

# MEDIA RELEASE

8th March, 2019

## Tasmania's First Smart School

Minister for Education, Jeremy Rockcliff MP, today recognised Trevallyn Primary School in the state's north as the first in Tasmania to achieve national Epilepsy Smart School accreditation.

One in 200 students are living with epilepsy and it can have a significant impact on a child's experience at school. Until now, schools have been unable to receive best practice accredited epilepsy-specific training within Tasmania.

The newly available **Epilepsy Smart Schools** programme helps schools to better help students with epilepsy achieve their academic potential and develop positive social relationships.

Each child's experience of epilepsy is different, so the Epilepsy Smart School program educates both teachers and the wider school community about epilepsy and how to react to seizures and create a safe environment.

"Trevalyn is to be congratulated for their swift response to undertaking this programme because epilepsy can have a big impact on a child's experience at school," said Epilepsy Tasmania CEO, Wendy Groot.

"Seizures and medication can make it hard for a child to concentrate or remember information from class. And the stigma of epilepsy and subsequent discrimination are still felt by many living with the condition today."

Launceston mum, Georgina Schilg's, daughter attends Trevalyn Primary School and says she feels relieved that 10-year-old Sophie's teachers are able to recognise her daughter's symptoms and call her or an ambulance, if needed.

"A particular strength of the Epilepsy Smart Schools program is its unique combination of training tailored to the individual as well as the whole-of-school approach," said Ms Groot.

“Very few other health programs are based on a program with this multi-system approach and in this way, the program not only seeks to benefit individual children, but also impact their families, and ultimately the community.”

Tasmanian schools can register to become Epilepsy Smart on the Epilepsy Tasmania website or by phoning 6344 6881.

- Ends -

### **MORE INFORMATION:**

Wendy Groot, CEO, Epilepsy Tasmania: 0427 044 074 or [www.epilepsytasmania.org.au](http://www.epilepsytasmania.org.au)

### **SPOKESPEOPLE:**

- Jeremy Rockcliff MP, Minister for Education
- Wendy Groot, CEO, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Annette Hollingsworth, PRINCIPAL, Trevalyn Primary School

### **ABOUT EPILEPSY SMART SCHOOLS**

An Epilepsy Smart School is one that embeds inclusive, safe and educationally sound practices for all primary, secondary and special school students living with epilepsy. Registration is free and easily commenced online at Epilepsy Tasmania.

### **Benefits of becoming an Epilepsy Smart School:**

- Schools are able to provide a safe and inclusive environment for students living with epilepsy.
- Students are able to reach their academic potential.
- School staff better understand their state **government policy** requirements and expected teacher support of students living with epilepsy.
- Teaching standards are adhered to in relation to supporting all students in a safe and inclusive manner.
- Teachers have the opportunity to participate in continuing professional development.
- Schools play an important role in raising awareness of epilepsy within Tasmanian communities.

- Training provided will direct teaching practice to ensure the expectations of schools under the **Disability Standards for Education 2005** are met.

### **Obstacles commonly faced by children with epilepsy at school include:**

- Embarrassment due to seizures, seizure behaviours or accidents.
- Anxiety, depression and moodiness, including anger and frustration from seizures or medication.
- Not being able to participate in activities, such as sports and camps.
- Missing classes/ school days.

### **Impact of epilepsy on cognition and learning includes:**

- Cognitive overload (e.g., finding it hard to keep up at school) can cause seizures.
- Seizures can also make it difficult to concentrate and remember new information.
- Memory difficulties can be a side effect of medication.
- Some children with epilepsy also have a co-existing developmental condition (e.g., Autism).
- Depression and anxiety in children with epilepsy are estimated to be 23-26% and 15-20%, respectively. Rates are higher in children with more complicated epilepsy (*Jones et al., 2007; Schraegle & Titus, 2017*).
- Parents perceived levels of stigma, low mood and worry, and unmet needs for information and support can impact behavioural difficulties in children with epilepsy (*Austin et al., 2015*).

