



A close-up portrait of a man's face, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark green with white text fragments scattered across it.

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Photo by Hilary Gauld from One for the Wall Photography

Message from the Chair

As summer comes to an end, it's time to get back into our routines. I hope everyone had a relaxing and healthy summer.

For our members who are starting school for the first time or returning to school, please feel free to reach out to our **WWDSS SEAC** (Special Education Advisory Council) representatives if you have any questions or need additional support. We understand that a new school year, new teachers, new friends, and new routines can be both exciting and overwhelming.

The **Any Which Way You Can A-Thon** will be held on Sunday, September 28, at Waterloo Park. The AWWYCA-thon is our largest fundraiser of the year for WWDSS, and the money raised will continue to support programs, events, and bursaries for our members with Down syndrome.

Our annual **Summer Picnic** was, as always, a fun-filled day that our families enjoyed. Great food, swimming, and games were on the menu on a beautiful sunny day. Many thanks to the Buurma family for graciously hosting us again.

Our New Parent/Caregiver Connection program was a huge success last spring, and many families have requested its continuation. We are planning to restart the program soon. Stay tuned for the start dates, which we will provide once determined. As always, childcare will be provided for all the children you register for the program.

Our **Speech and Music Social Group** programs will start again in September in both Waterloo and Guelph. These programs not only have therapeutic impacts but also help build and strengthen social skills and bonds among friends.

Plans to restart our **Cooking Classes** are currently in the works, and we will share the details and start dates as soon as they are available.

We are fortunate to have such an active organization that provides a wide range of programs and services to our members. We are unique in that we are entirely a volunteer-run organization, and with that in mind, we are always looking to our membership to help in any way you can. Please take a look at the page in the newsletter that lists positions or tasks for which we are seeking volunteers. Find a friend to share the assignment and the responsibility. We will continue to grow as long as we have engaged volunteers. We are so thankful for all the volunteers who give their time and expertise to help guide our organization.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the Any Which Way You Can A-Thon in September.

Have a great Fall.

Arisa Alexanian
WWDSS Chair
519-729-7855

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 Bowling Party Merita Elmazi	New Parent's Connection Wendy Newbery
New Parent Contact – Kitchener-Waterloo & surrounding area Hanika Williams	Pizza Pals Tamara Perez - Younger Group	WWDSS World Down Syndrome Day Celebration Lisa Buurma	Moms' Night Out Janice Duncan
New Parent Contact – Cambridge Roopa Bose	WWDSS Calendar Kate Herron	WWDSS Family Picnic Lisa & Ross Buurma	Teen Hangouts TBD
New Parent Contact – Guelph/Wellington County Vanessa Richard	Adult Programming Bursary Wendy Eichler	WWDSS Social Media Vanessa Richard	The Office Meetups (18+) Lori Maloney Emily Pike Mary Pike
WWDSS Website Steve Nicholson	Therapy Bursaries Alison Senior	Volunteer Coordinator Julie Maxwell	Independence Skills Program Jocelyne Bridle
WWDSS Store TBD	Transition Bursary Marianne Domm	Any Which Way You Can A-Thon Janine Oosterveld	
WWDSS Cooking Classes TBD	Camp Bursary Sylvia Cook	WWDSS Christmas Party Mandi Butcher	

WWDSS Representatives

PAAC on SEAC
Marianne Domm

DSAO Representative
Mary Casagrande

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.

The Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held in-person on Saturday May 3rd at RIM Park, Waterloo. We would like to introduce the elected Board of Directors for 2025-2026.

Chair – Arisa Alexanian

Vice Chair – TBD

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 – Merita Elmazi

Director at Large – Tony Fraser

Director at Large – Tara Hart

Director at Large – Lori Maloney

Director at Large – Kim Murphy

Director at Large – Janine Oosterveld

Director at Large – Janine Rorke

Director at Large – Roberta Thompson

REMINDER

all bursary
applications are due
on November 1st

2026 Bursary Application Forms

All bursary applications for: adult programming, camp, passport preparation funding and therapy are due November 1st.

The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society Board of Directors invites those who have been members for a minimum of one full calendar year to apply for our adult programming, camp, passport preparation funding, and therapy bursary.

Families must log a minimum number of hours per bursary awarded as detailed on the application form.

Please find the letter and application form enclosed in this newsletter for detailed information about the program.

The bursary program will run from January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2026.

The deadline to apply for bursaries is November 1, 2025.

How to Apply:

There are two ways to apply to the camp, therapy, passport preparation funding and adult programming bursary program.

