

# Walk raises awareness

By HEATHER TRAVIS  
The Daily News

It is a long journey recovering from an organ transplant, but the three-day walk from London to Windsor this weekend was something recipients and their families took in stride.

Thirty-five men and women of all ages participated in the Sun Life Financial Gift of Life Relay, travelling approximately 190-kilometres along Highway 2 from Thursday to Saturday.

The money raised during the fundraiser benefits the 2008 Canadian Transplant Games held in Windsor in August.

On Saturday, a group of walkers dressed in track suits and rain gear stopped by the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance to meet with hospital representatives and a local donor family before hitting the road for the next leg of their relay.

Jim and Nancy Smith of Chatham attended the welcoming event to show their support for organ donation.

Their 25-year-old son, Chad, died after being involved in a car accident two years ago.

The couple decided to donate his organs and by doing so, Chad was able to help more than 13 different people.

"We weren't able to save our son, (but) we were able to save someone else's life," said Nancy.

"It was an easy decision for us," added Jim.

Last year, Tom Awad of Windsor and his brother Roger Awad of Essex, walked the same route from Windsor to London to raise awareness about organ transplants and donation.

This year, Tom decided to recruit other donor families and recipients from areas such as Grand Bend, Dorchester and Wheatley to join him along the London-Windsor corridor.

"The number one goal is to raise more awareness," he said, adding that only a small percentage of Canadians are organ donors.

In 2002, Tom received a liver transplant.

"I was a week away from dying," he said. "It saved my life."

"Those people are heroes to us . . . We are so proud these donor families are walking with us."

He hopes to raise about \$25,000 from the event.

Lynn Tetler of Essex said the early morning rain was going to slow the walkers down, but not dampen their spirits.

"The awareness needs to get out there," she said.

Tetler, who received a liver transplant 12 years ago, is planning to participate in the upcoming transplant games.