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Kings Heath student Ayesha Jones is pursuing a dream to become a top model, in spite of suffering from a condition that was bending her back out of shape. She tells **Alison Jones** how she battled to overcome it

Model scouts have been spotting Ayesha Jones's potential since she was a schoolgirl more anxious to find fashion bargains than to break into the beauty industry on her annual pilgrimage to the Clothes Show.

One particular agency singled her out but at just 13, she was still too young. She kept getting noticed every time she went and eventually, when she was 16, she went to London to take them up on their offer.

In a flash of honesty that she later had cause to regret, Ayesha, who is now 18, admitted something that she was sure the agency, who would be looking for the slightest flaw and imperfection, would have noticed for themselves — the fact that her spine was curving due to the condition scoliosis.

"I thought it was very noticeable and I assumed others could see it as well. I thought it was better me telling them about it. Then I heard them trying to reach other 'look what it has done to her shoulder'."

"They didn't say anything to me, just that they would get in touch about work, but they never did."

"I regretted telling them because I have been in catwalk shows since then and nobody has commented, so maybe they would have signed me."

Ayesha, who comes from Kings Heath, had been living with scoliosis since she was 13. Her mother had spotted some of the tell-tale signs when she was running about on the beach while on holiday in the Caribbean.

"My shoulders were a bit protruding. We came back and got a doctor appointment and found out what was wrong."

"It was only very slight then but as I got older it got worse. A hump developed on the right side and I started to slink over more and more. My left hip is more pronounced than my right."

"It became a lot more painful if I was walking for a long time, carrying a bag on my shoulder or simply standing, not doing anything."

"If I was lying down I would have to brace my stomach and get someone to help me up because I was so that much pain and my back was spasming."

Ayesha also found herself getting increasingly short of breath as her lungs became compressed because of her curved spine and twisted rib cage.

The condition is hereditary. Ayesha's mother Omotona suffers from it but in a very mild form and she doesn't suffer any pain from it.

After seeing a consultant, X-rays revealed that Ayesha had a curve in her spine of 64 degrees. The recommended treatment was surgery which would involve metal rods being inserted either side of her spine and the spine fused solid.

Apart from it being a major operation it would almost certainly have ended any hopes Ayesha still harboured of being a model.

They sought a second opinion and again surgery was recommended.

However, Ayesha and her mother were still reluctant and desperate as well as less invasive methods of treatment, treading the internet for answers.

She tried the Bowen technique, a holistic therapy which works on releasing stored energy within the body, as well as massage, yoga, osteopathy and chiropractors, none of which made a significant difference to the structure of her back or the pain she was in.

Then an internet search came up with Scoliosis SOS, which is based in Suffolk and was set up by Scoliosis sufferer Erika Mande.

The treatment is a hybrid of the best non-surgical treatment techniques.

Ayesha went for a residential course there and spent a month exercising up to six hours a day to re-educate her muscles, strengthening the weaker ones and softening the stretched ones.

"I started to feel a change after a week," says Ayesha. "I started to feel a lot more comfortable. The visual effects became more apparent after a month. I went to my masseuse and she said the difference was a lot greater than she expected. My right shoulder was rotating forward and now it has moved further back."

"I have also had my lung capacity tested and that has increased."

Ayesha continues to exercise regularly, up to 45 minutes a day to maintain the change and she will be taking her special equipment up to the University of Lancaster in the autumn, where she plans to study photography.

"I have applied for a bigger room so I can fit all the boxes in," she says.

She hopes to combine photography with modelling, concentrating on the former at first and then moving behind the camera where she wants to produce pictures "with a message behind them."

"I want to change people's perceptions about things."

As well as her physical improvement, Ayesha has also been giving herself an emotional work out, trying to increase her confidence which had taken a battering during her struggle to deal with her condition.

"I have done some promotional work and catwalk shows but during one of them I told the organiser I wanted to drop out because I was feeling self-conscious and he didn't understand why."

"I always thought the scoliosis was very visible but from talking to people they said they never even noticed until I told them about it."

"But I think you are always more aware of your faults than other people are."

As the strength in her muscles improves and her back straightens, Ayesha is counting on giving her a precious few more inches in height.

"I have grown over an inch since I went on the course and I am now nearly 5ft 7in but I am pushing to grow a bit more."

"I am still self-conscious but I know how to pose to make things less obvious."

"I think if you are confident in yourself that it is going to stand out above everything."

■ For more information look up scoliosisonline.com or ring the Scoliosis SOS Clinic on 01394 389 670.