



The inaugural “Hack the Holiday” event was an overwhelming success this past Saturday!

Co-Hosted by Greater Essex County District School Board and John McGivney School Authority, participants were introduced to the Neil Squire Society and Makers Making Change. The guiding vision at Neil Squire, is to achieve economic, and social inclusiveness for all people with disabilities. To support this vision, Makers Making Change leverages the capacity of community based makers, disability professionals and volunteers to develop and deliver affordable Open Source Assistive Technologies.

According to Statistics Canada, 80% of people living with a disability use an assistive device to increase their independence. Cost is often cited as the main barrier for why a person does not have an assistive device. Playing with adapted toys leads to skill development, independence and social inclusion. Unfortunately switch adapted toys are often cost prohibitive, typically costing upwards of \$100 to \$300 dollars commercially.

Thirty (30) parents/grandparents/guardians were guided through the “how to’s” of building a switch, by Kelsey Smith, Education Consultant and 20th Century teacher at JMCCSA. Participants were supported in safe wire cutting, stripping and soldering from Lana Brode (Ed Coordinator GECDSD) and Bill Fetter (Technology Consultant with GECDSD). Upon completion of their switch, parents selected a free pre-adapted toy. Toys were previously adapted by Grade 11 and 12 Computer Engineering students (Ms. Heather St. Pierre's classroom) from Belle River High School.

Complimentary gift wrapping was completed by Jennifer Newton, Educational Consultant with GECDSD. We were also lucky to have Occupational Therapist Julie Bially (from the JMCC) and CDA Angelica McGuire (from GECDSD/JMCCSA) on hand to model communication strategies and how to utilize the toys selected.

We have to acknowledge and thank the Optimist Club of Kingsville and Makers Making Change for their financial support of this event.

This was a great partnership!

