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## Teen teaches teens about Tourette's

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When she got thrown out of science class because of a tic she couldn't control, Jennifer Zwilling resolved to make the world more aware of Tourette's Syndrome, a disorder that can cause involuntary motor or vocal tics.

She was 7 years old then, in the second grade. The teacher got angry because "she thought I was rolling my eyes over something she had said," Jennifer recalled. The teacher didn't understand her disease and its symptoms.

So Jennifer started with the world she knew. She began meeting with teachers at the beginning of each school year to educate them about this oft-misunderstood disorder. Soon she was speaking in front of students at the school. She became a sought-after presenter.

Now 16, Jennifer has extended her influence far beyond her Brookville home and schools. As founder of the National Tourette Syndrome Youth Ambassador Program, she is one of 12 young people from across the country to receive a national BRICK Award for "helping make the world a better place." With the other young people, who each received a \$10,000 community grant to continue their work, Zwilling will appear on the CW Network Thursday night.

She's trained more than 100 young "ambassadors" who bring an understanding of Tourette Syndrome to schools and youth groups around Long Island and elsewhere. She's also reached hundreds more with an online training program. A video developed by Jennifer with her sister, Amanda, 19, and brother, Eric, 14, can be viewed on the Web site of the Bayside-based [Tourette Syndrome Association](#).

"Jennifer has really made more impact because she teaches other kids to teach other kids," said Tracy Colletti-Flynn, spokeswoman for the association, which was founded 35 years ago. About 200,000 people in the United States suffer from the neurobiological disorder, which is characterized in varying degrees by tics such as eye blinking or head jerking and/or vocal outbursts.

"I get a great reaction when I speak to students -- they're eager to learn about TS and ask a lot of questions. I think teens learn best from teens," Jennifer said. She realized that by educating young people she could erase the myths and stereotypes about TS and help others become more accepted.

The BRICK awards are sponsored by Do Something, a Manhattan-based nonprofit that seeks to inspire and activate young people to find an issue close to their hearts and do something to bring about social change.

Zwilling was a winner in the health category. Other awards were in education and environment, global impact, and community building. Golden Brick awards were given to one winner in each category through a TV voting process.

Young people can learn about applying for next year's BRICK awards at the web site [Dosomething.org](#).