

Panu from a cursed life



HOW IT WAS DONE

1 The tibia bone is cut at an angle below the knee and elevated, correcting about 40 per cent of the bowing.

2 Bone graft from Panu's hip is used to fill the triangular defect in the upper tibia.

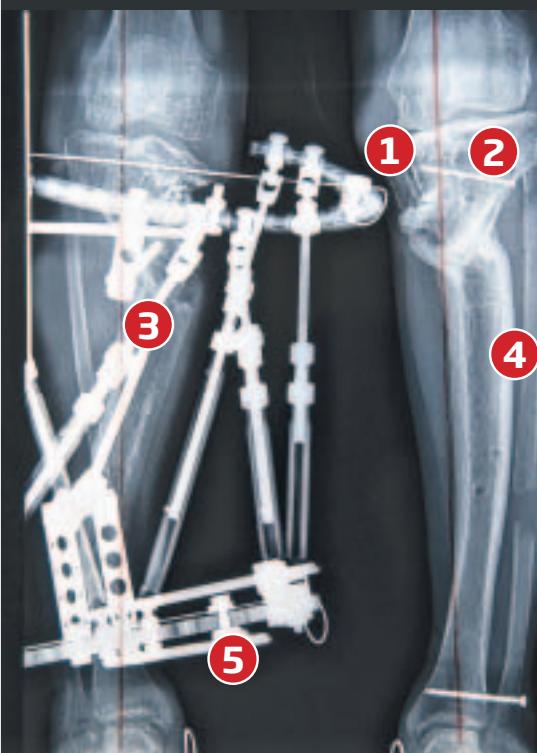
3 An external Taylor Spatial frame is attached to the tibia with wires and pins which pass through muscle and bone.

4 The upper shaft of the tibia is divided completely and a section of the fibula is removed. The frame is then tightened.

5 The wound is left to heal for one week before the six telescopic struts are adjusted daily to slowly correct the leg's deformity.

X-rays are taken of the leg and a computer system is used to plan the amount each strut is adjusted daily. The average movement is about 1mm per day.

When the leg is straight after 10 weeks, the adjustments stop and the frame is kept on for another eight weeks until the tibia has fully healed.



"It was horrific, that first leg was very traumatic for him. He's done it really tough," Ms Kelly said.

"He'd have night terrors, be screaming in his sleep, but looking back I think a lot of the way he dealt with it was cultural."

"I don't think he ever thought he would be able to walk again. Probably for so

long people said it couldn't be done."

"He didn't think it was possible. When we had to turn the screws, until he saw his legs starting to move into shape, then he started to see this new life was real."

Children from across the world have come and gone from the Kilmore farm in the

past year, with 20 new children expected to stay there this year while they recover from operations.

Panu is left as one of the oldest and longest-staying residents; a role he has grown to relish.

Earlier this year, new arrivals to the house from Gaza had been there for about a week before they



were all wearing woollen bracelets made by Panu.

They speak little English between them, but that doesn't stop the gentle jiving, jokes and banter between the boys.

Panu's trademark perfect white smile – always at the ready – has earned him a reputation in the house as a joker and constant source of entertainment.

He giggled behind his hands when describing how he awoke on his 21st birthday last month to a bucket of icy water, tipped on him by one of the farm volunteers.

Later that day, after shopping for a fancy dress

costume for his disco themed birthday party, Panu spoke to his family by phone.

"My mother talks to me and says, 'When are you coming back? I miss you so much. You're my baby, I miss you,'" Panu said.

"I say, 'Mum, I'm not your baby, I'm 21'."

It's an emotional thing for Panu to see photos of himself as a young child with buckled legs.

"That's all history now, Panu," said Ms Kelly, squeezing him in for a quick hug as Panu wipes his eyes.

"There are lots of reasons to smile now."

Panu's gratefulness is

evident in the way he hugs the nurses hello and the proud way he walks through the hospital corridor.

The nurses insist to a giggling Panu that they expect to be invited over for his wedding one day.

With a firm grasp of English and another bitter Kilmore winter approaching, Panu said he is ready to go home.

"I want to go to school and get a job – just to learn more and read and I want to play basketball."

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