

CANADIAN CHILDREN SPLASH NEW COLOURS ON RED, ITCHY SKIN



Young sufferers illustrate what it feels like to have eczema in national art contest

Toronto, February 4, 2010 - "Bright, angry red" is a colour that eczema often brings to mind. However, young eczema sufferers from across Canada utilized all the colours of the rainbow to showcase their feelings on life with the skin disease. Kids aged 12 and under were invited to become Monet for a day and enter the Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE) Program's "*My Life with Eczema*" national art contest. Through drawing, painting and an accompanying story, kids expressed their views on eczema, and the challenges which come with living with the disease. Their reflections included statements like: "People kept on asking why I have red spots so I told them I had eczema. I have to go in the bath two times a day to improve my skin." "I wake up frequently during the night...My spots start to itch as soon as my parents leave the room. I think the reason is because I don't want to show other people that they are itchy." "People often ask me what is wrong with my skin; it bothers me a little, but I answer politely. My friends at school...act as if my skin was the same as everyone else's, and they don't hesitate to hold my hand."

The entries were judged by renowned Canadian cartoonist Lynn Johnston of the iconic "*For Better or For Worse*" series, celebrated Quebec multidisciplinary artist Lysanne Pepin, and four Canadian dermatologists: Dr. Harvey Lui, Dr. Ron Vender, Dr. Marlene Dytoc and Dr. Marc Bourcier. After much deliberation, 7-year-old Tayana Côté of Sherbrooke, Quebec was chosen as the winner. Côté's winning drawing depicted her with eczema, represented by a hedgehog she is holding in her arms. In likening her eczema to the animal, Côté says, "a hedgehog puts up his spines to protect himself; when he feels safe, he becomes very soft."

"It was amazing to see the creative ways in which these Canadian children used art to represent their life with eczema," said Johnston. "Tayana Côté's use of a hedgehog is an imaginative way to present the problem of eczema. Scratching and discomfort is a given, but to make a character out of the disease is the best way to make it memorable and understandable. I couldn't have come up with a better character myself!" "The beautiful use of blended colour is very well done," said Pepin. "Speaking as an artist, Tayana Côté's colour choices and use of space worked very well and resulted in an inspired portrait." Côté will receive a \$1,500 Canada Savings Bond to assist with her future education. Two other young artists were named as finalists: 10-year-old Mackenzie Dalton of Calgary, Alberta for her depiction of the itchy reality of eczema; and 8-year-old Ethan Chan of North York, Ontario who created an uplifting portrait of children who are happy with their skin despite suffering from eczema. The artwork can be viewed at www.eczemaCanada.ca.

Twelve to 25 per cent of Canadian children suffer from eczema and its accompanying pain and constant itch which can distress children and disturb their sleep. It can interfere with school, cause low self esteem, and make them feel self-conscious about their appearance. Some children even avoid social situations because of it. The EASE Program website, www.eczemaCanada.ca, offers information on eczema including tips on speaking to a child's teacher about the condition, managing childhood triggers and how to control the itch.

About Eczema

Over two million children and adults in Canada suffer from eczema, a common, chronic, life-altering skin condition. Eczema (atopic dermatitis) is characterized by painful red, swollen, itchy

and flaky skin. The majority of eczema cases are diagnosed in early childhood, and it is estimated that while some children may eventually outgrow eczema, about 80 per cent will have dry, irritable skin throughout their lives. The condition is associated with the immune system's response to environmental irritants, as well as with respiratory allergies and asthma. Environmental triggers are the most common elements that cause flare-ups. In general, people with eczema often have hypersensitive skin that does not tolerate certain topical stimulants or environmental contaminants.

About the Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE[®]) Program

The Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE) Program is a national and fully bilingual patient education program developed with the assistance of leading Canadian dermatologists to provide access to useful and accurate information about eczema. Supported through an education grant from Astellas Pharma Canada, Inc., the EASE Program has been recognized with four Public Education Awards from the Canadian Dermatology Association (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007).

For more information about eczema or the EASE Program, visit www.eczemaCanada.ca. Parents, teachers and young children can also visit www.pennysworld.ca – a friendly website that aims to help children understand eczema.

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