Waterloo Wellington
**Down Syndrome** Society

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER | 2026




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Photo by Hilary Gauld from One for the Wall Photography

# Message from the Chair

As we wrap up another Canadian summer and shift back into familiar routines, I hope the past few months brought your family rest, joy, and plenty of sunshine. September always feels like a reset — a chance to settle in, reconnect, and look ahead to a new season together.

For families with children starting school or returning to the classroom, please remember that our WWDSS SEAC (Special Education Advisory Council) representatives are available if you need guidance or support. New teachers, new expectations, and new environments can bring both excitement and uncertainty, and we're here to help you navigate those transitions.

**Any Which Way You Can A-Thon — Sunday, October 4 at Waterloo Park**
Our biggest annual fundraiser is coming up quickly, and we can't wait to see our community come together again. The AWWYCA-Thon fuels so many of the programs and supports we offer throughout the year. Whether you walk, roll, run, or simply come out to cheer, your participation helps strengthen WWDSS and the families we serve.

**A Wonderful Summer Picnic**
This year's Summer Picnic was a beautiful day filled with laughter, swimming, great food, and time spent with friends old and new. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Buurma family for once again opening their home and hosting this cherished tradition.

**New Parent/Caregiver Connection — Returning This Fall**
We're excited to bring back our New Parent/Caregiver Connection program after the tremendous response last spring. Families shared how meaningful it was to connect with others who truly understand the early stages of the Down syndrome journey. Start dates will be announced soon, and childcare will be provided for all registered children.

**Speech & Music Social Groups**
Our Speech & Music Social Groups will resume in **Kitchener-Waterloo this September**, offering therapeutic benefits and opportunities to build friendships and social confidence. The **Guelph group will restart in the New Year**, and we'll share details closer to the launch.

**Cooking Classes — Coming Soon**
Plans to relaunch our Cooking Classes are underway. These sessions help build independence and life skills in a fun, hands-on environment. More information will be shared as soon as dates are finalized.

**Volunteers Keep WWDSS Thriving**
WWDSS is powered entirely by volunteers — and that is one of our greatest strengths. Every program, event, and initiative exists because someone stepped forward to help. In this newsletter, you'll find roles where support is needed. Consider teaming up with a friend or family member to share a position. Your time and talents make a real difference, and we are deeply grateful for everyone who contributes to our community.

I look forward to seeing you at the AWWYCA-Thon on October 4 and reconnecting as we begin a new season together.

Wishing you a warm and colourful Fall.

**Arisa Alexanian**
WWDSS Chair
519-729-7855

## WWDSS Board of Directors for 2026-2027

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## WWDSS Committee Leads for 2026-2027

**Newsletter**
Lisa Buurma

**New Parent Contact – Waterloo Region**
TBD

**New Parent Contact – Cambridge**
Jenn Burechails

**New Parent Contact – Guelph/Wellington County**
Vanessa Richard

**WWDSS Website**
Steve Nicholson

**WWDSS Store**
Merita Elmazi
Tony Fraser

**WWDSS Cooking Classes**
Bess Kara

**Pizza Pals**
Susan Powell - Older Group

**Pizza Pals**
Tamara Perez - Younger Group

**WWDSS Calendar**
Vanessa Richard

**Adult Programming Bursary**
Wendy Eichler

**Therapy Bursaries**
Alison Senior

**Transition Bursary**
Marianne Domm

**Camp Bursary**
Sylvia Cook

**WWDSS Bowling Party**
Merita Elmazi

**WWDSS World Down Syndrome Day Celebration**
Lisa Buurma

**WWDSS Family Picnic**
Lisa & Ross Buurma

**WWDSS Social Media**
Vanessa Richard

**Volunteer Coordinator**
Julie Maxwell

**Any Which Way You Can A-Thon**
Janine Oosterveld

**WWDSS Christmas Party**
Mandi Butcher

**New Parent's Connection**
TBD

**Moms' Night Out**
Janice Duncan

**Teen Hangouts**
TBD

**The Office Meetups (18+)**
Lori Maloney
Emily Pike
Mary Pike

**Independence Skills Program**
Jocelyne Bridle
Sylvia Cook

**Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament**
Mike Hellyer
Megan Hellyer

**Employment Skills Program**
Tracey Kuepfer

**Music & Speech Social Groups**
Arisa Alexanian
Mary Casagrande

## WWDSS Representatives

**PAAC on SEAC**
Marianne Domm

**DSAO Representative**
Lori Maloney

**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 - Keira Madden

**SEAC – Public**
Primary - Ted Fransen
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.




# **Important Notice:** Changes to the WWDSS "Words" Newsletter

The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society (WWDSS) Board of Directors has made the decision to move to a digital-only version of the "Words" newsletter, beginning with the January 2027 issue.

