

## Meet Annika

-Feeling safe, feeling confident!



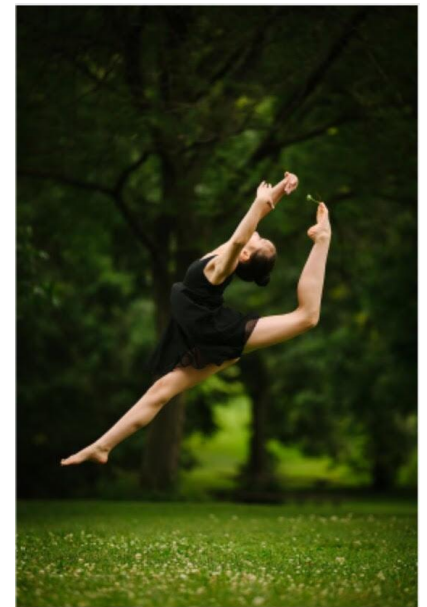
Left: Annika shortly before joining CAAM CDT.

Right: One year later, Annika is standing tall!

**“Before I started Chinese dance, my feet turned in, and they were loose . . . I hurt myself all the time from falling,”** says 11-year old Annika. “Chinese dance helped build my strength, and now I feel safe.”

At 8 months old, Annika was hospitalized. She had trouble growing; her muscle tone was slack, and her joints were loose. Her doctors diagnosed her with Benign Congenital Hypotonia. As she grew, risk of injury prevented her from participating in many typical childhood activities. By age 7, her mother started suggesting dance classes to help build her tone. Hip-hip, ballet, jazz — the answer was always the same: “No! I don’t want to dance!” Then her mother saw an ad for CAAM Chinese Dance Theater. Certain she knew the answer, she asked anyway: “Annika, do you want to try Chinese dance?” To her surprise, Annika said yes.

Even though her muscles put her at a disadvantage, Annika loved Chinese dance! To catch up with the other students, she did barre exercises every day at home. She studied the dances over and over and practiced them on her own. She began eating healthier and going to bed early so she would be strong for dance. She refused to miss a single class, even when a severe foot sprain set her back. Annika’s hard work has paid off: Her muscle tone improved leaps and bounds—so much so that even strangers now comment on her “dancer’s posture.” Even better, her confidence and poise grew along with her physical strength. Once shy, she is now confident. As her mother says, “Chinese dance is part of Annika’s identity. She just loves it!”



Annika is soaring! Photos courtesy the Olson family and Jijun He