

# NOTL hero improves lives of thousands of diabetics

## 10-year-old Maya Webster's campaign pays off as province agrees to cover cost of glucose monitors

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The Lake Report

Most people are lucky if they can honestly say they have improved a single person's life. But one Niagara-on-the-Lake resident has just improved the lives of thousands of Ontarians who have type 1 diabetes.

And she's only 10 years old.

After three years of campaigning with Niagara MPP Wayne Gates, Maya Webster has succeeded in getting continuous glucose monitoring systems covered by the Ontario government for many people with type 1 diabetes.

"I cried happy tears," Maya said about receiving the news.

When Maya started trying to help diabetic Canadians she was barely seven years old.

And all of her work was about helping other people so they could have the same level of safety she was privileged to have. Her family's insurance benefits already covered the cost of her glucose monitor.

"I didn't think it was fair that I was lucky to have my mom's benefits when there are people out there who don't have any," Maya said in an interview at her NOTL home on Monday.

Continuous glucose monitoring helps diabetics constantly monitor their blood sugar levels.

Without the system, people with diabetes have no choice but to go through stretches of time where they have no idea if their blood sugar level is falling or rising to a possibly life-threatening level.

Compounding this, many diabetics don't realize when their blood sugar level is changing, putting their lives



NOTL's own Maya Webster proudly displays her continuous glucose monitoring system. She just succeeded in a three-year push to get the device subsidized by the Ontario government for people with type 1 diabetes. EVAN SAUNDERS

in danger.

The coverage for continuous glucose monitoring is only applicable to people who don't feel their changing blood sugar levels.

"Which is very important because it's the most dangerous," Maya said.

The system can be extremely expensive. It can cost an individual up to \$4,000 per year for the system, Maya's mother Christi Webster said.

And while Maya is duly happy to have increased coverage for type 1 diabetics in Ontario, she already has her eyes set on a bigger goal.

"My next goal would probably be for all of Canada and all people with type 1 diabetes to eventually be covered," she said.

Maya knows too well the dangers of type 1 diabetes. She has been hospitalized several times in the past when her blood sugar levels were dangerously high.

But since getting the continuous monitoring system Maya has not spent a single day in a hospital bed, underlining the major difference the system can make for people.

Maya has friends with type 1 diabetes who haven't been able to get continuous glucose monitoring systems. Until now.

"Knowing now that they can be more safe with continuous glucose monitoring, it really felt good," she said.

Maya is an avid basketball fan and player. Not only has having continuous monitoring made her life safer, it has enabled her life to be more normal, she said.

"If I'm playing basketball I get distracted very easily," Maya said.

"Like sometimes if I'm burning energy I get a tired feeling but it's not a low (blood sugar) feeling, so I ignore it, have some water, and keep playing."

Maya's dad is one of the

coaches of her basketball team and is always keeping an eye on his athletic daughter's levels while she is focused on her dribble and lay-ups.

"If he sees me beeping he comes to me, 'Have some Skittles.' I look at him like, 'How am I low?'"

"But it's because I'm playing basketball."

Having a monitor gives her freedom, Webster said. Maya was able to go her first sleepover at a friend's recently, "which is a normal kid thing to do. But with diabetes it's hard."

In the past, Webster always hosted sleepovers at her house so she could monitor Maya's blood sugar levels.

The monitoring system provides relief for parents, who can even check blood sugar levels with their phones while their kid is out living a normal childhood.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of insulin first

being used to treat someone with type 1 diabetes.

Before the discovery, made by several Canadians at the University of Toronto in 1921, it was normal for people with type 1 to live less than two years, according to Diabetes U.K.

Maya is a youth ambassador with JDRE, an American non-profit dedicated to raising awareness and helping those with type 1 diabetes.

Her journey to help Ontarians with type 1 diabetes saw her address politicians in Ottawa, at Queen's Park and go door-to-door to thousands of homes to get signatures for support.

Maya fondly recalled being vocal at rallies in front of Queen's Park.

"I started a chant," Maya said proudly.

The chant was "CGM for all! CGM for all! And I had a microphone with me," she said.

"And then people looked

out the window and they had to come down to see what was happening. So, we got to educate more people."

She said at the next rally she's going to have a megaphone.

Maya was also bolstered by the unwavering support and dedication of Niagara MPP Wayne Gates.

"He was very helpful and he came with us to a lot of places and he was very supportive about everything," Maya said.

"He literally came door-to-door with us. He knocked on doors, he helped set up a bunch of different signing things at public events that got us a lot of signatures," Webster said.

"We love Wayne. He's really for the people."

Webster said Gates has already promised the hard-working and benevolent 10-year-old a job once she is ready or interested.

Maya also gave a shout out to Phil Leboudec, owner of Phil's The Independent Grocer in Virgil. Leboudec helped the family out by having them gather signatures outside of his store.

"It was more like a campaign because we were staying in one spot for people to come because, it's a grocery store, people are going to be coming in and out," Maya said.

"Phil is a great guy," Webster said.

"He actually helped with some of the diabetes events that we did, with sponsoring for condiments and snacks. Once I told him what it was for he was very helpful," Maya said.

Webster said part of the education work she and Maya do is helping people understand how serious type 1 diabetes is.

"It's not low maintenance and it's not caused by anything she did," Webster said.



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