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September 13, 2005 It doesn't matter whether you think you can, or you think you can't, because... Teaching children to walk, b

September 13, 2005 It doesn't matter whether you think you can, or you think you can't, because either way, you're right. So goes the old axiom, and there's never a more crystal clear demonstration of this than a child learning to walk. Tightrope walkers, rock climbers and gymnasts practice with safety harnesses, so why not a safety harness for children learning to walk. The pain of back surgery gave former plumber, Jeff Zinger, the impetus to design a tool to safely lift, hold, balance and provide self confidence to his 10-month old daughter as she learned to walk. He made it, and on the first family outing with the new device, a baby expo in Anaheim the couple were mobbed by people wanting one ? so great was the crowd that formed around them, they were asked to leave. The overwhelming public response on that day, turned the home-made one-off into the first prototype of a new product and perhaps even product category. The Walk-o-long is now being used to assist children to climb stairs, play and even ice-skate safer and earlier than before.

The excruciating pain of back surgery laid the foundation for former plumber, Jeff Zinger, to develop the Walk-O-Long as a tool to safely lift, hold, balance and provide self confidence to his 10-month old daughter as she learned to walk. Four months later, Zinger produced a u-shaped push roll that fits around a toddler's chest, under the arms, fastens with a snap buckle at the back and features handles at the ends just large enough for an adult hand.

The simple, yet innovative invention, endorsed by orthopaedic surgeons, chiropractors, physical therapists and delivery nurses, allowed Zinger to easily lift his daughter, help her navigate stairs; take her first ride down a slide and have the confidence to ice skate at a younger age than her contemporaries. The Walk-O-Long, which comes in pink and blue Hawaiian print and solid pink and solid blue polyester micro suede and zebra and cheetah faux fur is washable, retails for US\$24.95.

"The first time my wife and I took our little daughter out to the 2005 Yeah Baby Family Expo at the Anaheim Convention Center with the Walk-O-Long prototype on, we were actually asked to leave because parents were mobbing us wanting to know where to purchase the product. I suppose our product was getting more attention than the exhibitors!" the entrepreneur laughs.

The Walk-O-Long recently caught the eye of child disability educators at The University of California, Irvine, Children's Hospital of Orange County (CHOC), The Foundation for the Junior Blind of America and parents of children with cerebral palsy.

In addition, The Walk-O-Long prevents "nursemaid's elbow" dislocations that occur when an adult mistakenly pulls a child's arm, swings a child by its arms or a child jerks away from its caregiver.

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