



In this Issue

- 2 **Message from the Chair**
- 4 **Sunshine, Smiles, and Success - WWDSS Celebrates Another Amazing Any Which Way You Can-A-Thon!**
- 9 **Christmas Party**
- 10 **Calendar pre-orders are live!**
- 10 **WWDSS Presents: Speech & Music Social Groups**
- 11 **Mother's Night Out Dinner at Del's Italian Kitchen**
- 11 **Wellington Catholic District School Board SEAC Update**
- 11 **Fall Mini Conference Planning Your Family's Future**
- 12 **Waterloo Region District School Board SEAC Update & Advocacy Highlights**
- 13 **Waterloo Catholic District School Board SEAC Report**
- 14 **The Office Update**
- 15 **Come On Out to the WWDSS Bowling Party**
- 16 **Save the Date**
- 16 **Buddy Choir**

Message from the Chair

What an incredible fall season it's been for WWDSS!

Our **Any Which Way You Can-A-Thon** on September 28 was a huge success, with hundreds joining us on a beautiful, sunny day. Together, we raised over **\$81,000!** A heartfelt thank you to **Janine Oosterveld** and her amazing team for organizing such an inspiring event — your hard work truly shines.

Our **Speech and Music Social Groups** are also back in full swing, with sessions running in both KW and Guelph. The next session begins in early November, and it's been wonderful to see the enthusiasm and friendships growing in these programs.

Looking ahead, our **Fall Mini Conference** is coming up on **November 15 at KidsAbility Waterloo**. We're excited to start the day with a presentation from self-advocate **Emily Pike**, who will share the many incredible ways she contributes to our community. The day will focus on **future planning**, featuring expert-led sessions covering key topics such as Wills, Henson Trusts, Executors, Guardianship, RDSPs, DTC, ODSP, and more. Onsite childcare will be available, along with a fun field trip for older kids and young adults. This will be an important and informative day for all families — don't miss it!

We're also excited to announce that our **New Parent Program** will be starting back up in the **New Year**. This wonderful program offers new parents a chance to connect weekly, share experiences, and explore topics that matter most during the early stages of their journey. It's a safe and welcoming space — with daycare provided for the little ones — where parents and children can come together and begin forming lifelong friendships built on shared experiences. **Watch for registration details coming soon!**

And yes — the holidays are just around the corner! Our **WWDSS Christmas Party** will be held on **December 6 at the Alpine Club**. Registration is now open, so be sure to sign up for this festive, family-friendly event as we celebrate the season together. Rumour has it that a jolly old fellow might drop by for a visit!

As always, we're looking for **volunteers** to help plan and support our events and programs. If you have time to spare and want to get involved, please reach out — we'd love to find the right fit for your interests, skills, and schedule.

Wishing you all a wonderful fall and a joyful start to the holiday season!

Arisa Alexanian

Chair, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

WWDSS Board of Directors for 2025-2026

Chair Arisa Alexanian	Treasurer Sylvia Cook	Director At Large Merita Elmazi	Director at Large Kim Murphy
Vice Chair TBD	Director At Large Jocelyne Bridle	Director At Large Tony Fraser	Director at Large Janine Oosterveld
Past Chair Lisa Buurma	Director At Large Jenn Burechails	Director at Large Tara Hart	Director at Large Janine Rorke
Secretary Tracey Kuepfer	Director At Large Janice Duncan	Director at Large Lori Maloney	Director at Large Roberta Thompson

WWDSS Committee Leads for 2025-2026

Newsletter Lisa Buurma	Pizza Pals Susan Powell - Older Group	WWDSS World Down Syndrome Day Celebration Lisa Buurma	Teen Hangouts TBD
New Parent Contact – Waterloo Region Hanika Williams	Pizza Pals Tamara Perez - Younger Group	WWDSS Family Picnic Lisa & Ross Buurma	The Office Meetups (18+) Lori Maloney Emily Pike Mary Pike
New Parent Contact – Cambridge Roopa Bose	WWDSS Calendar Kate Herron	WWDSS Social Media Vanessa Richard	Independence Skills Program Jocelyne Bridle
New Parent Contact – Guelph/Wellington County Vanessa Richard	Adult Programming Bursary Wendy Eichler	Volunteer Coordinator Julie Maxwell	Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament Mike Hellyer
WWDSS Website Steve Nicholson	Therapy Bursaries Alison Senior	Any Which Way You Can A-Thon Janine Oosterveld	Employment Skills Program Tracey Kuepfer
WWDSS Store Merita Elmazi Tony Fraser	Transition Bursary Marianne Domm	WWDSS Christmas Party Mandi Butcher	Music & Speech Social Groups Arisa Alexanian Mary Casagrande
WWDSS Cooking Classes TBD	Camp Bursary Sylvia Cook	New Parent’s Connection Wendy Newbery	
	WWDSS Bowling Party Merita Elmazi	Moms’ Night Out Janice Duncan	

