

Impact Report 2023



Strength in *togetherness*



Epilepsy Ottawa remains steadfast in its mission to enhance the quality of life for people with epilepsy or seizures and their families. This mission continues to drive and inspire all our endeavors.

In 2023, the importance of building connections and fostering community shone through with the return of in-person community events such as our annual Purple Day Celebration at Ottawa City Hall, Family Nights, and a delightful Spring Fling BBQ. Among the highlights was a remarkable artistic collaboration between members of our community and graffiti artist Mique Michelle. After an online consultation, the community came together during our Purple Day Celebration to paint a mural that symbolizes the journey of living with epilepsy, depicted as the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly. For some, it represents self-acceptance with epilepsy, while for others, it embodies the profound sense of belonging found within a supportive community.

Your invaluable role within our community remains paramount. The decrease in depression, social isolation, fear, and anxiety experienced by our clients is a testament to the collective efforts of our generous donors, committed staff and volunteers, and the unwavering support of our partners. Your contributions have continued to alleviate burdens for those affected by epilepsy whom Epilepsy Ottawa has reached throughout the year.

The enduring support from our donors, sponsors, and community partners continues to astound and humble us. We are deeply grateful for your ongoing commitment and partnership as we strive to make a positive impact on the lives of those affected by epilepsy in our community.

49

Seizure Smart presentations reached

1005

people (629 students, 245 teachers, 131 daycare workers and other members of our community)



52

volunteers donated

302

members of our epilepsy community participated in support groups, social groups, and community events

506

clients from

326

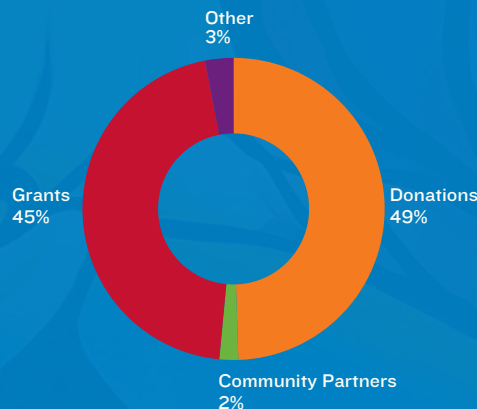
families received support and education services from Epilepsy Ottawa

346

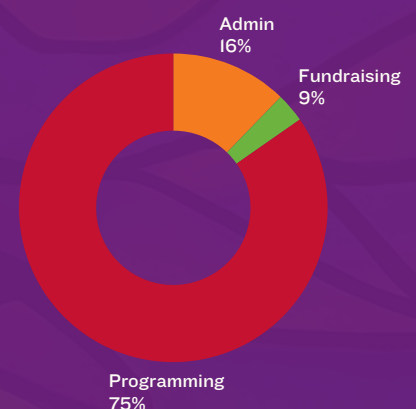
hours of their time



2023 Sources of Revenue



2023 Operating Expenses



Finding Solid Ground: Philip's *Epilepsy Awakening*

The early days of Philip's epilepsy journey were tumultuous, marked by denial, depression, and a fierce struggle to maintain control over his life. Initially resistant to accepting his diagnosis, Philip convinced himself that he didn't have epilepsy and he could handle whatever was happening to him on his own. As time passed, the reality of his condition became increasingly undeniable.

Haunted by episodes of seizures that he couldn't recall, Philip's denial began to crumble. It took a particularly alarming incident, where he experienced multiple seizures in a row, for him to confront the truth. His wife's insistence on recording a video of his seizure and the prospect of seeing visual evidence forced him to acknowledge the severity of his condition.

Acceptance didn't come easy. Philip grappled with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts as he struggled to come to terms with his new reality. "I've had a very stressful life. I'm used to it, but I'm not used to not being in control. I've always, always maintained control." The loss of control over his body and emotions was especially difficult for someone accustomed to being in charge. But with the guidance of caring professionals, including his GP and neurologist, Philip began to understand the importance of medication compliance and self-care.



His involvement with Epilepsy Ottawa proved to be a lifeline. Connecting with others who shared similar experiences provided him with much-needed support and understanding.

Through the group, Philip found a sense of community where he could openly discuss his challenges and receive empathy from those who truly understood.