1) Online Application Form (preferred) –

Visit www.wwdss.ca > Programs > Therapy Bursaries

2) Paper Application Form (included in this newsletter)



WWDSS Summer School Camp 2025

By Tara Hart

Who knew Summer School camp could be so much fun? We did! Our second annual camp ran August 11-15, and it was a blast! We had 24 amazing campers ages 4-20 join us for a week of learning, growing and summer fun.

Last year the goal was to plan a program that had all the fun of summer camp, along with the opportunity to get back into a learning mindset for the return to school. A key focus was on fostering peer relationships and learning to work together to build skills and accomplish tasks. Parents filled out detailed registration forms which allowed camp teachers and EA staff to come up with activities and learning materials that would benefit each camper. After the end of camp last year we collected feedback from camper families and staff, and this year we made some adjustments and it was even more awesome.

Our days were full and everyone was tired by the afternoon. Some camper favourites were the indoor play structure, our Special Olympics basketball workshop, and cool science experiments! We finished off the week with a water day, and

the weather was perfect. Sandwiched in between all that fun the campers worked hard learning and practicing their school skills. We all had the best time.

Special thanks to Creekside Church who were the most generous hosts ever, (and especially Carolyn Burge, Tom Scott and Gabrielle Scott), and to Waterloo Regional Police for an awesome visit and cruiser tour!



We can't wait for next summer, and we hope to see you all at camp 2026!





11th Annual WWDSS Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament

by Mike Hellyer

The WWDSS held our 11th Annual Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament on Monday June 16th at Rebel Creek Golf Club in Petersburg. We had great weather all day which made for a great day on the Golf Course.

This year we had 2 on course sponsors. H.L. Staebler offered \$10,000 for the first hole in one on their par 3 hole, and the Rogers Radio Group (96.7 CHYM FM, City News 570 & Country 106.7). We appreciate all our on-course sponsors 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. The live auction was fun with lots of bidding on some great donated prizes. 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 well as introducing a new song that a few people at the tournament may not have heard before.

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 12th 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:





EVENT SPONSORS

H.L. Staebler Insurance – Hole in One Sponsor
Pepsico
Rogers Kitchener Radio Group - 96.7
CHYM FM, CityNews 570, Country 106.7

EAGLE HOLE SPONSORS

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Gosen Electric
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RBC Dominion Securities—Rick Smerchinski
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BIRDIE HOLE SPONSORS

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Tacoma Engineering
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HOLE SPONSORS

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Korner Kitchen
Lakewood Wealth Partners
McLennan Speech & Language Services
Royal LePage Crown Realty—Gary Quinton
TD Bank—Asset Management
TD Wealth—Jason Murray
Techtown Dentistry
Woodhouse Group

Auction Donors (Silent and Live)

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Classy Lane Stables
Cook Homes
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Guelph Lakes Golf and Country Club
Herrle's Country Farm Market
Jack's Family Restaurant
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Molson Coors Beverage Company
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Natalie Stevanus
One For The Wall
Our Studio
Piatto Pizzeria + Enoteca Guelph
Pizza Pizza
POWER BUS WAY LTD.
Prysmian Group
Real Pickleball Guelph
Rebel Creek Golf Club
Rexall Pharmacy Group Ltd
Robert Christie Law
Robert Semple
Splashy Designs
Springfield Golf and Country Club
Stratford Municipal Golf Course
Suntory Global Spirits
The Alexanian / Nicholson Family
The Dunnington Family
The Howlett Family
Valet Car Wash
Waterloo Regional Police Service
Young Financial Group



LEG Up! Relationships and Sexuality

March 20 to April 24, 2025

by Jocelyne Bridle

Another informative and practical session was enjoyed by 8 members this spring! Featured topics included the qualities of a good friend and how to be one, different kinds of relationships in our society and how we as individuals relate to the different kinds of people in our own lives, from our family to strangers. The learners were also taught about anatomy, how their body changes through puberty and the importance of public and private discussions, activities and spaces. They further learned how to care properly for their bodies, which was followed by a lesson on sex, including what it is, how babies are made and how to be safe with sex. In relation to that, the final class covered consent and various types of boundaries for oneself and others, such as physical,

sexual, emotional, financial and intellectual, to name a few. As always, the lessons were complemented with at home learning to reinforce the concepts. The at home materials consist of discussion suggestions and activities that are easily incorporated into daily living. The LEG Up! program is an excellent resource for our members to learn more about topics relevant to their lives in an open, relational class that is catered to each member's learning style. LEG Up! is also uniquely effective in that they provide families with practical strategies to extend their child's learning beyond the class so that their newly gained knowledge and skills can be applied to their every day lives. We hope to continue this prized partnership!