WWDSS Representatives

PAAC on SEAC
Marianne Domm

DSAO Representative
Mary Casagrande

CDSS Representative
Amber Barens

Waterloo Region

SEAC – Catholic
Primary - Kim Murphy
Alternate - Gillian Hadden

SEAC – Public
Primary - Roberta Thompson
Alternate - Jeff Senior

Guelph/Wellington County

SEAC – Catholic
Primary - Katrina Fraser
Alternate - TBD

SEAC – Public
Primary - TBD
Alternate - TBD

Mission Statement

The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society (formerly the Waterloo Regional Down Syndrome Society) supports and informs individuals, families and the community on issues related to Down syndrome. We advocate for persons with Down syndrome to lead healthy and active lives enabling them to contribute their unique gifts to our community.



Sunshine, Smiles, and Success

WWDSS Celebrates Another Amazing Any Which Way You Can-A-Thon!

By the AWWYCA Organizing Committee

It was a sunny day in Waterloo Park on September 28 as the community came together for the annual Any Which Way You Can-A-Thon! Families, friends, supporters, and local officials joined in to celebrate, take part, reconnect with old friends, make new ones, and support WWDSS's biggest fundraiser of the year. Everyone had a great time trying out new lawn games alongside returning favourites from balloon artists and face painters. The fun kicked off with a warm welcome from our hosts, CHYM 96.7's Mark Paine and WWDSS ambassador Allie Libertini, followed by a fantastic performance from the Buddy Choir.

After completing the 2 km route, participants gathered to enjoy well-earned refreshments, made possible by our generous food and beverage sponsors and dedicated volunteer kitchen and grill teams. To cap off the celebration, crowd favourite Erick Traplin took to the microphone and had everyone up and dancing with this fun-filled performance. It was the perfect ending to a fantastic day!

Thanks to the incredible efforts of our fundraisers, sponsors, prize donors, grocery store donors, community partners, and volunteers, over \$81,000 was raised!

These funds directly support WWDSS' programs, events, and workshops that enrich the lives of people with Down syndrome and their families. As a charity without government funding, every dollar raised makes a meaningful difference.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped bring this event to life, including our set-up and take-down crew, sound engineer, registration and store teams, kitchen crew from McLennan Speech and Language Services and Kijenge Inclusive Music Education & Music Therapy, grill team led by Abdi Yasin and family, and route marshals. We are grateful for our community partners at Rotary Waterloo, who each and every year come out as a team to support us by volunteering their services to help our events be successful. We were thrilled to have the Laurier Women's Hockey team volunteer with us. Behind the scenes, we also appreciate those that help before and after the event with prize donation requests, thank-you card writing, donation processing and deliveries.

One last thank you to all of you who joined us - bringing along your friends and family to celebrate with us! We're already looking forward to another wonderful day together at next year's event!

The Any Which Way You Can A-Thon organizing committee

Janine Oosterveld
Arisa Alexanian

Roopa Bose
Lisa Buurma

Mary Casagrande
Chris Hammar

Sarah Kelly
Julie Maxwell

Janine Rorke
Kerry Wright



Thank you Event Sponsors!

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- Heartland, Guelph
- Clairfield, Guelph
- Eramsoa, Guelph
- Imperial, Guelph



Waterloo Wellington
Down Syndrome Society



CHRISTMAS



**Come and enjoy Socializing,
Santa, Pizza and Snacks.**

Anyone who wishes to attend must sign up on the events registration page of the WWDSS website. Registration is now open.

Registration is mandatory so that organizers can account for food and any dietary needs.

Keep an eye on your email for more info.

**Calendars, merchandise
and door prize tickets will be
available for purchase.**

Date Saturday December 6, 2025
Time 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Location Alpine Club
(464 Maple Avenue,
Kitchener)



CALENDAR PRE-ORDERS ARE LIVE!



Purchases can be made on the WWDSS website with local pick ups available in Guelph, Kitchener, Cambridge, and Waterloo. You will be contacted by WWDSS once physical copies are available to arrange pick up at one of the central locations. The cost is \$10 per calendar.

This year's calendar focuses on Belonging – ways in which our members belong as part of our amazing community as well as ways they struggle in belonging. The photos show off our members in their favourite attires from gardening with grandma in overalls, to shinning in their cheerleading costumes, to stepping up to the plate in baseball gear, and more. Our members belong.



