



EPILEPSY
Toronto
See the Person

2022 Annual Report



Our Vision...

We envision a world in which **epilepsy and seizures** are widely understood, and where those who live with them **feel fully supported**.

Our Mission...

To promote **independence** and improve **quality of life** for people with epilepsy and their families through **support services, information, advocacy** and **public awareness**.



2022

RE-EMERGING

When I reflect on the past year, the word that comes to mind is “re-emerging.” After two years of operating almost entirely online, Epilepsy Toronto saw a resurgence of in-person activities in 2022. Our office reopened for optional in-person counselling sessions and small group meetings, and we were thrilled to see the return of some of our most beloved events, including the Purple Walk, BuskerFest, and our Fundraising Soiree.

However, as we navigated this transition back to in-person events, it quickly became clear that our “new normal” now needs to be a hybrid model. We recognize the benefits of online events, such as their accessibility and efficiency, while also acknowledging the importance of and need for in-person connection.

In addition to our renewed focus on hybrid events, we are proud to have achieved several important milestones in the past year. We celebrated the graduation of our first class of Securing Futures participants, the first program of its kind in Canada that supports adults living with epilepsy to gain the life skills and housing opportunities they need to live independently. We’ve expanded our offerings to include Functional Seizures Services, which aim to address some of the unmet needs of a population that is often overlooked and severely underserved.

Our dedication to raising epilepsy awareness led to the creation of new online Purple Day classroom kits, which were distributed to a record number of classrooms across our city. The collaborative work of our staff and our members made this achievement possible, allowing us to bring epilepsy education to a larger audience of youth than ever before.

And the demand for our Employment Department’s services was unprecedented, a testament to the importance of our work in supporting individuals with epilepsy in the workplace.

Our community is at the heart of everything we do, and we are constantly striving to find new ways to support and connect with you. We are immensely grateful for your unwavering support, and we look forward to sharing more of our accomplishments and connections with you in the year to come.



Daryl Yeo
*President
Board of Directors*

CHILDREN & YOUTH SERVICES



“Childhood epilepsy can have a significant impact on learning & development, emotional maturity, independence, and self esteem. The earlier the intervention and the opportunities for connection, information, and support, the better the chance at life long success.”

— Katie Armstrong, MSW, RSW
Director of Children & Youth Services

HEARING FROM OUR MEMBERS

“In just a few months since our child’s diagnosis, Epilepsy Toronto has made us feel like this difficult diagnosis may actually be a blessing in our lives ... strength from adversity, community from despair!”



2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- **Building Connection:** One can’t understate the power of in-person connection and the benefits it provides children and youth. This year, for the very first time since the pandemic began, we have been able to meet face to face with our clients. Though we continue to offer virtual services to those who find it more accessible, we have resumed in person counseling, groups, school workshops, and community gatherings, like our Summer Family Picnic, Epic Day Purple Walk and Precious Purple Pumpkin Party.
- **Siblings:** They say that, when someone in your family is diagnosed with epilepsy, everyone is affected. Siblings often struggle with feelings of guilt and resentment, caretaking responsibilities, and lack of attention. It’s as though they’ve suddenly become invisible; epilepsy sucks up all the oxygen in the room. We established a support group specifically for siblings as a forum for drawing support and validation from others with shared experiences.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Parenting a child with extreme social and emotional challenges can be taxing and complex at the best of times; overwhelming, when seizures are added into the equation. Epilepsy Toronto Children & Youth Services and Surrey Place partnered to design and co-deliver specialized parenting workshops for families of children with epilepsy and behavioral management issues.
- **Partnering with TDSB and TCDSB:** We were proud to partner with our regional school boards in order to help spread epilepsy education to young minds across the City of Toronto for Purple Day. Our department developed comprehensive lesson plans and worksheets for every grade level to help educate staff and students about seizure first-aid and awareness in order to make our schools a safer and more inclusive space for children with epilepsy.

ADULT SERVICES

“The pandemic years were particularly hard for the epilepsy community; isolation was rampant, and the number of people struggling with anxiety and depression rose markedly. During this period, we served three times the number of adults than ever before. While demand for services remains high despite waning COVID, we are really excited at the prospect of finally being able to meet people live and in person, in the days and weeks ahead.”

