

"I WANT A NORMAL LIFE"

Plea from woman who has rare condition making her appear drunk

A Saltcoats mum spoke this week about her battle with a debilitating medical condition which can often leave people assuming she has been BOOZING.

Janie Grier says she has been approached in the street before by total strangers who ask her if she's drunk.

Yet the 42-year-old hasn't been hitting the hard stuff - she suffers from a little-known condition called ataxia which means she struggles to walk in a straight line and slurs her words.

It's hard to convince people you aren't drunk when so few have ever heard of ataxia, which causes the brain to shrink affecting speech, walking, and coordination.

Speaking to The Herald to mark Ataxia Awareness Day, which was on Saturday, Janie said: "I once phoned up NHS Direct because my little boy Ryan was ill," recalls Janie.

"The nurse at the other end asked me if I was drunk because my voice was slurred. I was shocked that even medical professionals didn't know about ataxia."

Janie, who has an eight-year-old

by **CRAIG NISBET**

daughter, Julia as well as five-year-old Ryan, first noticed something wrong in her late twenties when she was often dizzy and falling over.

At the time, she was living in Holland with her former partner and working in plant nurseries.

Frustrated with being told there was nothing wrong with her, Janie eventually came back to Scotland, where she was finally given a diagnosis of ataxia.

She was gradually losing control over her muscles and eye movements, causing the dizziness and falls she experienced.

Janie is now getting on with life, living in Mayfield Road, Saltcoats with her children. Now that both are at school she is planning to return to work.

"I won't let ataxia hold me back," she said.

"I just wish more people had heard of it, so I want to raise awareness.

"Before I developed the condition I wasn't even aware of it myself, so if there was more knowledge about ataxia out there, things would be a lot easier for people like me."



• Janie is pictured with daughter Julia and son Ryan.

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