Waterloo Wellington
Down Syndrome Society

WWDSS Presents: Speech & Music Social Groups

WWDSS is pleased to offer in-person and virtual Speech & Music Social Groups again this fall in Waterloo. The Guelph program will not be running for this session. The focus will be on building language and social skills between participants while developing an outlet for creative music communication. Participants in each group would engage in a variety of music & language activities.

For dates and locations see online registration at wwdss.ca/event.



Mother's Night Out

Dinner at Del's Italian Kitchen

Please join the Mother's Group for an evening of conversation & good food.

When

Thursday December 4, 2025

Time

7:15 p.m.

Address

Del's Italian Kitchen
2980 King St E, Kitchener,

WWDSS will cover five appetizers for the evening

Please RSVP by Friday November 28, 2025 at janiceduncan@rogers.com



Wellington Catholic District School Board SEAC Update

by **Katrina Fraser**

The October 15 meeting of Wellington Catholic District School Board SEAC was an update about the summer programming and September transitions, getting students settled and EA support to do that. There was also some discussion about increases in student numbers and EAs, as well as the new digital IEP template for the board, that's sent home electronically. I also shared information about the Any Which Way You Can A-Thon fundraiser amounts, and showed the I BELONG media campaign. Next meeting is November 19, 2025.

Fall Mini Conference

Planning Your Family's Future

Date	Saturday November 15, 2025
Location	KidsAbility - 500 Hallmark Dr Waterloo
Time	9:00 am - 2:30 pm

See insert included with this newsletter for more details.

Waterloo Region District School Board SEAC Update & Advocacy Highlights

by Roberta Thompson

Navigating Special Education in Ontario

Roberta Thompson, SEAC Primary Representative for WWDSS, recently attended a webinar titled *Navigating Special Education in Ontario Schools*, presented by the Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) in partnership with Community Living Ontario. The session offered helpful information, tips, and strategies to support caregivers of students receiving special education services.

A key takeaway from the session was the document **Strategies for Success: Navigating Special Education in Ontario - A Guide for Students, Parents, and Caregivers**, which provides clear explanations of the processes, rights, and advocacy tools available to families. This guide is an invaluable resource for anyone supporting a child in the education system. You can access it at specialeducationguide.communitylivingontario.ca.

SEAC Meeting Highlights - October 2025

The Waterloo Region District School Board shared several important updates at the October SEAC meeting.

Professional Development: The Ministry of Education has outlined required topics for school board professional learning this year, including school safety (health and violence prevention), artificial intelligence, and racism. Other areas of focus include

Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ACE classes, and Human Rights training for administrative professionals (Duty to Accommodate, Suspensions and Expulsions, and Modified Days).

Funding and Student Support: There is now greater flexibility in the *CTEP* funding, which helps students who are receiving medical treatment that prevents regular school attendance.

Transportation: Last year's concerns about buses without working air conditioning have been resolved, and staff now include notes in student files to ensure accommodations for heat sensitivity.

Gifted Screening: The Board is reviewing new tools to reduce bias in identifying gifted students, as current screeners can favour English speakers or those with prior knowledge.

Student Support Process: The Board shared updates on its tiered approach:

- **Tier 1:** Universal Design for all students.
- **Tier 2:** Targeted interventions for learning challenges.
- **Tier 3:** Intensive support for significant needs.

Referrals now include student strengths, goals, and collaboration with professionals such as itinerant teachers, speech-language pathologists, social workers, and psychologists. Elementary schools, particularly in Kindergarten to Grade 2, can also request itinerant support to assist classrooms through co-teaching and inclusive planning.

Trustee Updates: Consultations are underway for strategic plan updates, and

the Summer Learning Program continues to expand with new opportunities including co-op placements.

The next SEAC meeting will take place **virtually on November 12, 2025**.

Why We Must Stand Up for Elected Trustees

School board trustees are elected voices for students, families, and communities. They help shape board policies, oversee budgets, and ensure that decisions reflect the needs of all learners — especially those with disabilities. Trustees play a crucial role in ensuring that Individual Education Plans (IEPs), inclusive programs, and accessibility remain central to board priorities.

Recently, the Ministry of Education has indicated plans to reduce or even remove elected trustee positions, replacing them with government-appointed supervisors. Advocates warn that such changes could silence community voices and weaken accountability. Trustees provide the democratic oversight that ensures students with disabilities and their families have an avenue for advocacy when issues arise. Removing that voice risks shifting decision-making away from local realities and toward top-down control.

