

Katie's Walk

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At twelve, Katie Nevins is a hard working organizer and educator from Westboro, who lives with Type 1 diabetes. Recently she developed a plan to raise awareness at her school about this chronic condition.

Even though there was no cooperation from the weather on June 8th, the entire student population of Hilson Avenue Public School participated in Katie's walk. The older students walked outside when the rain held off, and inside when it rained. The kindergartners walked in the schoolyard. Distances varied by the ages of the students. Katie received enormous support from her teachers and the principal at school to set this up, and also from the twenty parent volunteers who helped out. The timing of this event led up to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation "Walk for the Cure" which took place on June 14 in Queen Juliana Park.

Katie's motivation to create this awareness is partly due to the fact that it is very rare to have more than one child per school with Type 1 diabetes and so the facts surrounding the disease are not always well known.

She has prepared an informative presentation which she has shown to every class at Hilson. The kindergarten classes asked the most questions about Katie's life with diabetes. She included a video explaining her story, which has a strong, upbeat, hopeful message. In the video, she explains about insulin injections, (although now she has an insulin pump) and how she pokes her fingers ten to twelve times a day to test her blood. She carries supplies such as apple juice, granola bars and dextrose tablets at all times, in case her sugar goes too low, particularly during exercise.

Her video shows that, even though "diabetes sucks", with careful management she can participate in the sports she loves. In fact, six months after her diagnosis she became a cheerleader, a very strenuous sport which she continues to enjoy, along with playing volleyball at school.

Katie was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in Grade three when she began to develop the typical symptoms -- extreme tiredness, excessive thirst, and weight loss. Initially it seemed as though she was suffering from the flu, but her condition worsened gradually to the point where she was almost in a coma and her blood sugar level was dangerously high.

Her parents took her to CHEO where, to their shock, she was diagnosed as having diabetes. CHEO provides training to children and parents about administering insulin and problems to watch for along with information regarding management of diabetes. At CHEO's diabetes clinic, Katie is followed up every three months. Staff members at the school have received training regarding diabetes management, and there is a binder available to staff with all necessary information.

This year, Katie will take an active role with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. She hopes to continue to raise awareness about Type 1 diabetes when she changes schools this fall, and has considered a career as an educator in this field. She is a dynamic powerhouse, and the walk at Hilson has given her a strong start toward this goal.