FRESH CO
Lowering food prices

Thank you
to FreshCo for
their generous
donation

WWDSS Annual Summer Picnic

by Lisa Buurma

The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society hosted its annual Summer Picnic on Sunday, June 29, following a rescheduled date due to extreme heat the previous weekend. The event was held at the Buurma farm in Puslinch and was well attended, with many members gathering to enjoy an afternoon of community and connection.

Children delighted in ice cream treats and the bouncy castle, while parents valued the opportunity to socialize and build new friendships.

WWDSS extends its sincere appreciation to **FreshCo** for generously sponsoring the hamburgers, and to **Abdi, Suaad, and their family** for their time and efforts in preparing the barbecue for all attendees.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The success of WWDSS depends on the dedication of our family members and friends who generously volunteer their time to coordinate programs, deliver services, and represent us on committees. As an active organization, we offer many programs that directly support people with Down syndrome and their families.

We're currently seeking a few new volunteers. If you're interested but short on time, consider sharing a role with a friend—we can also help match you with a partner. Training and ongoing support will be provided to help you succeed.

If you'd like to learn more or have questions, please contact us at info@wwdss.ca

Volunteer Opportunity	Key responsibilities	Time commitment
SEAC Rep — Primary (Upper Grand DSB, Guelph)	Role: Represent parents/children with exceptionalities and act as liaison between WWDSS and the Board. Duties: • Collect and share perspectives from parents and local families. • Advise on special education program development and delivery. • Participate in the Board's annual Special Education Report review. • Contribute to the Board's annual budget and financial statement review as they relate to special education. • Provide information and support to parents on request. Meetings: Monthly (typically 2nd Wednesday, 7:00 pm) — public meetings at the UGDSB office in Guelph.	3–4 hours / month
SEAC Rep — Alternate (Upper Grand DSB, Guelph)	Same responsibilities as Primary Rep; act as backup and support the primary representative, attend meetings when the primary rep cannot, and assist with liaison duties and information-sharing.	1–3 hours / month
SEAC Rep — Alternate (Wellington Catholic SB, Guelph)	Same responsibilities as Primary Rep; act as backup and support the primary representative, attend meetings when the primary rep cannot, and assist with liaison duties and information-sharing.	1–3 hours / month

WWDSS Store Coordinator	Role: Manage WWDSS merchandise, inventory and order fulfillment. Duties: • Oversee ordering, storage, stock levels and quality control; recommend pricing (goal: breakeven / accessible pricing). • Maintain and post online inventory with photos and sizing. • Coordinate shipping (Canada Post) and local pickup locations (Guelph, Cambridge, Waterloo, Kitchener). • Support set-up and sales at events (e.g., World Down Syndrome Day, AWWYCA, calendar release) or arrange volunteer coverage when unavailable. • Conduct an annual sales review before new stock purchases to avoid over-supply. • Respond to store inquiries and coordinate volunteers for pick-up/events.	Avg: 1 hour / month — increases to ≈10 hours during peak months (September and November/ calendar release)
Teen Hangout Group Coordinator	Role: Plan and run monthly teen hangouts; manage volunteers and communications. Duties: • Solicit agenda items and provide a monthly update to the Board. • Choose monthly activity based on participant feedback; book venue and support workers. • Coordinate and confirm volunteers (including Holly McIntyre and Katie Boer) and book additional workers as needed. • Prepare website content, registration details and reminder emails (send reminder to info@wwdss.ca the Sunday before). • Check in with volunteers the Thursday prior. • After each hangout, approve workers' hours and forward to Treasurer for payment.	2–6 hours / month
CDSS Representative	Role: Represent WWDSS at the national level. Duties: • Share WWDSS views and priorities with the national Down syndrome community. • Attend monthly online meetings with other provincial/territorial reps; report back to the Board.	2–3 hours / month
DSAO Representative	Role: Represent WWDSS at the Provincial level Duties: • Share WWDSS views and priorities with the provincial Down syndrome community • Attend monthly online meetings with other city/territorial reps; report back to the Board.	2-3 hours / month
Community Representative	Role: Represent WWDSS at local collaborative meetings. Duties: • Attend virtual or in-person meetings in Waterloo Region and Guelph/ Wellington County. • Share WWDSS's story, advocate for members and build partnerships with parent-support organizations. • Identify potential collaborative opportunities and report back to the Board.	2–3 hours / month

WRDSB SEAC Meeting Recap – June 2025

by Roberta Thompson

At the June SEAC meeting, WRDSB staff shared a presentation on literacy and the changes being implemented through the **Right to Read Program**. This includes the development of a revised **Language Curriculum (Grades 1-8)**, a revised Grade 9 English Curriculum, and a revised **Kindergarten Curriculum**. All updated curricula will be designed to be relevant and inclusive of the diverse cultures and backgrounds of students.

