



NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS, INC.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hillsdale Teen Inspires his Community to Tackle Tourette Syndrome

HILLSDALE, NJ— Mike Hayden is taking his Tourette Syndrome advocacy efforts to the next level.

Tourette Syndrome (TS) is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary movements or sounds known as tics and is frequently accompanied by other neurological or mental health disorders. 1 in 100 school-age children lives with TS and many report feelings of isolation and have been bullied because of their disorder.

Hayden, now 16-years-old, was diagnosed with TS in fourth grade although he started showing symptoms in kindergarten. In 2012, he decided that he wasn't going to let his diagnosis hold him back so he stepped up to become a Youth Advocate for the NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome and Associated Disorders, Inc. (NJCTS).



NJCTS Youth Advocate Mike Hayden and T3 co-organizer Meghan McIntyre welcome NJCTS Education Outreach Coordinator Gina Maria Jones at the Teens Tackle Tourette's walk on May 22, 2016.

NJCTS Youth Advocates lead presentations about TS in schools and community groups to raise awareness, promote understanding and tolerance, and deliver a strong anti-bullying message. They also present with NJCTS-partner doctors at hospitals to educate medical professionals about TS.

When it was time for Hayden's honors English class at Pascack Valley High School to choose an issue to which to bring attention for their final project, Hayden shared his personal journey with TS and the class was instantly inspired. They organized the group "Teens Tackle Tourette's" and spent the school year organizing, promoting, and producing a fundraising walk.

"It was an incredible feeling to know that my class truly cared about this cause," said Hayden. "They knew it was close to my heart and I had many people tell me that there was no question in their mind that this is the cause they wanted to support. It is amazing that they would support me in raising awareness for this issue that many people are incorrectly educated on."

Hayden recalled that when his family needed help after he received his TS diagnosis they called NJCTS for education and support. To better educate his classmates, he decided to partner with NJCTS Education Outreach Coordinator Gina Maria Jones and Executive Director Faith Rice for a series of in-class presentations about Tourette Syndrome and associated disorders.

“I figured that if we were going to learn about TS, we might as well get the experts in to help teach us,” said Hayden on reaching out to NJCTS for guidance. “I have had many years of experience with NJCTS, so I know that they are truly the best of the best when it comes to education and outreach.”

The Teens Tackle Tourette’s T3 walk took place on May 22 at the Pascack Valley High School Campus and raised more than \$1,120 which was donated to NJCTS. During the walk, there were several guest speakers as well as food, games, and giveaways.

“NJCTS is proud to work with young people who take the initiative to raise awareness,” said Education Outreach Coordinator Gina Maria Jones. “It is because of Youth Advocates like Mike that our Youth Development programs are so successful and we hope that all kids living with TS will follow in his footsteps.”

Soon after hosting the Teens Tackle Tourette’s walk, Hayden led a Youth Advocate presentation to 150 fifth graders at Fairmount School in Hackensack on May 24 and delivered the keynote address at the Dare to Dream Student Leadership Conference at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ on May 25.

“Youth Advocates like Mike Hayden live out the mission of NJCTS and advance public perception, understanding and acceptance of people with TS and associated disorders,” said NJCTS Executive Director Faith Rice. “We are so proud of everything Mike has accomplished.

For more information about Tourette Syndrome and NJCTS, call 908-575-7350 or visit www.njcts.org.

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*NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders, Inc.
Collaborative partnerships for the Tourette Syndrome community*