### **Becoming an Epilepsy Smart School is a three-step process:**

#### **√ Holding specific epilepsy management plans for each student with epilepsy**

Schools must ensure that Epilepsy Management Plans (EMP) are held for each student living with epilepsy. And where emergency medication has been prescribed, a current Emergency Medication Management Plan (EMMP) must be in place. Once you have completed this step, all staff with a duty of care must complete Epilepsy and Emergency Medication training to administer emergency medication.

#### **√ Participating in epilepsy-specific training**

Schools must be aware of the impact of epilepsy on the student. This step will give teachers an understanding of the psychological, social and cognitive impact of living with epilepsy and how this may affect a student in their classroom. This requirement can be met through completing Epilepsy and Emergency Medication training. This training will direct school staff teaching practice, ensuring the expectations of schools under the **Disability Standards for Education 2005** are met.

## √ **Holding an event that promotes better awareness and understanding of epilepsy**

Schools must educate the student body about epilepsy. This step can be completed using resources from this website, either through embedding epilepsy education within the curriculum (e.g. completing the Epilepsy Smart Quiz within health studies) or hosting an awareness-raising campaign, such as a purple day event.

## **ABOUT EPILEPSY**

**Epilepsy is a chronic disorder of the brain that affects people worldwide.** It is characterised by recurrent seizures, which are brief episodes of involuntary movement that may involve a part of the body (partial) or the entire body (generalised), and are sometimes accompanied by loss of consciousness and even incontinence. Characteristics of seizures vary and depend on where in the brain the disturbance first starts, and how far it spreads.

**Epilepsy can develop at any age regardless of ethnicity or gender.** One in 10 people experience a seizure during their life. One in 25 Australians will go on to develop epilepsy (2 or more unprovoked seizures).

**20,000 Tasmanians have epilepsy and an additional 80,000 family members, colleagues and friends are affected in some way.**

**One-fifth of Tasmania's population is touched by epilepsy,** yet the condition still has an unfortunate stigma that causes much hurt and frustration: **51% of Tasmanians with epilepsy have experienced discrimination as a result of their condition during the last year.** The most common place for discrimination is the workplace, followed closely by educational environments.

**Epilepsy is not contagious.** The most common type of epilepsy (affecting 6 out of 10 people with the disorder) is called idiopathic epilepsy and has no identifiable cause. The known causes of secondary epilepsy include a severe head injury, a stroke, an infection of the brain, or a brain tumour.

Epilepsy is generally successfully treated with anti-epileptic medications. **60%-70% of people diagnosed with epilepsy will gain seizure control with medication.** Others may continue to have seizures, but less frequently.

**Epilepsy is one of the world's oldest recognised conditions,** with written records dating back to 4000 BC. Fear, misunderstanding, discrimination and social stigma have surrounded epilepsy for centuries. This stigma continues in many countries today and can impact on the quality of life for people with the disorder and their families.

**Only one third of Tasmanians with epilepsy drive their own car.** The remainder are forced to rely on public transport or taxis, the cost of which is often prohibitive given that **55% are on low incomes (half of these below the poverty line),** due in part to heightened medical expenses, and an inability of many to work full-time.

**People with seizures tend to have more physical problems** such as fractures and bruising from injuries related to seizures and epilepsy is **up to eight times more common in people with other health conditions** such as depression, dementia, heart disease and arthritis - further affecting seizure outcome and quality of life.

**The risk of premature death in people with epilepsy is up to 3 times higher** than the general population, with the highest rates found in low and middle-income countries and rural versus urban areas.

## ABOUT EPILEPSY TASMANIA

Epilepsy Tasmania is a not-for-profit community-based organisation that has been improving the quality of life and community participation of Tasmanians affected by epilepsy for over 40 years.

Epilepsy Tasmania is committed to bringing epilepsy out of the shadows, and break down the stigma and discrimination associated with epilepsy in Tasmania. Its overarching aim is to increase opportunities for those living with or affected by epilepsy and it will not be satisfied until Tasmanian children with epilepsy are receiving a good education, and Tasmanian adults are able to gain and maintain regular employment.

Its statewide services and support includes:



Workplace training.



Epilepsy Smart Schools training.



Peer support service.



Raising awareness of epilepsy within a relaxed environments, in partnership with Blooming Tasmania.