Staff also explained the **three tiers of literacy support**:

- **Tier 1** – Universal design and differentiated instruction for all students (intended to meet the needs of approximately 90% of the class).
- **Tier 2** – Targeted, small-group instruction.
- **Tier 3** – Intensive interventions to close specific gaps in student understanding.

A **universal screening tool** is now mandatory, with no students exempt. This follows SEAC's questions from previous meetings. Encouragingly, staff reported both unexpected successes and challenges with the tool. Where students could not interact with it in the prescribed way, educators adapted — for example, if a student was unable to write or select an answer, a teacher might prompt by asking, "Point to something that begins with the 'r' sound" so the student could demonstrate their knowledge through gestures or other responses.

To support this work, **Early Reading Resource Teachers (ERRTs)** have been deployed to schools that request them. In the first three rounds, ERRTs collaborated with teachers to plan, assess, and deliver instruction, while also supporting teachers to provide Tier 2 interventions. In the fourth round, ERRTs themselves worked directly with Tier 2 students. In

addition, reading support teachers are now available at every grade level, and educational technology is being integrated to strengthen literacy instruction.

One gap that remains is in supporting students who do not yet have basic literacy skills, including students with exceptionalities and English language learners. Staff highlighted the importance of collaboration between ERRTs and **Speech-Language Pathologists** to help address these needs.

The **budget update** confirmed that current special education staffing levels will be maintained, with the possibility of increases in some areas.

Finally, members heard about an upcoming **student mental health conference (held in June)**. Encouragingly, awareness of mental health supports in the WRDSB is currently **above provincial standards**.

The next SEAC meeting will take place **virtually in September 2025**.

Families have two important resources when it comes to navigating **special education with WRDSB**.

1. The **WRDSB SEAC** website is a valuable tool for all families to familiarize themselves with. It provides information about SEAC, meeting dates, and resources to support your child's learning journey. You can explore it here: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/learning/programs/special-education/seac/>.
2. The **WWDSS SEAC Representatives** are also available to speak with you directly. They can listen, answer questions, and support you. To get in touch, please email info@wwdss.ca

Support Worker – Assisting People with Down Syndrome (all ages)

- Encourage social, educational and recreational activities
- Provide companionship
- Accompanying clients to programs, appointments and outings

Mary Anne Gordon – 226-749-3223



Any which way
you can A-thon
Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

Join us September 28th
for our annual
fundraising walk and
wheel that we like to call
the **Any Which Way
You Can A-Thon!** It is a
fun day of friends, family,
food and fun. Everyone
is welcome!

See the
event insert
for more
information.





Spring 2025 Mini Conference Highlights

Introduction - Self Advocate: Katie Millman

Katie began the day with her extraordinary life so far! Katie leads a vibrant and active life filled with learning, creativity, and community involvement. From volunteering at the Cambridge Library and Chartwell Queen's Square Retirement Residence, to participating in programs like Carousel Theatre, Our Studio, and Adults in Motion, Katie brings her enthusiasm and kindness to every space she enters. She also enjoys dance, music, and sports — with highlights including Special Olympics swimming, Fierce N Fit boxing, and her long-standing passion for Carousel Dance.

Katie's schedule is as dynamic as she is, and it reflects her love of connection, fun, and growth. She thrives in programs that encourage creativity and friendship, from theatre and dance to her beloved karaoke nights. She is also a valued participant in summer camps, where she continues to explore new opportunities and build lifelong friendships. As AGM Ambassador, Katie reminds us of the joy, talent, and dedication within our community, and we are proud to celebrate her as a shining example of what it means to live a full and meaningful life.

Understanding Behavior through an ABA Lens

by Lisa Buurma

Nicole Neil, PhD, BCBA-D, RBA (Ont.)

Associate Dean (Research in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario)

Board Certified Behavior Analyst and coordinator of the MPED in Applied Behavior Analysis.

Research focuses on maximizing outcomes in behavioral interventions for learners with developmental disabilities.

Involved in projects investigating intervention for communication among children with Down syndrome, and improving relationships between children with autism and their siblings.

When we think about behavior—our own, our child's, or even our partner's—it helps to have a framework to reflect on what's happening and why. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) provides one of the most widely used models for understanding behavior and shaping change.

This framework is often used in schools, though not every teacher or support staff will use the exact language. Learning some of these terms will help families have more productive conversations with educators and professionals.

