



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

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TOURETTE SYNDROME AWARENESS WEEK: Scotch Plains students learn how to be advocates for TS

SCOTCH PLAINS – When Connie Dovi asked her fifth-grade class at Terrill Road School to come up with a service learning project, Josh Klapper didn't have to think very long to decide what he wanted to do.

Klapper, 11, who has Tourette Syndrome, immediately told Dovi that he wanted to spread awareness about the neurological disorder that affects as many as 1 in 100 kids. Dovi was thrilled with the idea, and soon after, classmate Jannine Huby, 11, also jumped on board. To help complete their project, Klapper and Huby brought in 12-year-old Tess Kowalski, who has done several peer in-service presentations on behalf of the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome (NJCTS) at schools and houses of worship around Central Jersey.

Kowalski's presentation on Monday, April 23, was a smash hit with Dovi's class of 23 students, many of whom swarmed her table of TS information, books and other materials to ask questions afterward. Kowalski has become a pro at talking about TS, but even she was left beaming at how well Klapper's classmates took the message she presented. And Klapper was surprised at how much they understood what the concept of Tourette awareness is all about.



Photo by NJCTS

"I think everyone is going to learn a lot," Klapper said before joining Kowalski in front of the class for the end of the presentation. "Me and Jannine learned a lot from reading 'The Junkyard Wonders,' by Patricia Polacco, that had a kid with Tourette Syndrome in it who was helped by her classmates and teacher. That's where we got the idea for this from. It's important for people to learn."

From left, Terrill Road School fifth-grade teacher Connie Dovi is all smiles after two of her students, Jannine Huby and Josh Klapper, developed a Tourette Syndrome service learning project that culminated in a New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome peer in-service presentation by 12-year-old Tess Kowalski.

Klapper was diagnosed with TS when he was 8 years old, but the tics – opening and shutting the door for hours and myriad sounds and utterances while talking – he exhibited in force near the end of last year recently have subsided significantly thanks to the medication known as Abilify. Huby, on the other hand, doesn't have Tourette at all but still feels it is important for people to learn about important topics such as Tourette Syndrome awareness.

“I'd never really heard of it (TS) before doing the project. People don't really know about it a lot, so I just wanted to get the word out there and tell people that this is actually a problem out there,” Huby said. “It's not very commonly known, and not many people know why people with it do the things they do. I think they are shocked and say things like, ‘I never knew this was a problem in the world.’ It shouldn't be like that.”



Photo by NJCTS

Dovi couldn't have been more proud, visibly noting how much her students had absorbed. But she was most pleased with Klapper and Huby, who more than adequately helped spread awareness about Tourette Syndrome.

Tess Kowalski is thrilled to answer questions from the students in Connie Dovi's fifth-grade class at Terrill Road School following an in-service presentation on Tourette Syndrome.

“Josh was very excited about this project because a lot of people either don't know what Tourette Syndrome is or have a misconception of it. That immediately got my attention,” Dovi said. “They are spreading the word. I think the students made the connection right away.”

The presentation at Terrill Road School coincided with the first annual Tourette Syndrome Awareness Week, April 23-29, the culmination of which will be Tourette Syndrome Awareness Day with the Somerset Patriots Baseball Club on Sunday, April 29, at TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater. More information about that event and Tourette Syndrome Awareness Week is available by calling 908-575-7350 or by visiting www.njcts.org.

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