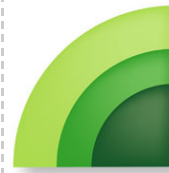




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Life goes on

BY NATALIE GALLENTI

JOHN and Maggie Zeffiro spent over a decade wondering what was wrong with their beloved daughter.

When little Vanessa was only four months she suffered her first seizure. After rushing her to the nearest hospital the worried parents were told it was a febrile convulsion due to high temperature. But she experienced another seizure less than six months later, followed by uncontrollable and severe seizures throughout her childhood.

The Keilor Downs couple spent years consulting doctors and specialists and agonising over every diagnosis they received.

"After the first one, she had a lot of different seizures, all from fevers associated with normal childhood illnesses, but they were prolonged – the longest lasted 55 minutes," Mrs Zeffiro said.

They were told it was a form of epilepsy.

But finally at the age of 12, and after constant perseverance from Maggie who knew her daughter's case was far more severe, she was diagnosed with Dravet Syndrome.

Dravet Syndrome is a neurodevelopmental disorder beginning in infancy and characterised by intractable seizures.

While medication can ease symptoms there is no cure and Vanessa, now 17, continues to have seizures every seven to 14 days.

"The side effects of the medications and the continuous seizures have massive impacts on all aspects of Vanessa's life."

Mrs Zeffiro said the support she received from the Epilepsy Foundation had helped her understand how to deal with Dravet Syndrome and offered her the opportunity to meet other families dealing with the same disorder.

She said it was important the public were aware that people with epilepsy



Living with epilepsy ... Vanessa Zeffiro suffers from the severest form of epilepsy. 61650
Picture: DAMJAN JANEVSKI

could lead a relatively normal lifestyle and they should not be isolated because of the illness.

And she said Epilepsy Week, which will conclude this weekend, and Purple Day on Saturday 26 March, would help to increase the public's understanding of epilepsy.

"Most people don't know a lot about it. "A lot of doctors I speak to don't even know about Dravet Syndrome."

Vanessa is now in her final year of spe-

cial school, but will continue her education as she also suffers a developmental delay and mild autism.

"People say they don't want their children to grow up, but you want them to. You want to see them grow," her father John said.

The couple have also set up a website, providing detailed on information and creating better awareness of Dravet Syndrome. The website is www.dravetsyndrome.com