



2020

ANNUAL REPORT

epilepsy
ottawa

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épilepsie

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Whereas the last few years at Epilepsy Ottawa were marked by growth, 2020 was a year of adapting during a worldwide health crisis. Our top priorities were to reach our members under new circumstances and address the changing needs of our community.

The Epilepsy Ottawa team began working remotely and we shifted our group and individual meetings to video conferences. Stay-at-home orders increased the social isolation of many of our members, so we introduced a weekly daytime social group.

Collectively, we experienced fear and loss on a previously unimaginable scale. The general public faced an increase in mental health challenges due to the stress of the pandemic, which compounded the higher rates of depression and anxiety in people with epilepsy. In response, Epilepsy Ottawa launched UPLIFT - a proven program to help our members with depression and anxiety that's provided over the phone.

These efforts were bolstered by local and provincial collaboration. Formalizing our partnership, CHEO, The Ottawa Hospital, and Epilepsy Ottawa launched The Ottawa Epilepsy Program - a central portal for those seeking epilepsy care in Eastern Ontario. Community epilepsy agencies across Ontario coordinated our efforts on several fronts, from programming (webinars) to fundraising (Epilepsy 50/50 and The Epilepsy Shop).

Epilepsy Ottawa benefitted from the support of various federal and provincial pandemic response programs, which offset lost revenue from the cancellation of events such as the Ottawa Fire Truck Pull. This provided the agency with the means to continue providing community support at 100% capacity throughout the year.

The Epilepsy Ottawa team is eager to see members of our community in person again soon. In the meantime, we are happy to safely continue delivering services by phone and video conference.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: DONNA HODGINS

Donna Hodgins discovered her artistic abilities as she developed epilepsy. When she had focal seizures with impaired awareness, Donna would pick up a brush and start painting. The cover of this annual report features one of her masterpieces.

Donna was scheduled to be the keynote speaker at Epilepsy Ottawa's Purple Day Celebration in March 2020 where we planned to showcase her artwork. That event was cancelled due to the pandemic and, sadly, Donna passed away a few months later.

We didn't know Donna for very long - she was a relatively new member of our community - but everyone who met her was taken by her warmth and joy. She seemed to exude an inner light. We are grateful to have known her, even for a short while.



EDUCATION

Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Kahoot joined the Seizure Smart and Clinic to Community toolboxes this year as Epilepsy Ottawa continued to provide epilepsy education to teachers, students, people with epilepsy, and their families.

Virtual education dissolved geographic barriers in a province-wide epilepsy webinar series. Epilepsy Ottawa’s contributions included a webinar about epilepsy surgery with Dr. Mary Pat McAndrews and epilepsy & genetics with Dr. James Eubanks.



I'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH EPILEPSY.

C2C
Clinic To Community

- i** How do I talk to my employer?
- +** When is a seizure a medical emergency?

Whether you're newly diagnosed or you've been living with epilepsy for a while, we can help. Book your appointment with an Epilepsy Educator today.

613-594-9255 c2c@epilepsyottawa.ca epilepsyottawa.ca/c2c

MY CHILD HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH EPILEPSY.

C2C
Clinic To Community

- i** How do I talk to my child's school?
- +** When is a seizure a medical emergency?

Whether your child is newly diagnosed or your family has been living with epilepsy for a while, we can help. Book your appointment with an Epilepsy Educator today.

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SUPPORT

People with epilepsy are at a significantly higher risk of depression and anxiety than the general population. COVID-19 magnified social isolation with stay-at-home measures and heightened these mental health challenges. As a direct result, Epilepsy Ottawa saw a dramatic increase in requests for mental health support since the pandemic began. Compounding the complexity of this issue, anxiety and stress can go hand in hand with increased seizures. The result is a continuous cycle affecting both physical and mental wellness as well as decreased quality of life.



With the help of generous third party fundraisers, the Government of Canada’s Emergency Community Support Fund, and Ottawa Community Foundation, Epilepsy Ottawa introduced “Using Practice and Learning to Increase Favourable Thoughts” (UPLIFT) to respond to this growing mental health crisis. UPLIFT is a mindfulness-based cognitive behavioural therapy program proven to improve depression, anxiety, and overall psychological quality of life.

Groups of 5-8 participants meet by teleconference for an hour once a week for 8 weeks. The groups are co-facilitated by a mental-health professional and a person with lived experience.