Going forward, all members will automatically receive the newsletter by email. However, we understand that some members may still prefer to receive a hard copy by mail.

Want to continue receiving a hard copy?

If you would like to continue receiving a printed copy of "Words" by mail, you must let us know by December 1, 2026.

You can do this in either of the following ways:

- Email us at info@wwdss.ca and let us know that you would like to continue receiving a hard copy of the newsletter; or
- Log in to your WWDSS account, go to Member Settings, and check the box indicating that you would like to receive a hard copy of the newsletter.

If you do not request a hard copy by December 1, 2026, beginning with the January 2027 issue, you will receive "Words" by email only.

This change will help WWDSS reduce printing and mailing costs while continuing to make our newsletter easily accessible to all members.

Thank you for helping us make this transition!



# WWDSS Calendar Photoshoot

**by Vanessa Richard**

We had two fun and exciting days of shooting for our upcoming photo series and calendar, Beyond Expectations, in August.

Our members welcomed our new photographer, Tina Weltz, with open arms. There was sass, there was silliness, there was a beautiful representation of our community.

We look forward to sharing the series with the world in October. These photos, and our members, certainly are Beyond Expectations.

WWDSS Calendar Committee: Vanessa Richard, Merita Elmazi, Sarah Kocher, Sarah Keeler, and Tina Weltz







# Annual Summer Picnic at the Buurma Family Farm

**by Lisa Buurma**

The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society hosted its annual Summer Picnic on Sunday, June 20, at the Buurma family farm in Puslinch. It was a wonderful day filled with sunshine, laughter, and plenty of opportunities for members and their families to spend time together and enjoy the great outdoors.

There was something for everyone to enjoy! Members had the chance to explore the farm and get up close to the chickens and cows. The bouncy castle was also a big hit, keeping the kids entertained and adding lots of fun to the day.

One of the highlights of the picnic was seeing some new faces and welcoming new families to our Society. It was especially special to meet some of the sweet new babies and their families who have recently joined our Down syndrome community here in the Waterloo-Wellington area. Events like this give us a chance to connect with one another, welcome new families, and strengthen the wonderful sense of community that makes our Society so special.

A big thank-you to the Abdi, Suaad, John, Prescila, and James for their time and efforts in preparing the barbecue for all attendees. We are also grateful to everyone who attended, volunteered, and helped make the day such a success.

It was a wonderful day of family, friendship, fun, and community—and we are already looking forward to next year's Summer Picnic!







# Calling all Kitchener & Guelph area youth aged 14-21!

Student Links is looking for new students to explore interests, engage in the community, and discover new roles for their future beyond high school.

Connect with our local coordinator, Seth Bartz, at sbartz@communitylivingontario.ca 519-546-5999

Learn more about Student Links and get involved at bit.ly/CLOStudentLinks

# 12th Annual WWDSS Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament

**by Mike Hellyer**

The WWDSS held our 12th Annual Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament on Monday June 15th at Ariss Valley Golf & Country Club in Guelph/Eramosa. We had great weather all day which made for a great day on the Golf Course.

This year we had 1 on course sponsor. Cooperators Insurance offered $10,000 for the first hole in one on their par 3 hole. We appreciate our on-course sponsor as they add to the fun of the event. Also we would like to thank Pepsico for donating bags of chips for each golfer. Our banquet started with a thank you to all the golfers from our Committee Chair Michael Hellyer. WWDSS then welcomed City News 570's Mike Farwell as our emcee. We are very appreciative to have Mike emcee our event each year as his great sense of humor captivates the crowd and keeps the event moving smoothly. Our silent auction was very competitive with all auction items being bid on and closely guarded by some golfers. We closed the bidding for the auction items and were lucky to be serenaded by the always popular Buddy Choir, who belted out everyone's favorite tunes.

As always, our volunteers went above and beyond the call and gave their time to make this event such a success. Without the dozens of volunteers helping with large and small tasks, we would not be able to get everything that needs to be done prior to and the day of the event completed. Thank you to the organizing committee who worked tirelessly over a period of several months to contact our past and new sponsors, golfers and others who have donated items in the past. We truly appreciate your dedication to the event.

