

Media Release



TRILLIUM GIFT OF LIFE NETWORK LAUNCHES RECYCLEME.ORG: AWARENESS CAMPAIGN URGES YOUTH TO CONSIDER ORGAN DONATION

Provocative new campaign kicks-off National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week and puts spotlight on critical need for donors

TORONTO, ON – April 20, 2009 – Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN) took a bold step today and launched its first-ever campaign directed at youth to raise awareness about the critical need for organ and tissue donation in Ontario. The provocative new campaign, geared at reaching 15 to 24 year-olds is anchored by a new website, *RecycleMe.org*, which asks young people to consider the critical need for donors and the ultimate act of ‘recycling’. The campaign, which aims to increase donor consent registrations, was developed with the support of a youth advisory panel and will run for 10 weeks.

“This is our most important campaign to date,” said TGLN President and CEO Frank Markel. “It’s about starting a movement among young people and creating a culture of organ and tissue donation in this province. “Every three days someone dies waiting for an organ transplant and it is our belief that this campaign will let young people know that they have the power to help save lives.”

To develop the campaign, TGLN created and worked with a youth advisory panel over a period of six months to ensure its messages would speak to the intended audience. “Today’s youth are bombarded with thousands of messages every day and we knew that to break through, we’d need to listen to them about what stuck,” said Markel. “This campaign is a direct result of what they told us. It’s 100% for youth, by youth.”

The launch of the campaign is part of the Ontario Government’s provincial Organ and Tissue Donation Strategy designed to build awareness about the need for organ and tissue donation which will be rolled out over the next two years

“With almost 1700 Ontarians currently on the waiting list for a transplant, we have a responsibility to build awareness and education - especially among our youth,” said David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. “Research has shown that organ and tissue donation is simply not on the radar screen of most youth. This campaign is an important step towards creating greater awareness and increasing donor rates.”

Running throughout the spring and into the summer, the province-wide campaign includes gripping transit and online ads, as well as wild postings and social media activations, which drive youth to the website. RecycleMe.org includes inspirational testimonials from youth who have had personal experiences with organ and tissue donation, raw video footage that features actual transplants, and a discussion forum.

The site gives youth the chance to 'join the movement' and pledge their support for organ and tissue donation.

Aaron Kucharczuk, a 24 year-old student from the University of Toronto was one of the panelists who helped inform the campaign. "The problem with the issue of organ donation is that it hasn't caught our attention like a lot of other causes that are well known," said Kucharczuk. "We believe this campaign is going to put the issue on our radar and really get people thinking and mobilized in a powerful way."

Besides the youth panel, TGLN consulted with various stakeholders groups throughout the development of the campaign including the Donor Family Advisory Council, Provincial Volunteer Committee and health care professionals. "My father passed away while waiting for a heart transplant," said 18-year-old Jaynel White, whose father made the decision to donate his organs while on the waiting list. "Even though he lost his life, there are multiple people who are alive today thanks to him. This new youth campaign can only help to save more lives, and hopefully prevent another child from having to say goodbye to a parent."

Today in Ontario, nearly 1700 patients are on the waiting list.

Facts about organ and tissue donation in Ontario:

- Every 3 days someone dies waiting for an organ transplant.
- One organ donor can save up to 8 lives and enhance the lives of up to 75 others through tissue donation.
- Everyone is a potential organ and tissue donor, regardless of his/her age. To date, the oldest Canadian organ donor was over 90 years of age while the oldest tissue donor was 102 years old.
- Even an individual with serious illness can sometimes be an organ or tissue donor.
- The organs and tissue that can be donated include: heart, liver, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, small bowel, corneas, heart valves, bone and skin.
- Most major religions support organ and tissue donation.
- Organ and tissue donation does not affect funeral services and you can still have an open casket.

About Trillium Gift of Life Network

Trillium Gift of Life Network is a not-for-profit agency of the Government of Ontario and is responsible for planning, promoting, coordinating and supporting organ and tissue donation across Ontario and improving the system so that more lives can be saved.

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For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

Carrie Hoto
Trillium Gift of Life Network
Tel: 416-619-2299
Cell: 905-999-2856
choto@giftoflife.on.ca

Micha Goddard
Narrative Advocacy Media
Tel: 416-922-2211
Cell: 905-999-2856
micha.goddard@narrativeadvocacy.com



(l to r) David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Aaron Kucharczuk, Youth Advisory Panel Member, Rabbi Bulka, Chair of Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN) Board of Directors, Frank Markel, President and CEO of TGLN