



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome  
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships  
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

908.575.7350

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50 Division Street • Somerville, NJ 08876 • [www.njcts.org](http://www.njcts.org) • [info@njcts.org](mailto:info@njcts.org) • FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Cresskill students get lessons about Tourette Syndrome from NJCTS Youth Advocates**

*Drew Friedrich, Cameron Mehlman, and Mike Hayden educate students and teachers during Cresskill school district's weeklong awareness campaign about the neurological disorder*

NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome's (NJCTS) Youth Advocates inspired, educated, and spread awareness about Tourette Syndrome to a total of 1400 Cresskill, NJ students from May 11 through May 15, as part of a weeklong TS awareness campaign in the district.

Tourette Syndrome (TS) is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary movements or sounds known as tics. It is estimated that 1 in 100 children show signs of the disorder—as many as 20,000 school aged kids in New Jersey alone. TS is frequently accompanied by ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and learning disabilities. Kids with TS are at increased risk for bullying and report feelings of isolation due to their condition. NJCTS Youth Advocates share their experiences with TS and spread messages of encouragement, acceptance, and self-advocacy.

Drew Friedrich spoke about TS to over 600 high school and 400 middle school students on May 11. Drew is 22 years old, a recent graduate of County College of Morris, has been a Youth Advocate since 2012, and was a coach at the first annual Tim Howard Leadership Academy last August. "Drew did an amazing job connecting with the students and was comfortable in his skin, TS and all," said NJCTS Education Outreach Coordinator Gina Maria Jones. "He showed students that anything is possible and being different can be empowering. The students asked wonderful questions and started great discussion."

Cameron Mehlman presented to 150 third, fourth, and fifth grade students at Merritt Memorial Elementary on



**NJCTS Youth Advocate Drew Friedrich at the Cresskill High School educating students about Tourette Syndrome**



**NJCTS Youth Advocate Cameron Mehlman at the Merritt Memorial Elementary School in Cresskill with NJCTS Education Outreach Coordinator Gina Maria Jones**

May 14. The students paid close attention to Cameron's stories and asked great questions. Cameron, who is 15-years-old, an avid golfer, and a volunteer NJCTS Youth Advocate since the fall of 2014, worked together with Jones to bring an informative and interactive presentation to the students.

Mike Hayden presented to 250 third, fourth, and fifth grade students at Bryan Elementary School on May 15, Tourette's Awareness Day. Mike is 16-years-old, a member of his high school track and field team, has been a Youth Advocate since August 2013, and participated in the first annual Tim Howard Leadership Academy last year. He has presented to medical professionals about his journey with TS and enjoys speaking to kids.

Together, NJCTS Youth Advocates educated more than 1400 students and faculty in Cresskill alone about TS. Each presentation had a strong anti-bullying message and the Youth Advocates explain the myths and stereotypes that are often attributed to TS.



**NJCTS Youth Advocate Mike Hayden at the Bryan Elementary School in Cresskill with Danielle Reiffe MSW, LCSW, Superintendent Michael Burke, and NJCTS supporter Caryn Aronson**

The week-long presentations were coordinated and organized by Caryn Aronson, a long-time and generous supporter of NJCTS and a steadfast advocate for children with TS. Aronson, a Cresskill resident and whose son has TS, worked diligently with the school district to create awareness for TS and encouraged the educational presentations. Aronson's family has participated in many of NJCTS's programs over the years including the annual Family Retreat Weekend. NJCTS is grateful for her efforts to bring awareness and education to her school district.

"Each year NJCTS conducts outreach and presentations to hundreds of schools across New Jersey. Caryn's effort has given us the opportunity to bring our training to not just one school in Cresskill but to the entire Cresskill school district," said NJCTS Executive Director Faith Rice. "We are grateful for all her work to improve awareness of Tourette Syndrome and make a difference in so many lives."

Parents of teens or pre-teens with TS who wish to get involved in the NJCTS Youth Advocate Program, please call 908-575-7350 or email Education Outreach Coordinator Gina Maria Jones at [gjones@njcts.org](mailto:gjones@njcts.org). For more information about NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome, visit [www.njcts.org](http://www.njcts.org).

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