We are looking forward to our 13th Annual next year so stay tuned for more information.



We are grateful for the generous support of our sponsors and we encourage you to support these great community leaders whenever you can. Make sure you take a moment to thank them for sponsoring the WWDSS:

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# End of a Great Season

**by Mandi Butcher**

Many of our members are involved in Special Olympics. There are many sports to choose from with a variety of different levels and skills. All of the coaches are compassionate volunteers. Members are welcome to join the Special Olympics beginning at age 8.

Two of our members, Kieran Butcher and Emma Casagrande competed against each other in the end of season tournament hosted by Guelph Special Olympics at the University of Guelph. Emma played for the Guelph team and Kieran played for the Kitchener Waterloo team. The game perfectly aligned with the oath of the athletes for all Special Olympics competitions; "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

Congratulations to all of the athletes who compete year-round in the Special Olympics!

# Spring 2026 Mini Conference



## Meet Katie Kuepfer

Katie Kuepfer recently shared her story at the WWDSS AGM as a self advocate, giving us a glimpse into the people, activities, and communities that bring meaning to her life. Katie enjoys spending time with her family and friends, volunteering at Chartwell Retirement Home, attending dance and cooking classes, bowling with Special Olympics, and taking part in fitness and boxing activities. She is also a huge WWE fan and loves music, especially ABBA and songs from High School Musical. Katie is proud of her accomplishments and the many skills she continues to develop, and she has big hopes and dreams for her future.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

# Mental Health in Down Syndrome

## Looking beyond behaviour to understand the whole person

**Notes prepared by Roberta Thompson**

At our Spring Mini-Conference, Dr. Anupam Thakur presented an informative and compassionate session on mental health in people with Down syndrome. Dr. Thakur is Psychiatrist-in-Chief at Surrey Place, a staff psychiatrist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), and an assistant professor at the University of Toronto.

**One of the session's most important messages was simple: mental health is health.**

People with Down syndrome can experience depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, trauma, psychosis, dementia and other mental health concerns. However, their symptoms may not always look or be communicated in the ways families and healthcare providers expect.

When a person communicates differently or has difficulty describing their internal experiences, emotional distress may instead appear as a change in behaviour, sleep, appetite, energy, participation or daily routines. If we only describe the behaviour without investigating what may be causing it, an important health or mental health need can be missed.

### Notice changes from the person's usual self

Families know their loved ones best and are often the first to recognize that something has changed.

- increased irritability, fearfulness or reassurance-seeking;
- withdrawing from people or previously enjoyed activities;
- changes in sleep, appetite, energy or concentration;
- new physical complaints or signs of pain;
- a noticeable loss of skills or independence;
- increased difficulty beginning or completing familiar activities;
- changes in communication, movement or daily routines; and
- the sudden appearance or significant increase of repetitive or ritualized behaviour.

None of these signs automatically means that a person has a psychiatric disorder. They are signals telling us to pause, become curious and look more closely.

## Behaviour is communication

Dr. Thakur introduced the H.E.L.P. approach, a framework used to understand emotional distress and behaviours of concern in adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

H.E.L.P. encourages families and healthcare professionals to consider four connected areas:

- **H - Health:** Could the person be experiencing pain, illness, constipation, medication side effects, sleep difficulties, hearing or vision changes, or another untreated health concern?
- **E - Environment:** Have there been changes at home, school, work or a day program? Is the environment noisy, overwhelming, understimulating or unpredictable? Does the person have appropriate communication, sensory and daily-living supports?
- **L - Lived Experience:** Has the person experienced grief, bullying, trauma, loneliness, a relationship change or a major transition? What has happened from the person's perspective - not simply from the perspective of the people around them?
- **P - Psychiatric Disorders:** After considering the person's health, environment and lived experiences, could depression, anxiety or another psychiatric condition be contributing to the changes?

**This approach helps us move from asking, "How do we stop this behaviour?" to asking, "What might this person be communicating, and what support do they need?"**

## Communication must be part of assessment

A person should not be excluded from conversations about their mental health because they do not communicate primarily through speech.

Pictures, symbols, communication boards, visual scales, easy-read information and wordless stories can help people identify feelings, describe experiences and participate more fully in their care. Communication supports should be available before a crisis occurs and included in school and adult-transition planning.