The WWDSS SEAC stands firmly in support of maintaining strong, elected trustee representation. Trustees are essential partners in inclusive education — helping families navigate challenges, ensuring transparency, and keeping the needs of students with disabilities visible and prioritized in our school communities.

Waterloo Catholic District School Board SEAC Report

Did You Know? - The Power of Your Local Trustee

Trustees are elected, not appointed.

They represent *you* — ensuring community voices shape education policy and practice.

The Ministry of Education has proposed changes that could reduce or remove elected trustee roles. This would silence local voices and weaken accountability.

Why it matters:

- Trustees help ensure **IEPs and supports remain a priority.**
- They **advocate** for equitable funding and inclusive learning.
- They **hold boards accountable** for accessibility and transparency.
- They **amplify family concerns** and protect students' rights.

Without trustees:

- Families lose a **direct line of advocacy.**
- Special education could become **less transparent and less responsive.**
- Decision-making could drift from **community values.**

by Kim Murphy

September 3, 2025 - WCDSB SEAC Meeting

- The committee met on the first day of school, following the opening of two new schools in Kitchener. We met new Director Annalisa Varsano who attended the meeting.
- The Professional Development Plan for the year was reviewed. Topics include: training on the new Clevr IEP platform (minimal visible change expected for families), Empower Reading, Transition Planning, Mental Health supports, and Behavior Analyst support.
- A summary of the Summer Boost Program (Math and Literacy support) was shared. Over 300 elementary students participated and the program was considered successful.

October 2025 - WCDSB SEAC Meeting

- Student Achievement & Learning Innovation Consultants presented "AI - How Can It Help Our Students?". The presentation focused on potential benefits when appropriate safeguards are in place. Members were invited to provide feedback to inform student/parent guidelines.

As usual, community associations and Trustees provided their updates and highlighted upcoming events.

SEAC Meeting Minutes are available on the Board website:
[WCDSB.ca](#) > Programs & Services > Special Education > Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) > Meeting Minutes

As your WWDSS representatives on WCDSB SEAC, we are available as a resource for families and to ensure the concerns and needs of our children are represented.

Primary: Kim Murphy
Alternate: Gillian Hadden.




the **Office**
WWDSS
Social Group

by Lori Maloney

On October 7th we enjoyed indoor mini golf at IBowl in Cambridge. We had 17 members attend this fun event. The Office group were made aware that the Teen Group did not have a volunteer to organize activities. They have decided to invite the teen group to our Halloween party and our next zoom to see how things go.

On October 21, we gathered at Lori's Apartment community room for a pasta potluck and Halloween celebration. Everyone showed off some fantastic costumes. It was a wonderful evening full of food and laughter.

The Office has many fun activities and zooms planned until the end of the year. Here is an outline of what we have planned:

Date	Activity	Details
November 18	Birthday Party For All Birthdays September, October, November, December	Lori's Community Room 205 Victoria St. S Pizza will be served
December 2 Bandagi Birthday	Wicked Part 2	
December 16	Christmas Party	Crabby Joes
December 30 Emily's Birthday	Zoom - Board Games	





Waterloo Wellington
Down Syndrome Society

Come On Out to the WWDSS Bowling Party

Sunday February 22, 2026

Victoria Bowl
280 Victoria Street South, Kitchener

3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Please register at www.wwdss.ca

Come enjoy an afternoon of bowling with the whole family! You do not have to bowl to enjoy this event. There will be pizza and drinks for everyone to enjoy. Gluten free options are available as well.

This is open to all WWDSS members and is a no cost event. **Registration is required** for bowlers and non-bowlers so that we can plan the lanes and food.



Save the Date Events

Fall Mini Conference

November 15

Mother's Night Out

December 4

Christmas Party

December 6

Bowling Party

February 22

Save the Date Programs

The Office

November 18
December 2, 16

Speech & Music Group

Waterloo: November - December 2025
Guelph: not running for this session



Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

is grateful for the extraordinary
grant received from



WATERLOO REGION
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John A. McLennan
FAMILY FUND

This generous grant will help WWDSS to continue to provide the much needed programs and services for those living with Down syndrome and their families in Waterloo Region and Guelph/Wellington County.



Buddy Choir

Buddy Choir has started our rehearsals on Mondays from 6:30 until 8:00 p.m. at Our Studio 109 Ottawa St. South.

We have most recently performed at the WWDSS Any Which Way You Can A-thon. On November 17th we will be performing at the Waterloo Region District School Board PD Day for Educational Assistants.

**A choir for the entire family
- please join us!**

For more info call Lori Maloney at 519-501-6747 or email her at lmcy50@gmail.com.