

Annual Report 2019



EPILEPSY
Toronto
See the Person



2019 Annual Report

This report provides a snapshot of organizational highlights and achievements from the past year.

Children & Youth Services:

- Provided information, counselling and support to 300 children & youth with epilepsy and their families. Provided epilepsy education to 4,100 teachers, students, and child care professionals at 70 schools, daycare settings, and children's community agencies.
- Organized support groups for young adults with epilepsy, parents of young children with epilepsy, and siblings.
- Collaborated with The Hospital for Sick Children to support families with children in the Epilepsy Monitoring Unit (EMU).
- Provided scholarships to 4 students with epilepsy for outstanding perseverance and commitment to academic achievement in the face of extreme challenges.



In 2019 our Children and Youth Services Department hosted our first Purple Pumpkin Party!



The 2019 Michelle Edwards Bursaries were presented by Peter Boisseau (ctr) to Kirsten Huber (lft) and Nazanin Babaie (rt)

- Negotiated with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) to implement new protocols, wherein every student with epilepsy would have a personal seizure emergency plan on file at their school (remains a work in progress).
- Organized a series of family events throughout the year that provided opportunities for children with epilepsy to connect, and their parents to draw support from one another, in a relaxed atmosphere. These included, our first ever Purple Pumpkin Party, our 10th Annual Family Retreat at the Geneva Center in Orillia, an afternoon at the Rogers Centre watching the Jays, and the ever-popular Annual Holiday Feast, where we somehow manage to pack over 200 people into our tiny little office for an evening of festivities.

Adult Services:

- Provided information, counselling, and support to 670 adults with epilepsy and their families; and provided epilepsy education workshops to 1,110 individuals at 74 public service, health care, and community agencies.
- Organized support groups for: adults living with epilepsy, partners & spouses, surgery candidates, professionals, parents with adult children, and women.
- Provided epilepsy outreach services in Scarborough at the Scarborough Storefront and in Etobicoke at the Rexdale Community Centre.
- Collaborated with the Toronto Western Hospital Krembil Neuroscience Center to support adults with epilepsy at epilepsy first-seizure clinics and the Epilepsy Monitoring Unit (EMU).
- Established a bi-weekly yoga program, led by professional yoga instructor and Epilepsy Toronto volunteer, Michael Alex.
- Increased the Friday Recreation Program enrolment by 50%.
- Developed peer-to-peer client support services for isolated adults.
- Launched Securing Futures: Independent Living Services for Independence-Challenged Adults.



In October, our Friday Recreation Program members were joined by volunteers from the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan for an outing to a cooking class - this photo was taken just before their departure.

Employment Services:

- Provided employment counselling and job development services to 135 adults with epilepsy, resulting in 40 jobs.
- Pioneered cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) employment counselling for job seekers with epilepsy.
- Organized multiple speed mentoring events, matching job seekers with HR professionals for accelerated employment consultations.
- Implemented group intake services to reduce wait times for employment counselling.
- Established weekly job search workshops to improve job search skills and technique and bolster confidence.
- Developed an instructional video for the Retail Council of Canada on inclusive hiring and workplace accommodation strategy.



In November, our Employment Services Department collaborated with TravelEdge on a 'Speed Mentoring' event for our clients.

Fund Development:



World of Dance finalist, Briar Nolet's performance was one of the highlights for guests at the 2019 Amari Thompson Soiree

- Successfully executed each of our core special events (the Amari Thompson Gala, BuskerFest, Purple Walk and Holiday Fair in the Square), generating critical revenue, volunteer engagement, and media attention for Epilepsy Toronto. We have begun exploring potential new initiatives for the future.
- Maintained Scotiabank, Mackenzie Financial, United Way, City of Toronto, and The Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure (MEDEI) as our most significant supporters; each are currently re-examining funding priorities and delivery structures.
- Continue to work in partnership with Epilepsy Ontario and our sister agencies from across the Province, to pursue Ministry of Health Core funding.
- Continue to work with our major benefactors to strengthen independent living services for vulnerable adults with epilepsy and their families.
- Explored small business, social enterprise, and investment opportunities, and continue to do so.