Healthcare providers can also make reasonable adjustments by offering longer appointments, reducing distractions, scheduling a quieter or earlier appointment, explaining before touching or beginning a procedure, allowing a familiar support person to attend and providing information in an accessible format.

The goal is not simply to gather information about the person. It is to create the conditions in which the person can be heard.

## Changes require careful investigation

The presentation also discussed conditions such as catatonia and Down Syndrome Regression Disorder (DSRD). DSRD is associated with a rapid and significant change from a young person's previous level of functioning, which may include changes in language, movement, sleep, cognition, behaviour or daily skills.

Regression is not something families are expected to diagnose themselves. A sudden or substantial loss of skills, marked slowing, major sleep changes or other significant changes should be documented and discussed promptly with a healthcare professional. Because many physical, neurological, environmental and psychiatric conditions can produce similar changes, a comprehensive assessment is essential.

Keeping a simple record can help families explain:

- what changed;
- when it began;
- how often it occurs;
- where it happens;
- what was happening beforehand;
- recent health, medication or life changes; and
- what helps the person feel safer or more regulated.

## Treatment should fit the person

Support may involve treating an underlying physical condition, adapting the environment, strengthening communication, providing counselling or modified psychological therapies, increasing meaningful social connection, or reviewing medication.

Dr. Thakur also highlighted the importance of careful medication review. Medication can be appropriate and beneficial when clinically indicated, but it should not replace a thorough investigation of pain, health, trauma, communication barriers or unmet support needs.

Approaches such as behavioural activation, accessible talking therapies, relaxation, deep breathing, guided imagery and visual coping plans can be adapted for people with intellectual disabilities. Families should work with qualified healthcare professionals to determine what is appropriate for the individual.

## Supporting brain health and well-being

Mental health support is not limited to responding when something has gone wrong. Protective opportunities can be built into everyday life through:

- regular health, hearing, vision and medication checks;
- physical activity suited to the person;
- nourishing food and healthy sleep routines;
- meaningful relationships and social connection;
- enjoyable activities and opportunities to contribute;
- accessible ways to express feelings and choices;
- predictable routines with preparation for change; and
- time for relaxation, sensory regulation and personal interests.

Family and caregiver well-being matters, too. Individuals, families and service providers are interconnected. Supporting the person also means recognizing caregiver stress, listening to family knowledge and building a collaborative circle of care.

## The key takeaway

Changes in behaviour should not be dismissed as "just Down syndrome," but they should not automatically be labelled as a psychiatric problem either.

Begin with curiosity. Look at the whole person. Check physical health. Consider the environment and the person's lived experiences. Make communication accessible. Seek a careful assessment when changes are significant or persistent.

Most importantly, listen to the person and involve them in decisions about their own care. Mental health care should be person-centred, trauma-informed and grounded in dignity, safety and belonging.

## Accessible books and visual resources

Dr. Thakur highlighted Books Beyond Words, a series of word-free picture stories created with people who have lived experience of intellectual disabilities. Rather than requiring the reader to follow written text, the illustrations allow the person to describe what they see, connect the story to their own experiences and communicate in their preferred way.

These books can support conversations with family members, educators, counsellors and healthcare professionals.

The reader should be given time to lead the story. A supporter can observe, listen and offer only as much prompting as the person needs, rather than deciding what the pictures mean for them.

Titles featured in the presentation included:

- **Sonia's Feeling Sad** - A visual story about low mood, worries, seeking help and receiving counselling.
- **Ron's Feeling Blue** - A picture-based story that can help people explore depression, withdrawal and support.
- **When Mum Died** - A gentle, direct visual resource for talking about the death of a parent and grief.
- **When Dad Died** - A companion visual resource about the death of a parent, designed for adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities and their supporters.
- **Explore all Books Beyond Words titles and themed book sets**

Some stories address grief, trauma or other sensitive experiences. Families and professionals should preview a resource first, introduce it when the person feels safe, and follow the person's pace and communication.

## Helpful resources

- Surrey Place: H.E.L.P. with Emotional and Behavioural Concerns
- Surrey Place: Comprehensive Health Check for Adults with IDD
- Surrey Place: Trauma-Informed Health Care
- CAMH: Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities - Treatment
- National Down Syndrome Society: Regression and Down Syndrome

This article summarizes educational information presented at the Spring Mini-Conference. It is not a substitute for individualized medical or mental health advice. Families concerned about a significant change in their loved one should consult an appropriate healthcare professional.






