



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome  
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships  
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

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## **Dare To Dream Student Leadership Conference showcases determination of New Jersey teenagers**

*Middle school and high school students with Tourette Syndrome and associated disorders learn about life, college, self-advocacy and more*

PISCATAWAY – As students, educators and parents streamed into the Busch Campus Center on Monday, May 21, at Rutgers University, they weren't sure what to expect from the first Dare to Dream Student Leadership Conference to target the community of New Jersey high school students living with neurological conditions such as Tourette Syndrome, OCD, ADHD, anxiety and Asperger's Syndrome.

But it didn't take long for them to become completely immersed in a series of informative learning sessions, heartwarming tales of overcoming adversity and opportunities to become more aware of how their respective disorders affect them, their teacher, their families and everyone around them.

In the words of keynote speaker Sue Conners, a noted author and Tourette Syndrome advocate, "Nothing should stop you. You can dream the world if you let nothing stop you." Conners herself was wowed by the intensity, intelligence, desire to succeed and quest to overcome adversity exhibited by the students who followed her on the conference dais.

One of those students was 13-year-old Tommy Licato of South Plainfield. Licato, a National Tourette Syndrome Association Youth Ambassador who last month was in Washington, D.C., for the annual Youth Ambassador Training Conference, used a popular quote from one of his idols to get across his message of hope.



Photo by NJCTS

**From left, Tommy Licato, NJCTS Education Outreach Consultant Melissa Fowler, Sarah Ethridge and Amanda Silvers each had an important role in the 2012 Dare To Dream Student Leadership Conference.**

“Different is the new normal,” Licato said, drawing upon the encouragement set forth on the international stage by an adult with Tourette Syndrome who advocates for the disorder – former American Idol contestant James Durbin. “Someone said that I need to be put in a cage because of my behaviors. I’ve learned that in a perfect world, everyone would be able to respect each other and their differences. But I think we all understand that that doesn’t happen without education. Having this disorder isn’t always great, but I wouldn’t be me without it.”

Another student, Richard Lizzi of Northern Valley Regional High School, summed up what the students learned in the numerous breakout sessions – which included learning how to transition successfully from high school to college, figuring out how to self-advocate and discovering how to prepare for job interviews – very succinctly: “I can do anything I want to, and you can do anything you want to. It’s the power of positive thinking.”

Also speaking about their experience as students with Tourette Syndrome and/or associated disorders were East Brunswick High School junior Amanda Silvers, Jackson Liberty High School junior Raimonda Zeimyte, Montclair State University freshman Katie Delaney and DeSales University graduate James Goodwin.

Goodwin was the oldest of the nearly 300 students in attendance, graduating from DeSales in January, but his message resonated with everyone: “When I received my diploma, I let out a sigh of relief that what I had worked hard for could not be taken from me,” said Goodwin, listing these tips as essential for future success:

- Don’t give up.
- Allow yourself time to wind down.
- Get others to help you.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Believe in yourself.
- Reach for your dream.
- Work hard.
- Never give up.
- Never think you’re not good enough.

The 2012 Dare To Dream Student Leadership Conference was made possible by a partnership between the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders (NJCTS) and the New Jersey Department of Education.

“We could not be more pleased with the turnout for this Dare To Dream Conference,” said NJCTS Education Outreach Consultant Melissa Fowler, who helped plan the event. “Each of the students in attendance learned some valuable life lessons, the most important of which being that no matter what condition they might have, they have the tools necessary to succeed in life.”

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*New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome and Associated Disorders, Inc.  
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Photo by NJCTS

**The 2012 Dare To Dream Student Leadership Conference began with a video message from Tim Howard, followed by a slideshow presentation about the life of the soccer star, who has Tourette Syndrome.**