

His mission: A cure for diabetes

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BY MICHELE HOWE

Star-Ledger Staff

Drew Weinstein is a young man with a mission.

At 14, he has raised \$15,000 so far for diabetes research.

"What motivated me the most to do this volunteer work is my commitment to the cure," said Drew, who is a juvenile diabetic.

The Parsippany teenager is an American Diabetes Association leader and an advocate for the New Jersey Stem Cell Research Education Foundation. In addition, Drew is a juvenile arthritic.

Diagnosed with diabetes in fourth grade, he has spent the last three years fundraising for the American Diabetes Association and talking to others about the disease and about the benefits of stem cell research.

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce enough insulin, a hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into the energy needed for daily life.

"No one knows the exact cause of diabetes. There are 20.8 million people in this country, or 7 percent of the population, who have it," Drew said. "Once I was diagnosed and got involved with the organization I wanted to do something to help, so I started by fundraising.

"First, I took part in America's Walk for Diabetes fundraiser in Morristown on Oct. 16 and raised \$3,000. Before that, I sold (ADA) red bracelets and Beanie Babies to raise money for research," said Drew, a freshman at Barnstable Academy in Oakland.

The teenager also is the youth chair/youth advocate for the New Jersey Stem Cell Research and Education Foundation. "A member of the ADA invited me to a stem cell meeting because she knew I had written letters to the editor of my local paper advocating stem cell research," he explained.

Drew met the chief operating officer of the NJSCREF at the meeting, and he was invited to a roundtable discussion with the foundation members and advocates.

"Now I speak to others about it," Drew said.

"I believe stem cell research will be important in finding a cure for diabetes and other illnesses like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. We're just trying to get the word out to a lot of different people -- especially young people, because they are the future," he said.

His most recent talks took place within a week of each other.

He spoke to the senior class at Watchung Hills High School in Warren during a morning assembly on Nov. 23. The program also featured Gary Friedman, an organ transplant physician

and founder of NJSCREF, and Rob Margolin, a graduate student at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and a graduate of Watchung Hills.

Drew also took part in a program yesterday at UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School in Newark. He and Richard Gaskin, a quadriplegic, talked to graduate students about their respective health problems and their advocacy for stem cell research.

"I plan to stay involved with NJSCREF and am working on an educational video and possible PBS stem cell film," he added.

Drew just returned from the American Diabetes Association's second annual Community Volunteer Leadership Conference in Chicago.

"The American Diabetes Association invited me to attend the youth-leadership program and asked me to consider becoming the national youth chair next year," he said.