Today, Philip is determined to live his life to the fullest despite his condition. He's embraced writing as a form of therapy and self-expression, and he's even embarked on training his own service dog. His message to others facing epilepsy is clear: seek support, whether it's from loved ones, professionals, or organizations like Epilepsy Ottawa. No one should face epilepsy alone, and reaching out for help is the first step towards acceptance and healing.

"I've had a very stressful life. I'm used to it, but I'm not used to not being in control"

Empathy in Action

When Ashley first started having seizures, she felt isolated despite having her husband by her side. No one she knew really understood what she was going through. Once she got involved with Epilepsy Ottawa, she realized that she could offer the support to others that she wished she had back then.

Ashley volunteered as a co-facilitator with lived experience for UPLIFT, a program aiding adults with epilepsy and depression, and found purpose in the challenges she overcame. She saw that people with epilepsy struggle in different ways, but they still responded to Ashley sharing what she went through. She reflected on the experience, “To be able to help them, even if it’s just a little bit, to be able to see that you’re making a difference was really rewarding.” Little by little, she saw their improvement over the 8-week program. Witnessing the positive impact of her experiences on others fueled her commitment.

As a peer mentor for Epilepsy Connect Ottawa, Ashley says that she can offer her mentees something she didn’t have earlier in her epilepsy journey. “Having somebody to talk to when I was first diagnosed with epilepsy would have been really helpful. Having someone to explain things to me or even to get some understanding from the other person would have been nice. They talk about their experience and then you can talk a bit about yours. And there’s a lot of similarities I find, even though we all have different experiences, there are a lot of similarities.”

Reflecting on her journey, Ashley realizes the importance of support during difficult times. She understands the value of someone who can empathize and share similar experiences. Through her volunteering efforts, Ashley aims to be that guiding light for others, offering understanding and hope.



*“I really like that I
make a difference.”*

Raising *Awareness,* Raising Funds

Angie and Dan, devoted parents and business owners, found themselves thrust into the world of epilepsy when their daughter was diagnosed 2½ years ago. A pre-teen at the time, their daughter went from being a perfectly healthy child to experiencing seizures seemingly out of nowhere. Angie said the experience was like “a bomb being dropped” on her family. Suddenly they found themselves navigating a complex condition that they knew little about.

In their search for support and resources, they stumbled upon Epilepsy Ottawa, a lifeline in their journey. Through Epilepsy Ottawa, Angie and her family found invaluable support, including educational programs like Seizure Smart, which provided crucial information and guidance for her daughter’s school community. “That was a huge deal. It gave us some peace of mind that we’ve done as much as we possibly can to ensure that our daughter has a safe space, that her classmates understand what she’s up against and how to be a friend to be able to help her.” Angie was shocked to learn that Seizure Smart receives no public funding.

Determined to make a difference, Angie decided to take matters into her own hands. Leveraging her family’s position as the owners of Valley Custom Cutting, a provincial meat plant and retail butcher shop, Angie organized her very first fundraiser. With the support of her loyal customers and community members, Angie rallied donations ranging from gift baskets to magic show tickets to sweaters designed by a cousin. Valley Custom Cutting also donated a percentage of their sales to Epilepsy Ottawa.



The fundraiser surpassed Angie's expectations, raising over \$5600, with the majority of contributions coming from the community. Moved by the outpouring of support, Angie realized the power of community in facing challenges like epilepsy. The fundraiser not only raised crucial funds but also forged new connections within the community. Angie got a bit choked up when she explained, "I was surprised by the number of people that came forward to share that they had a family member with epilepsy. Living with this is a very isolating thing. So, it's pretty cool to find out there's more people in our support system that understand. Had we not done this, we would have no idea."



Looking to the future, Angie hopes to see more epilepsy education initiatives in schools, recognizing the transformative impact such programs can have on kids with epilepsy. Plans are coming together for Valley Custom Cutting's 2024 fundraiser in support of Epilepsy Ottawa. For Angie, the fundraisers aren't just about raising money—they're about raising awareness, building support networks, and advocating for better education and understanding of epilepsy in the community.





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The Bronson Centre
211 Bronson Ave., Suite 207
Ottawa, ON K1R 6H5

613-594-9255
epilepsyottawa.ca
Charitable Reg. #: BN 14075 5869 RR0001

