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press clip

Caught out



Teen hopes Purple Day will clear up epilepsy myths

By JUDITH MAIZEY

EPILEPSY is not contagious, but that is not what the children at Robert Hayes' school thought when he was diagnosed at 11.

Now 19, Robert said there was a lot of misunderstanding about epilepsy, its causes and symptoms.

"People are used to seeing people frothing at the mouth like on television," the Regents Park resident said.

"They're afraid that like a cold, they're going to catch it."

Robert hopes this Friday's Purple Day will help raise awareness.

Students and workers wear purple, the internationally recognised colour for epilepsy.

Epilepsy Queensland hopes to raise \$30,000 through the day to support

people with the condition.

So far, 36 schools, five hospitals and 50 businesses across Queensland have registered for the event.

Robert's mum Carolyn Hayes said her son's diagnosis had come "out of the blue".

"He was just lying on the lounge one night and fell asleep while watching television," she said.

"We then saw him throw his arm back and he was fitting.

"We had no idea what was happening as there is no history of epilepsy in the family."

For the next 18 hours, every time Robert went to sleep he experienced a seizure.

Mrs Hayes said her son's diagnosis had meant a total life change for her as she had to give up a full-time job to become his carer.

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AT A GLANCE

- EPILEPSY affects more than 86,000 Queenslanders and about 50 million people worldwide.
- It is the world's most common serious brain disorder.
- Epilepsy can be a medical condition or the symptom of a medical condition, but is the tendency to have recurring seizures.
- There are different types of seizures which can last a second or hours.
- Generally, an ambulance is required if a person has a seizure for more than five minutes, or had continual seizures.
- Visit www.epilepsyqueensland.com.au or phone 3435 5000.



press clip

Epilepsy Day starts discussion

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For Robert, the change meant leaving high school in Year 10 because he was so ill, and finishing his education at TAFE with the help of a support worker.

He has also lost the peripheral vision in his left eye and has to see a neurologist every three to six months.

He cannot drive a car or enjoy a normal social life as his medication does not fully control the seizures.

Mrs Hayes said: "We're basically joined at the hip 24/7 because a seizure can come out of nowhere at any time."

In the lead-up to Purple Day, Mrs Hayes said epilepsy needed to be discussed openly and "come out of the shadows" because for years it had been a condition that people had kept hidden.

Robert said he had heard some children had grown out of epilepsy as they got older.

"That's been my hope ever since I was 11," he said.



MYTHBUSTER: Robert Hayes with dog Duke, says some people believe they can catch epilepsy the way they can catch a cold. **Picture: Michael Pratt**