# WWDSS Summer School Camp 2026

**by Tara Hart**

From August 10-14 this year we had the most epic camp week ever! Memories were made and friendships grew. The days were filled with smiles and laughter from 28 campers and 15 staff as we danced, played, relaxed and learned together.

At our summer school camp we take great care to plan a curriculum that is not just fun and engaging, but is also focused on learning and practicing school skills. All three classes are planned by teachers, and staffed with as many EAs as needed to fully support all campers. As a result we are able to meet each camper where they are, and help them have the best time and work hard, too!

Special thanks to Creekside Church who were the most generous hosts ever (and especially Carolyn Burge, Tom Scott and Gabrielle Scott). We are so grateful that they support our organization so enthusiastically each year. And camp wouldn't be the same without our annual visit from the WRPS. We got to sit in the cruisers, blare the sirens, and a couple of persistent campers even got to try out the handcuffs! We learned so much about what Police officers do, and how they can help us when we need them.

Time seemed to go by so quickly this year–you know what they say; "time flies when you're having fun"! Some camp highlights were Yoga classes with Miss Emily, Boxing and circuit training with Courtney Hughes, and Music with Taryn. Water day is always a hit, and we ended our week together with a relaxing afternoon movie, complete with popcorn!

Our amazing staff are already planning for next year, and we really hope to see even more of our friends come out to summer school camp in 2027!

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BACK TO SCHOOL

# A Simple Guide to IEPs

## For families of students with Down syndrome

**An IEP is a plan to help your child learn, participate and experience success at school.**

### What is an IEP?

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a written plan that describes the supports, accommodations and learning goals your child may need at school. For many students with Down syndrome, it helps the school team understand how your child learns best and what supports will help them access learning and participate in school life.

- Strengths and needs
- Accommodations that help your child learn
- Modified or alternative learning expectations, when appropriate
- Teaching and assessment strategies
- Assistive technology or other supports
- Goals related to communication, independence, social development or other areas of learning

### Start With Strengths

Your child is more than a list of needs. An effective IEP should recognize what your child can do, what motivates them, how they communicate, their interests and the conditions that help them be successful.

**Ask yourself: What does my child enjoy? How do they communicate? What helps them understand something new? What helps them participate? What are they working toward this year?**

### Accommodations vs. Modifications

| ACCOMMODATIONS | MODIFICATIONS |
|---|---|
| Change how a student learns or demonstrates learning.<br><br>Examples: extra processing time, visual supports, reduced distractions, assistive technology, alternative ways to respond. | Change what a student is expected to learn compared with grade-level expectations.<br><br>**These decisions matter. Ask questions if you are unsure why something is being modified.** |

### Think Beyond Academics

**You Are Part of the Team**

Parents and caregivers bring an important perspective to IEP planning. You can share information, ask questions and suggest goals or strategies. Useful questions include:

- What are we hoping my child will learn this year?
- How will we know they are making progress?
- What supports will help them participate with their peers?
- How are their communication needs being supported throughout the day?
- Are there opportunities for greater independence?
- What can we reinforce at home?

### Read the IEP Carefully

When you receive your child's IEP, take time to read the strengths, needs, goals, accommodations and learning expectations.

**A simple check: "Does this sound like my child?"**

If something does not make sense, ask about it. If important information seems to be missing, share that with the school team. An IEP should be a useful, working document - not simply paperwork that gets completed and put away.

## What Can I Write for Parent/Caregiver Input?

You do not need educational jargon. Write plainly about your child's strengths, what works, your priorities and the opportunities you want them to have.

**STRENGTHS & INTERESTS**

"My child is social and enjoys being part of a group. They are motivated by music, movement and opportunities to help others."

**HOW MY CHILD LEARNS**

"My child learns best when instructions are clear, concrete and broken into smaller steps. Visual supports and demonstrations are helpful."

**PROCESSING TIME**

"Please allow additional processing time after asking a question. My child may know the answer but need more time to organize and communicate a response."

**COMMUNICATION**

"Please give my child time to respond and speak directly to them rather than having someone answer for them. Communication may include speech, gestures, signs, visuals or other supports."

**INCLUSION & BELONGING**

"We would like our child to participate with classmates as much as possible, with appropriate supports provided within those experiences."

**INDEPENDENCE**

"Please look for opportunities for our child to make choices, complete familiar tasks independently and take responsibility before adult assistance is provided."

