

# Metcalfe woman working to raise epilepsy awareness

by Sandy Casselman

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**METCALFE** – Purple Day for Epilepsy has come and gone for another year, but the movement to raise awareness of the neurological disorder is ongoing for Metcalfe's Mallory Allan, and her mother, Donna.

Inspired by Mallory, who was born with epilepsy and who has undergone several brain surgeries, the salespeople at an Ottawa car dealership and the staff at a chiropractic office in Manotick wore purple Wed., March 26, while the Allan's spiritual family at St. Andrews United Church in Metcalfe decorated with purple on Sun., March 16.

While the family was buying a new car from salesman Shahir Moradi earlier in March, Mallory took a seizure in the Bank Street store. Following the experience, Moradi took action, Donna said. He requested epilepsy awareness material from the Allan's, which he then took to a car show he attended that weekend. He then rallied his coworkers to participate in the March 26 campaign, and now Dilawri Hyundai is giving away a purple shirt with each new vehicle purchased.

Donna said it is important for people to know what to do if they encounter someone having a seizure. Never hold them down or put anything in their mouth; move dangerous objects out of the way; if standing, steer them away from danger; if fallen, move them onto their



Mallory Allan (centre), a Metcalfe woman with epilepsy, recognized Purple Day for Epilepsy on Wed., March 26 at Dilawri Hyundai on Bank Street, along with salesman Shahir Moradi (left), and Allan's mother, Donna.

side and place something soft under their head; and time the seizure.

Both Mallory and Donna said they are overwhelmed by the support, as this is a very isolating disorder.

"I don't think people understand how much epilepsy affects their lives," Donna said. "It's an isolated disorder because people are afraid of it."

Mallory, whose last surgery took place in Montreal in February 2013, had her first recognizable seizure at the age of 10. Last year, she spent 10 days in Montreal with a doctor who later determined that she was actually born with the recurrent disorder. Donna recalled

moments when Mallory, as a baby, stared off into space, and realized these may have been seizures. In 60 to 75 per cent of cases the cause of epilepsy is unknown, Donna said.

The last operation, which was one of three major surgical procedures since 2010, is expected to diminish the number of seizures Mallory experiences on a daily basis.

However, the success of the surgery remains unknown, as changes are not expected to show themselves until healing is complete. This, Mallory said, can take more than a year following the surgery.

Until then, Mallory lives in an apartment above her mother's garage, works on her studies, and

plans for the future, where she hopes to be a spokesperson for epilepsy awareness, and to write a book about her journey.

Although the disease has negatively impacted Mallory's spelling and memory, the 28-year-old has not let it stop her from following her dreams.

"She's spoken to groups of 30 to 40 doctors and medical students at McGill University," Donna said. "She's a strong woman. She just amazes me."

Mallory said that while she is a shy person by nature, when she stands up to talk in front of these experts her fear dissipates and it just comes naturally and easily.

"She has good days and bad days," Donna said. "She's been through a lot."

What most people fail to realize, she added, is that epilepsy often robs people of things other people take for granted, like independence.

Mallory cannot get her driver's license, as she has lost some of her peripheral vision following the surgeries. Also, the provincial government requires epileptics to be seizure-free for a full year.

On the flipside, epilepsy treatment has advanced throughout the years with respect to research, medications, and procedures. Today, Mallory takes three different medications instead of 20.

"We're hoping that down the road there will be an answer," Donna said. "It's good to know that at least they're working on it now. They're looking for answers."

Until then, Mallory takes each day one at a time with the support and love of her mother, and her older brother, Adam. Also, by this time next year Mallory hopes to have the added assistance of an epilepsy seizure response dog from the Lions Foundation of Canada. In addition to assisting with the sight loss, it is possible that her new companion will be able to detect a seizure before it happens, giving Mallory some warning.

Mallory and Donna said they hope that next year more people and businesses will show support for epilepsy awareness by wearing purple on March 26.