

**A story of acceptance, understanding and courage from a class of students in grade six...**

It all began with a mother's strong desire to educate the children in her son's class about his seizure disorder. Braden is a grade 6 student at Crosby Heights Public School, in Richmond Hill and he has Epilepsy. Braden has had the seizure disorder for many years now and, despite all the challenges he has had to endure, still remains a bright eyed young boy. His mother contacted Epilepsy York Region to recruit staff member to visit the school and do a presentation. The children had many unanswered questions after witnessing Braden's seizures and were curious about the disorder. Upon arrival in the classroom, the presenter, Joyce Hwang, found a bunch of eager students intensely interested in learning more about epilepsy and was amazed to discover how resourceful and smart the students and teacher were. The children in the classroom had already taken on helping roles for when Braden was having a seizure. Everyone knew exactly what to do in the event of a seizure. The maturity, understanding and ability of these students to stay calm in an often stressful situation was absolutely outstanding and their eagerness to understand was truly heartwarming. Their plan of action was an extraordinary one. It also showed how outstanding the students, teacher Ms. Kagan, and staff were. Ms. Kagan describes the action plan as follows: *"After witnessing Braden have his first seizure at school in my class, I could feel the fear and discomfort among the rest of his classmates. My students were full of questions, and we spent that afternoon talking about what Epilepsy was, and I tried to help them to understand based on my knowledge. As part of the procedures of the YRDSB, a Medical Care Plan was completed for Braden. After reviewing this, and having experienced one of Braden's seizures first hand, I knew that an action plan that involved the students also needed to be implemented immediately. We set up a classroom plan, and designated certain roles for members of the class. If Braden was going to have another seizure, I needed to know that he was as safe as possible, along with my other students. We knew that the length of a seizure was critical information, so one job was a timer. We needed to inform the office, so an office runner was put in place. Braden's comfort and safety was our main focus, so one student was responsible for getting the pillow at the back of my classroom, her job is 'head support'. Because I would always be beside Braden, making sure that he was in the proper position, we designated a role of phone monitor as well. The rest of the class ensures that all desks and chairs are moved away from Braden, and they quietly line up outside the classroom.*

Often *“the stigma and insensitivity of others are stressors that affect the emotional and adaptive behavioral responses in children. Many are excluded from activities with classmates; teased beyond belief; and frequently suspended from school because of behavioral dyscontrol. This further reinforces the child or adolescent’s negative view of himself/herself and isolates the child from the usual social and learning experiences which promote normal development”* (Irene M. Elliott, RN, MHSc Hospital for Sick Children, Neurology) Clearly this isn’t happening at Crosby Heights! According to Braden’s mother, *“as a parent of a child with a seizure disorder, you worry not only about the clinical effects of the seizures, but the potential for harm depending on where you child is when he has a seizure, what he’s doing, if someone is available to assist him, and the reactions of those around him. After Braden’s first seizure in class, he was hesitant to return to school for fear of negative reactions. To his surprise and relief, his classmates were extremely empathetic and supportive. I happened to be at the school one day when Braden had a seizure and witnessed a remarkable response and action plan. I cannot adequately express my appreciation to his classmates, teacher, school administration and staff for the level of support that they provide to my son and the comfort they provide to me simply in knowing that the school environment is one area about which I do not need to worry.”*

March being National Epilepsy Awareness Month, this story is an incredible example of what can happen when we take the time to learn and understand Epilepsy. Breaking down the negative barriers and stigma that affect the lives of many individuals with this seizure disorder is crucial. We often underestimate our children, but Ms. Kagan’s class is a perfect example of how children (as young as they are) can be powerful influences in the lives of others. By leading through example, these grade 6 students demonstrate positive character qualities even adults find difficult....compassion, caring, respect, understanding and empathy.