

## **New Support Group in Sudbury**

Wendi Belanger supported others. As a busy working mom, she always supported her two children in their school and sporting activities. As a child and youth worker in a variety of work settings for over two decades, she confidently supported children, youth and families through difficult times, providing encouragement by listening, advising, guiding and sharing hugs. However, that all changed in 1998 when she was diagnosed with a brain tumour - oligodendroglioma.

Before her diagnosis, Wendi began having small seizures at night. She continued to work, not having any concerns about these seizures. Soon they began occurring during the day as well, but Wendi continued to ignore them.

On a trip to Alberta with her daughter for a ringette tournament, Wendi had another seizure and was taken to the hospital by ambulance. Shortly after, she returned home to Sudbury, Ontario and went directly from the airport to her local hospital where her diagnosis was confirmed.

Because of the tumour's location, removing it wasn't an option. Today, Wendi, 53, has lost some of the independence that most of us take for granted. Because of the unpredictability of her seizures, she can no longer drive and was forced to retire. Having been the one who always supported others, she now finds it difficult to ask for assistance. Despite these changes in her life, Wendi continues to find ways to help those in need, including her volunteer work for Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada.

Three years ago, Wendi was asked to join the organizing committee for the [Sudbury Spring Sprint](#) event and continues in that role today.

At one of the organizing meetings, Wendi spoke about her journey. Afterward, a young woman approached her, saying that Wendi's story made her feel less alone. "She gave me a big hug," says Wendi, who was touched by that special embrace. "Hugs have always been a big part of my work."

Wendi believes it is important for brain tumour survivors to connect and share their stories with others. At last year's Spring Sprint she spoke to staff from Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada saying, "We need a support group in Sudbury. I really believe that I could help start this and I really believe that I have some skills that I could contribute."

On January 18th Wendi facilitated the first Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada [support group in Sudbury, Ontario](#).

Mike Fluit, Support Services Specialist for Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada, was present at that inaugural meeting. He praises Wendi for her enthusiasm and determination to help create this new support group.

"Wendi understands first-hand how important it is to connect with others with similar experiences with a brain tumour. She's been an inspiration to many people and was very instrumental in establishing this support group."

According to Wendi, "I'm used to being the one helping others, but now I see things from the opposite side. I think I needed to walk in the patient's shoes to really understand what it is like to need support. I hope that [Sudbury's Support Group](#) can help to offer this support to people."