The sessions review different ways living with epilepsy can affect mental health and teaches valuable coping strategies. Some topics include coping and relaxing, monitoring thoughts, and preventing future low moods.

COMMUNITY

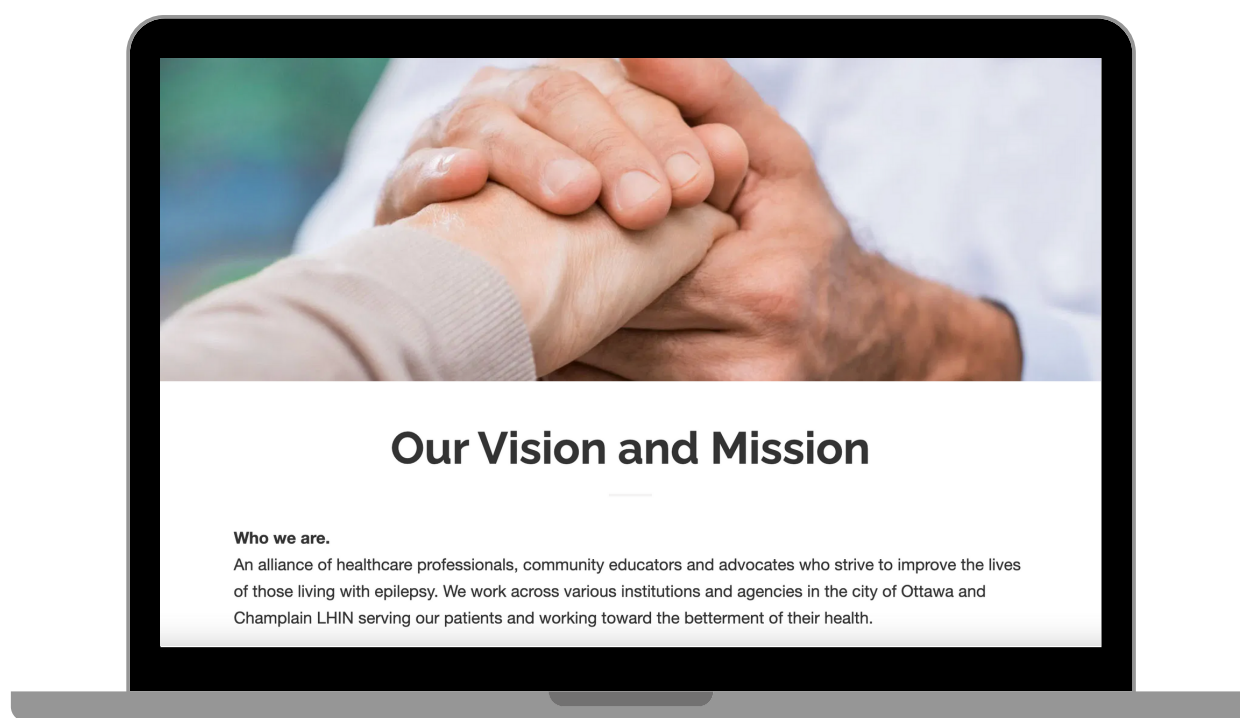


Even though “together while apart” has become cliché during the Covid-19 pandemic, that sentiment motivated us to find ways to connect with our community while socially isolating. We learned that hosting events by video-conference increased community engagement.

Our online weekly Daytime Social Group offered a social opportunity for members with limited public transportation options. More parents attended our virtual Parent Support Group than the previous in-person meetings, now that they could skip the babysitter. The number of families that participated in our first online craft night exceeded expectations. It was easier to attend a community event when families didn't have to rush through dinner and get downtown on a tight schedule.

While we do not plan on staying virtual-only long term, Epilepsy Ottawa will continue to hold some virtual meetings beyond the pandemic.

COLLABORATION



Epilepsy is a complex disorder for which complex social and health system solutions are paramount in helping patients lead full and productive lives.

The Ottawa Epilepsy Program (ottawaepilepsyprogram.ca) seeks to answer this need. The program is a fully interconnected network of community educators, social service providers, patient advocates and healthcare professionals whose activities seek to promote the health and well being of those living with seizures and epilepsy in our nation's capital.

The Ottawa Epilepsy Program launched in 2020 and is composed of 4 core programs: adult (The Ottawa Hospital), pediatric (CHEO), transition, and community (Epilepsy Ottawa).

MEET THE TEAM

STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS



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Ontario Trillium Foundation
Ottawa Community Foundation

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