



The Eczema Society of Canada and EASE invite kids to express disease through art

National art contest encourages young eczema sufferers to paint a picture of life with eczema

Toronto, November 1, 2011 – One child described eczema as a prickly cactus, while another drew a huge pencil eraser and said she wished that it would take away her eczema. When words can't describe the itch, pain or discomfort of eczema, art can spell out the feelings with precision. The Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE) Program, in collaboration with the Eczema Society of Canada, invites kids aged 12 and under to illustrate how it feels to live with eczema by entering the third annual **"My Life with Eczema"** Art Contest.

"On behalf of the Eczema Society of Canada, we are delighted to team up with EASE for this initiative" said Amanda Cresswell-Melville, Director of the Eczema Society of Canada. "Both my children suffer from eczema, and I know it can be especially difficult for kids to understand and cope with this chronic disease. Art provides a way for them to communicate their experience when words don't seem enough."

Twelve to twenty-five per cent of Canadian children suffer from eczema. Although it affects everyone differently, eczema is characterized by some basic symptoms, including dry skin, sore rashes, and intense itch, all of 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.

"As this is my third year judging the art contest, I can't wait to see this year's entries," said Lynn Johnston, well-known Canadian cartoonist and creator of the "For Better or For Worse" series. "It never ceases to amaze me how touching and thoughtful their drawings can be." This year Lynn will be joined by Tristan Demers, Quebec cartoonist, and creator of *Gargouille*, one of Quebec's most popular comic book characters that will help select this year's contest winner. "I created *Gargouille* when I was ten years old, and strongly believe that no matter how young you are, art has the ability to express ideas in ways that words can't," said Demers.



Artwork must be submitted on a special contest template that can be downloaded at www.eczemaCanada.ca and will be judged using a five-point rating system (5 being the best) that looks at the following criteria:

- Use of colour
- Use of space
- Uniqueness
- Personal story

In addition to Johnston and Demers, entries will be judged by a panel of experts, including registered Canadian Art Therapist Janice LeBlanc, dermatologist and Assistant Clinical Professor at the University of Toronto, Dr. Charles Lynde, and Vancouver pediatrician Dr. Joseph Lam. The winning entry will be showcased on the EASE program website www.eczemaCanada.ca and the Eczema Society of Canada website www.eczemahelp.ca in February 2012. The selected young artist will also receive a **\$1500.00 Canada Savings Bond** to assist in their future education, and two finalists will each receive a \$250 Canada Savings Bond.

Interested participants can visit www.eczemaCanada.ca to download a "My Life with Eczema" contest template and guidelines. The contest begins Tuesday, November 1st and entries must be received no later than December 31st, 2011.

About Eczema

Between four to six 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 constant itch that goes along with eczema makes it very different from any other skin condition. Eczema is often called the 'itch that rashes' rather than the 'rash that itches' because the itch starts long before the rash appears. The itch leads to a lot of scratching and that's when the red, raw rash appears. 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.



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

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. Parents, teachers and young children can also visit www.pennysworld.ca - a fun, child-friendly website that aims to help children understand eczema.

About the Eczema Society of Canada

The Eczema Society of Canada is a registered charity dedicated to meeting the needs of those suffering with eczema, through patient support, education, awareness, and research. The Society has a strong commitment to the continuing education of the medical community, supporting ongoing research activities, and increasing public awareness of eczema in society. For more information on eczema, speak to your doctor or visit www.eczemahelp.ca.

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