

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 21 March, 2016

World Health Organisation states *“epilepsy is arguably the world’s most stigmatized, misunderstood and under-resourced of all health conditions”* and *“the social consequences of epilepsy are often more difficult to overcome than the seizures themselves.”*

Sadly, these facts are something 24-year old Harry Adams from Glenorchy knows all too well.

Since developing epilepsy at 11 years of age, Harry has experienced around 3 seizures a week and is unable to control them with medication. Seizures of this frequency hinder his lifestyle and employment options, but **the worst thing for Harry is the discrimination he encounters.**

“One experience I’ll never forget happened when I was in a chain store in a suburban Hobart shopping centre buying a shirt to wear for a job interview that afternoon,” said Harry.

“Whilst waiting at the checkouts I suddenly fell to the ground having a seizure. I don’t remember what happened next but apparently a lady bent down to help me and my arms - which were jerking as they do during my seizures - nearly hit her. When I came to, I was in a room with two policemen, a security guard and the store manager stood over me.”

None of them would believe Harry was epileptic and he was very **nearly charged with assault.** He also never made it to his job interview.

The next day Harry and his mum took a doctor’s letter to show the store manager but he was **never given an apology** and is still **only allowed in the store under supervision.**

“Every time I even go into the shopping centre the **security guards still follow me around.** It’s like I’m a criminal,” he said.

Harry’s experience is sadly not uncommon. Lance Franklin from the Sydney Swans experienced recent discrimination when onlookers **assumed he was under the influence of drugs or alcohol during a seizure.** Radio and TV presenter Ben Fordham, rugby legend Wally Lewis and water polo champion Luke Quinlivan **kept their epilepsy hidden for years because of the stigma** associated with it.

Epilepsy Tasmania Executive Officer Mr Phil Baker says there is low community awareness and understanding of epilepsy.

“Research suggests the social stigma and misconceptions that surround epilepsy result in many people not disclosing their condition and then missing out on the support they need,” he said.

March is International Epilepsy Awareness Month, with the aim of encouraging people to talk about epilepsy and remind those who live with seizures that they are not alone.

“We are asking Tasmanians to end the discrimination and stigma of epilepsy by hosting a purple fundraising event at their school or work; purchasing merchandise from our online shop; making a donation; or participating in our social media awareness campaign,” said Mr Baker.

-ENDS-

MORE INFO: Claire Burnet on 0448 585 947 and www.epilepsytasmania.org.au

CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Twitter: @epilepsytas
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EpilepsyTasmania/>
Hashtag: #purplepose #epilepsytasmania

SPOKESPEOPLE AND VISUAL OPPORTUNITIES:

- Harry Adams is available to interview and photograph upon request
- Epilepsy Tasmania Executive Officer Mr Phil Baker

ABOUT EPILEPSY TASMANIA:

We are a not-for-profit association improving the quality of life and community participation of Tasmanians living with or affected by epilepsy.

ABOUT EPILEPSY:

Epilepsy is a common brain disorder that takes the form of recurring seizures. It can develop at any age, regardless of gender or ethnicity. One in 10 people will experience a seizure, and one in 25 Australians (20,000 Tasmanians) will develop epilepsy at some point during their life.