Public Education:



Two of our ambassadors were invited to speak at Humber College to a class on "Issues in Diversity".

- Delivered workshops and seminars on epilepsy and stigma, gender, cannabis, stress, diet, memory, music, disclosure, relationships, genetics, seizure dogs, seizure technology, and psychogenic non-epileptic seizures.
- Created the 'Bridge the Gap' ambassador program that recruited and trained agency consumers to deliver epilepsy education workshops throughout the community.
- Reached out to local college and university students with epilepsy to begin forming a post-secondary student support network.
- Had plans to expand educational puppet shows to local schools, but when faced with complications due to the teacher strike, struck a partnership with Taking it Global to live-broadcast TAP (Teaching Awareness through Puppetry) shows to Inuit communities in the Far North.
- Met with every MPP in the City of Toronto to provide personalized epilepsy awareness sessions.
- Delivered online Epilepsy@Work training to TD employees, nation-wide.
- Provided 20 schools with epilepsy awareness kits for Purple Day, reaching a total of 4,000 students.
- Organized an epilepsy awareness event at Queen's Park for the Conservative Provincial Caucus.
- Continued to build awareness of epilepsy and share our members' inspirational stories through our various social media platforms (increased Twitter base by 10%, Facebook by 19%, and Instagram by 81%, and had over 30,000 visits to our website).

Key Partners:

Camp Couchiching
Canadian Epilepsy Alliance
Canadian Mental Health Association
Canadian League Against Epilepsy
Centennial College
Center for Internationally Educated Nurses
Community Living Toronto
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
Developmental Services Ontario
Epilepsy Ontario

Episodic Disability Network
EPLINK
Gage
George Brown College
Krembil Neuroscience Center
L'Arche
Local Immigration Partnership (East, North)
Mothercraft
Neurology Center of Toronto
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

Ontario Disability Employment Network
Options for Homes
REENA
Rexdale Community Center
Scarborough Store Front
Sickkids (Hospital for Sick Children)
Supported Employment Alliance
South Riverdale Community Health Centre
Woodgreen Community Services
YMCA Geneva Park

2020 and COVID-19

The world has changed with the advent of COVID-19, forcing us to adapt the way Epilepsy Toronto functions as an organization in its entirety. As of April 2020, we have successfully transitioned all of our programs and services onto virtual platforms and we now function as an entirely virtual organization in order to continue serving our community effectively.

- The office was officially closed, and all in-person meetings and community events were suspended until further notice.
- Every effort has been made to reach out and stay connected with those feeling most isolated, despondent, and vulnerable. We now use Zoom for our staff and board meetings, client counseling interviews, group sessions, workshops & consultations.
- Computers and cell phones were acquired for those without.
- Specialists were engaged to address member concerns about a range of topics (Coronavirus, mental health, medications, relationships, etc.) in real time interactive webinars broadcast through Facebook.
- A series of employment workshops were provided (ex. job search, disclosure, workplace accommodations, labor market trends, Covid-19 safety, etc.) to assist those that lost jobs as the result of the pandemic.
- A number of online forums were launched to help members feel less anxious and alone, including: Mindful Mondays (meditation and yoga), Live with Lily! (in partnership with Teaching Awareness through Puppetry), Feel Good Fridays (stories of triumph and resilience), Job Search Jeopardy, Family Games Nights, and the Socially Distant Social Club.
- Core Government and foundation funding was retained but all our major special events were cancelled. This jeopardized fully one third of our operating revenues, and required that we explore virtual fund raising avenues and tap into organizational reserves to safeguard programs and services.
- Plans are underway for a staged reopening in the fall, with office retrofits, and PPE, sanitation, and physical distancing protocols.



Some snapshots of our members: (L-R) Liam and his cousin just after they performed at BuskerFest; Lauren and her friend drumming at Purple Walk after performing the land acknowledgement; Dr. Valiante and Lindsay just after she had presented him with a H.O.P.E. award; Isabella and Bella at the family retreat; Matthew at the Purple Walk