

My name is Orla Stark and I am 15 years old. I was born in Scotland, and moved to Singapore with my family in 2008 when I was 6 months old. Some of my earliest memories of Singapore were watching monkeys in the rainforest, swimming every day, slurping lots of noodles and climbing up into the Merlion's mouth at Sentosa. When I was 8 years old, my family and I went on an outing to the Singapore Zoo. I got as far as the crocodile enclosure when I collapsed. I was unresponsive. An ambulance took me to a hospital where I was given emergency medication to stop the fitting. We didn't know I was having a seizure. A month later, I had my second seizure at school and was rushed by ambulance to a different hospital which has become very familiar to me over the years. I was diagnosed with Benign Occipital Epilepsy and started taking carbamazepine daily. Apart from a couple more episodes of status epilepticus, I have enjoyed living a happy normal life. I love going to school. I love playing the cello and guitar, and taking part in school productions. Things started to fall apart as I started having numerous seizures requiring hospital admissions and my medical team was puzzled as to why the seizures had suddenly increased in frequency. They changed my medication but the seizures continued. I was in hospital having a seizure when a different consultant happened to observe and thought I was having non-epileptic seizures. This turned out to be true, and I continued having these episodes for a few years, but learned how to cope living with them with the support of a psychologist, my neurologist, my family, my teachers and my friends. I also had major knee surgery during this period to fix my dislocated knee. At this time, it took over my life. I just lived and breathed epilepsy.

Epilepsy doesn't own or define me! I am Orla, a normal teenage girl, living life as who I am and who I always will be. Some people aren't as lucky as me, and that's why I decided to raise awareness of epilepsy and fundraise for the Epilepsy Care Group (Singapore). At my school, Nexus International School, we are always encouraged to take action about issues that we are passionate about. This inspired me to start '*PJ Day for Epilepsy*.' It's a simple idea, wear your PJs to school and bring a small monetary donation for my chosen charity. It was very well received by everyone in my school and has become an awesome and fun annual event for all. In June 2022, we had our fourth successful PJ Day where learners, teachers and administrative staff finished the academic year wearing their PJs to school.

I have really enjoyed raising awareness of epilepsy and sharing my personal journey with the learners at my school. I have presented at a number of whole school assemblies, and in my final year of primary education I made a movie titled 'My Road to Recovery' which was shortlisted in 2019 for the finals of the Around Asia Youth Film Festival in Vietnam. I was honoured to join the Epilepsy Care Group (Singapore) to celebrate their 25th Anniversary, and proudly got on stage to share my journey with a wonderful audience including group members and a Minister of State of the Singapore Government.

I am so grateful that my epilepsy is controlled, but I want to help other people who aren't as fortunate to feel like they are not alone in this, and that they can get through it. I hope by donating this money, it will make a little difference to these people's lives. I am very proud of what PJ Day has turned into, and I want it to go from strength to strength. I am a proud Ambassador of Epilepsy.