— Rosie Smith, MA, RP
Director of Adult Services



HEARING FROM OUR MEMBERS

“I never knew this agency existed. I have had epilepsy for many years and have struggled alone. For the first time, I feel safe to share my deep feelings about how epilepsy has impacted my life... I can see a light at the end of the tunnel ”



2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- **New Initiatives Supporting Mental Health:** Last year we introduced several new groups and counselling initiatives to help those struggling with mental health. We explored various alternative therapies, including an art therapy program and a writing workshop that helped our clients to express their emotions and nurture self-esteem.
- **Expanding our Services:** We continued to expand our services to persons with functional seizures; the only organization in the nation to provide this specialized support.
- **Reaching Diverse Communities:** We had a very successful year raising awareness of epilepsy in diverse communities through virtual, in-person and teleconference presentations. A new advisory committee was established to spearhead outreach to persons with epilepsy in communities of diversity throughout Toronto.
- **Prioritizing Connection and Community:** Created in response to the pandemic were a series of recreational programs that have been extremely well received and underscore the profound need for connection among those we serve.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



“This past year was extremely busy on the employment front. With the community fast recovering from COVID, people were anxious to get back to work. Demand was so great we had to serve people in groups. Still, jobs were not easily come by. The challenges associated with an episodic disorder are multifold and attitudinal barriers, long entrenched.”

— Carter Hammett
Manager of Employment Services

HEARING FROM OUR MEMBERS

“Epilepsy Toronto has been a great resource; helping me secure a job that catered towards my strengths, while making me feel comfortable as someone living with epilepsy”



2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- **Job Search Preparation:** In 2022, we bolstered our counseling program with a robust series of workshops and seminars on job search techniques, resume writing, disclosure strategies, memory accommodations, personality dimensions, and occupational health & safety.
- **Take It From Someone Who Knows:** Speed mentoring has long been one of our most successful programs; the opportunity to engage in rapid-fire mini consultations with employers and HR professionals on best practices in the workplace and the essentials to getting and keeping a job. One key difference this year: ALL our mentors were themselves, people living with epilepsy.
- **Ax Throwing & Bungee Jumping:** Two vocations not typically associated with epilepsy. Last year, however, we were fortunate to partner with Astro Amusements and the Canadian National Exhibition to provide work experience to twenty individuals interested in trying their hand at the carnival industry.
- **Managing Anxiety:** Looking for work is stressful at the best of times. To those for whom stress is a seizure trigger, it can be a monumental barrier to employment. UPLIFT is a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program that instructs persons with epilepsy seizure management strategies. We were the first in the nation to modify this program entirely within the context of work.
- **Looking to the Future:** There are many who contend that the pandemic has forever changed the nature of work. The question is, is this to the detriment or advantage of those living with seizures. We like to look at all change as opportunity. In the year ahead, we'll be introducing new seminars on emerging trends and technologies in the workplace and establish customer service training for those targeting remote work.

SECURING FUTURES PROGRAM

“We are very proud of the graduates of our inaugural Securing Futures Life Skills Program. After a year of training they have accomplished a major milestone in attaining the life skills they needed to transition to independence. We watched them learn and grow, and were thrilled to join them in celebrating their graduation this past November. Two of the participants have since moved out on their own; two others are currently pursuing the post secondary education they had previously believed was beyond their wildest reach. We’d like to thank the families, agency staff, and content specialists for their insight and expertise in developing this dynamic program.”

— Leah Sultan-Khan, EdD, MA, CHES
Director of Community Engagement & Public Education



A GRADUATION NIGHT TO REMEMBER



HEARING FROM OUR MEMBERS

“This past year has been the happiest year of my life. I have developed more as a person and made friends, and gained the confidence to go to college and pursue my dreams.”

MORE FROM 2022



After a two year hiatus, BuskerFest returned to Woodbine Park with fire, magic and even some sheep!



We created two new video featuring youth, one geared towards youth and one specifically for teachers.



We collaborated to create new Purple Day Classroom Kits which were circulated to classrooms across the city and beyond.



This year's Holly Jolly Holiday Event brought members together in person to gather in City Hall and then move outside to take in the festivities of our very own Holiday Fair in Nathan Phillips Square.

2022 Purple Pumpkin Party



2022 Purple Walk



2022 H.O.P.E. Award winner Monica Diaz-Greco and family taking in the festivities at this year's Toronto International BuskerFest for Epilepsy

THANK YOU

Thank you to our members, supporters, funders,
and community partners on whose proud
generosity we have come to depend.

Your support is making a difference in people's
lives every single day.

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