**GOALS FOR THE YEAR**

"This year, we would particularly like to focus on communication, independence and developing meaningful relationships with peers."

**PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD**

"As our child gets older, we would like IEP goals to increasingly connect to self-advocacy, employment, community participation, transportation, decision-making and independence."

**At the end of this school year, what would I love to see my child doing that they aren't doing yet?**

## Turn Your Ideas Into Meaningful IEP Input

Sometimes it helps to turn a broad hope into a specific description of what you would like your child to have opportunities to do.

**GENERAL IDEA:** "I want my child to be more independent."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "I would like my child to have more opportunities to complete familiar tasks independently, make choices, navigate the school and ask for help when needed."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "I want my child to make friends."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "I would like my child to have meaningful opportunities to interact and build relationships with classmates during class, lunch, clubs, activities and other less-structured parts of the school day."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "I want better communication."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "I would like my child to have opportunities throughout the day to initiate communication, make choices, express opinions, ask for help and communicate with peers using the methods that work best for them."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "Reading is important."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "We would like literacy to remain an important goal, using topics and materials that are age-respectful and interesting to our child."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "I want my child included."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "We would like our child to participate alongside classmates as much as possible, with appropriate accommodations and supports that make participation meaningful."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "My child needs lots of help."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "My child benefits from clear instructions, visual supports, modelling, repetition and additional processing time. Please allow opportunities to attempt tasks independently before providing additional assistance."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "I want more life skills."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "We would like opportunities to practise meaningful skills that support greater independence at school, at home and in the community, while continuing access to academic learning and school experiences."

**GENERAL IDEA:** "I want my teenager ready for adulthood."

**MAKE IT SPECIFIC:** "We would like to connect learning goals to our child's future, including self-advocacy, communication, employment, community participation, relationships, transportation and increasing independence."

## What Could That Look Like?

**Independence:** getting belongings, following a schedule, ordering food, navigating the school, completing a familiar routine.

**Communication:** asking a question, saying no, making a choice, expressing an opinion, asking for help, starting a conversation.

**Belonging:** group work, clubs, lunch with peers, school activities, opportunities to build friendships.

## Growing With the IEP: Middle & High School

As students move into middle and high school, the IEP can grow with them. Alongside academics, families can think about independence, self-advocacy, relationships, participation in the school community and opportunities to discover interests.

Independence does not mean doing everything alone. It means having opportunities to make choices, develop skills, take appropriate responsibility, ask for support and participate more fully in school life.

### Independence Opportunities at School

- Follow a personal schedule and move between familiar areas of the school.
- Organize and manage belongings, materials and routines.
- Make choices about activities, courses, interests and how to complete familiar tasks.
- Use the library, cafeteria, gym, office and other shared school spaces.
- Order or purchase lunch and manage simple school transactions when appropriate.
- Communicate directly with teachers and staff to ask questions or request help.
- Use visual schedules, technology or other tools that support independence.
- Complete familiar routines with less adult prompting and practise problem-solving.

### Be Part of the School Community

Inclusion is not only about where a student receives instruction. Middle and high school offer many ways to develop interests, relationships, confidence and belonging. Ask what support would make these opportunities accessible.

- Clubs and interest groups
- Sports, physical activities and intramurals
- Music, drama, art and school productions
- Student leadership, committees and school spirit activities
- Assemblies, field trips, dances and celebrations
- Volunteer opportunities and helping with school events
- Library, office or other meaningful school responsibilities
- Extracurricular activities connected to the student's own interests

### Relationships & Belonging

Unstructured parts of the day matter too. Families can ask:

- Where does my child spend lunch and breaks?
- Who do they spend time with when activities are not adult-directed?
- Are there opportunities to connect with students who share their interests?
- Are they participating in clubs, teams and activities alongside other students?
- Is adult support helping create peer connections and independence?

### Build Self-Advocacy

Students can become increasingly involved in their own educational planning, using the communication methods that work best for them.

- Express likes, dislikes and preferences.
- Choose activities or identify goals that matter to them.
- Communicate when they need help or a break.
- Say when they do not understand.
- Ask questions and make decisions.
- Share what they are good at and what they want to learn.
- Contribute to, or attend parts of, their own IEP meeting when appropriate.

### Think Toward the Future - Without Rushing the Present

High school can help prepare students for adulthood, but it is also an important part of their life right now. Employment and life skills matter, and so do academics, friendships, recreation, interests, new experiences and belonging.

