website at www.clapa.co.uk. The charity can also be phoned on (0207) 4310033.



● Pretty as a picture: Olivia as she looks now, playing at being a hairdresser.

'Most people wouldn't know she had had a cleft lip and palate'

Little Olivia was born with a 'great big hole' where her left nostril should have been.

But mum Jo and her family made light of the deformity in the early days after her birth by calling it her 'Les Dawson' face.

"She looked just lovely, and I miss that face because she got sewn up so quickly," said Jo.

Things were set in motion to stop Jo worrying about her unborn child soon after moving back in with her mum and dad, Irene and Graham Bagg, at Newbold.

Chesterfield Royal Hospital fixed it for her to meet a specialist nurse from the Sheffield Children's Hospital team who would mend Olivia's face.

Jo was shown reassuring photos of babies who had undergone corrective surgery after being born with a cleft lip and palate.

She learned about CLAPA, swotted up using the charity's advice leaflets and website, and arranged to get their modified feeding bottles.

"I knew what to expect, and how cute these babies looked," said Jo.

Devastated Jo Watson's world fell apart when she learned her unborn baby's face was literally not joining together properly.

But in a few days' time, the same child — born with a cleft lip and palate — is to be one of the prettiest stars of GMTV's massive charity fund-raising drive, Get Up and Give.

TV bosses believe the way Jo and little Olivia have overcome their problems will act as an inspiration to others in the same situation.

And charity chiefs at the Cleft Lip and Palate Association (CLAPA) hope that highlighting their brave plight will help a fund-raising drive.

Derbyshire Times reporter LESLEY FIELDS went to meet them...

An initial operation took place at Sheffield when Olivia was just a month old to repair her face, and nine months later she underwent surgery at Portsmouth to mend her palate.

But there was still hard work to be done on the way to recovery.

For the first two months of her life it meant Jo, her sister Amanda and their mum had to work in shifts to feed Olivia tiny drops of milk every five minutes.

"You have to squeeze the milk into the child's mouth because they have no palate, so they can't suck," said Jo.

Olivia's feeding regime was so demanding it still affects her sleeping patterns. She has a hearing aid and receives speech therapy.

Devoted mum Jo has only just returned to work because she was determined Olivia's medical and emotional needs came first.

Jo said: "I'm just glad I had her. She is even cuter now. People often stop her over her strawberry blonde colour, and say how lovely she is.

"I would say most people wouldn't know she had had a cleft lip and palate."



● Devoted: Mum Jo with Olivia.