

## Thinking about Epilepsy – Education comes to Niagara

Epilepsy Niagara is pleased to announce the 2007 launch of “Thinking About Epilepsy” in the Niagara Region. With the help of funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation, Epilepsy Niagara will be presenting this fun, interactive and educational program, to local grade five students and teachers about epilepsy. They will learn about the disorder itself, about people living with the disorder, and important facts about seizure first aid. Classrooms will be visited this year from the Niagara District School Board, the Niagara District Catholic School Board and some private schools, upon approval. The “Thinking About Epilepsy” program was created by the London Epilepsy Support Centre following a young child’s seizure at a local elementary school. The parents contacted the Centre to express their concern regarding the teacher’s lack of knowledge with the handling of their child’s seizures. They were also very worried about the understanding and awareness of epilepsy in the school system entirely. In addition, parents discussed the fact that they had not disclosed their son’s condition to the school, as a result of the stigma surrounding the disorder. The London Epilepsy Support Centre saw this first as an opportunity to implement an educational program that would provide students and teachers with greater awareness of epilepsy. Second, they saw this as a chance to increase factual knowledge about seizure first aid, and improve society’s attitude towards the disorder.

Research has proven that grade five is an ideal age (8-11 year olds) to form attitudes, and to foster empathy about others. When developing the program, the Epilepsy Support Centre brought together parents, children and educators to contribute to the content. In addition, a science curriculum writer was used to ensure a direct link between the program and Ontario elementary school curriculum. Currently, the program covers four to six learning objectives in the grade five Public and Catholic Human Body Science Unit. It also closely ties with Health Studies, Physical Education and Special Education classes. At present, the program is currently approved by the Thames Valley District School Board, the London District Catholic School Board, the Lambton Kent District School Board and the St. Clair Catholic District School Board. Using “Thinking About Epilepsy”, including its innovative visual props, such as the Kids On The Block™ puppets, EEG wires and photos of famous people, Epilepsy Niagara plans to continually build community awareness and acceptance, by meeting the following objectives:

- Increase epilepsy knowledge and reinforce prevalence in the community.
- Teach about all types of seizures.
- Reduce stigma and fear of epilepsy and seizures.
- Teach seizure first aid.
- Promote tolerance for those affected.
- Reinforce that epilepsy should not stand in the way of achievement.
- Encourage disclosure for those living with epilepsy

To put this plan into action, Epilepsy Niagara has recently added a new face to their office. Nadine Furbacher has joined the team in August to help implement and manage the Thinking About Epilepsy program, part time. In partnership with Melissa Penner, Executive Director, and the help of Education Assistant Volunteers, Nadine will be planning and presenting this program throughout the 2007 school year. She brings with her a strong background in marketing, presentations, sales and human resources. She is also an advocate for people living with epilepsy, human rights and social services.

By: Nadine Furbacher

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