**Ask: "What experiences can my child have at school today that will help them build the life they want tomorrow?"**

### Parent/Caregiver Input Example

"As our child moves through middle/high school, we would like increasing independence, self-advocacy and participation in the school community to be priorities. We would like opportunities for them to make choices, navigate familiar school routines, communicate directly with teachers and peers, take on meaningful responsibilities and participate in extracurricular activities that reflect their interests. Please consider what supports will help them access these opportunities while encouraging increasing independence."

### A Question for the IEP Team

Instead of only asking, "What support does this student need?" also ask, "What opportunity could the right support make possible?"

| ELEMENTARY | MIDDLE SCHOOL | HIGH SCHOOL |
|---|---|---|
| Build the foundation | Expand opportunities | Build independence & voice |
| Communication | Changing classes | Student input |
| Learning routines | Clubs and activities | Community participation |
| Friendships | Peer relationships | Extracurriculars |
| Making choices | Self-advocacy | Life and employment skills |
| Trying new things | Responsibilities | Decision-making |
| Growing independence | Discovering interests | Planning for adulthood |



# Parents Evening Out with Broil King

**by Janice Duncan**

On Friday June 19, 2026 Spencer Wolf the culinary specialist from Broil King demonstrated his barbequing cooking skills to a group of parents. We enjoyed chicken skewers, brisket, grilled portobello mushrooms, coleslaw & salads.

The parents evening out started at 6:00pm with light conversation with the barbequing demonstration starting at 6:30pm. Spencer demonstrated how to clean your grill (grill maintenance), grilling cooking tips, seasoning your food and how to plate your food to give it the five star restaurant presentation.

As Spencer was demonstrating how to add your chicken and to add it to the skewers, the seasoning and the most important how to get that nice BBQ grill look on the chicken. While the chicken was cooking a demonstration on how to make the grilled portobello mushrooms (topped with feta cheese was my favourite) was demonstrated.

When the food was prepared everyone helped themselves to the family style buffet. Good food, good drink & good conversation was enjoyed by all.

A huge thank you to Spencer from Broil King for doing the demonstration and to Arisa & Steve for hosting the BBQ at their house in their backyard.

# Board of Directors for 2026-2027

The Annual General Meeting was held in-person on Saturday April 25 at The Catalyst, Kitchener.

**We would like to introduce the elected Board of Directors for 2026-2027**

Chair – Arisa Alexanian

Vice Chair – Merita Elmazi

Past Chair – Lisa Buurma

Secretary – Tracey Keupfer

Treasurer – Sylvia Cook

Director at Large – Jocelyne Bridle

Director at Large – Jenn Burechails

Director at Large – Janice Duncan

Director at Large – Tony Fraser

Director at Large – Tara Hart

Director ag Large – Pavneet Makkar

Director at Large – Lori Maloney

Director at Large – Kim Murphy

Director at Large – Lori Murray

Director at Large – Janine Oosterveld

Director at Large – Janine Rorke

Director at Large – Roberta Thompson



## Save the Date **Events**

**Any Which Way You Can A-Thon**
October 4

**Down Syndrome Association Ontario Conference**
October 16 & 17

**WWDSS Holiday Party**
November 28

## Save the Date **Programs**

**The Office**
September 8, 22
October 6, 20
November 3, 17
December 1, 15

**Speech & Music Group**
Waterloo: September – November 2026

Guelph: January 2027

# the Office WWDSS Social Group

**by Lori Maloney**

The Office is a fun group of adults from WWDSS who plan and participate in various activities together every second Tuesday evening.

Our meetings will start on September 8th. We will start with a zoom to plan our activities from September to December. This zoom will run from 7:00 until 8:30 p.m. The zoom link will be sent by email prior to the meeting.

The dates for our get together or zooms will be:

**September 8, 22**
**October 6, 20**
**November 3, 17**
**December 1, 15**

If you have any ideas of fun things to do, please let us know by emailing Emily Pike at emilyp91@hotmail.com

**Please join us!**

# Buddy Choir

**Buddy Choir is back for our 20th year!**

Rehearsals will start on Monday, September 14th at Our Studio 109 Ottawa St. S from 6:30 until 8:00 pm.

If you like to perform and participate in a fully inclusive community - please join us!

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

If you would like more information, please contact Lori Maloney lmyc50@gmail.com 519-501-6747.