The ABCs of Behavior

ABA uses a simple but powerful model called **Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC)**:

A - Antecedent

What happens before the behavior?

This includes the environment, time of day, people involved, words spoken, and the situation leading up to the behavior.

B - Behavior

What is the behavior itself?

Behavior is anything observable and measurable (e.g., dancing, saying "no," looking around, flopping on the ground). It's important to describe *what the person does*—not who they are. For example, instead of saying "they're stubborn," describe the action: "they said no when asked to put on their shoes." Avoiding generalized labels helps us focus on what can change.

C - Consequence

What happens after the behavior?

Consequences are the responses or feedback the world gives to our behavior. They shape whether a behavior happens again. For instance, if a child yells in class and the teacher gets them in trouble, that attention—though negative—can still reinforce the behavior if it increases in frequency.

Why Behavior Happens

All behavior serves a purpose for the individual. It helps them:

- Get something they want (attention, items, activities)
- Avoid or escape something they don't want (demands, noise, discomfort)
- Communicate a need when words are hard to find

ABA focuses not on "fixing" the person but on understanding the environment around them and how it influences behavior.

Reinforcement

Positive Reinforcement

Something is added after a behavior that increases the chance it will happen again. (Example: a hug, a smile, or even getting in trouble —if it makes the behavior repeat, it's reinforcement.)

Negative Reinforcement

Something unpleasant is taken away after a behavior, and the behavior strengthens. (Example: a child complains about homework, and the task is removed. The relief makes them more likely to complain again.)

How Do We Change Behavior?

If behavior is serving an important purpose, we don't just want to take it away. Instead, we:

1. **Identify its function** – Why is the behavior happening?
2. **Teach an alternative** – A new behavior that gets the same need met but in a more acceptable, easier, or socially valuable way.
 - Instead of yelling out in class → raising a hand for help
 - Instead of hitting a sibling → asking for a turn with the toy



3. **Start with prevention** – Adjust the environment before the behavior starts. For example, if a child seeks attention, we can provide them with a “job” or responsibility that gives them positive attention before problem behavior occurs.

When teaching Replacement Behavior:

- Don't assume student already has a Replacement Behavior in their skill set
- Develop an observable definition of behavior
- Model/Lead/Test
- Schedule review & practice of skill/behavior regularly

Goodness of Fit: Shaping the Environment to Support Your Child

Sometimes, challenging behaviors happen when there's a mismatch between a child's needs and what's being asked of them. This is called a 'goodness of fit' issue. We can improve the fit by adjusting how we teach, communicate, and support:

- Slow down and simplify instructions
- Match the activity to their interests and strengths
- Use tools like visuals or breaks
- Stay flexible and curious
- It's not about changing the child – it's about changing the approach

When to Seek Formal Assessment

If a behavior is very severe or difficult to manage, a Registered Behavior Analyst can complete a formal Functional Behavior Assessment. This process may include rating scales, interviews, and direct observations to identify triggers and functions of behavior.

Key Takeaway

Behavior is never random—it's communication. By looking at the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences, we can better understand why behavior occurs and teach more positive ways to meet the same needs.

- Behavior is observable and measurable
- Behavior is functional
- Changing the context changes behavior

Common Traits in Down syndrome & Support Strategies

High social motivation

What You Might See: Seeks interaction, enjoys attention, may repeat behaviors that get a reaction

Support Strategy: Use positive attention as a reward! Play, praise, and eye contact go a long way

Stronger visual learning

What You Might See: Understands pictures or modeling better than spoken instructions

Support Strategy: Use visual schedules, first-then boards, and model what you want them to do

Communication differences

What You Might See: May struggle to express needs or be understood; may use gestures or behaviors to communicate

Support Strategy: Use simple language, visuals, AAC, and give choices; teach functional communication

Slower processing speed

What You Might See: May need more time to respond or transition between tasks

Support Strategy: Offer wait time, use countdowns or timers, keep directions short and clear

Persistence or rigidity

What You Might See: May get 'stuck' on routines or repeat actions

Support Strategy: Prepare for changes with visuals, offer routines, and build in flexibility slowly



Part 2: Employment Skills & Services Workshop

Employment Skills & Services Workshop

by Roberta Thompson

The **Employment Skills & Services Workshop**, held during our 2025 Spring Mini-Conference, marked the next step in the WWDSS **Future Planning journey**.

This process began at the **Future Planning Sessions in 2022/2023**, where families identified the need to strengthen adult supports for individuals with Down syndrome. From that came the WWDSS Future Planning Directive — a commitment to turning family priorities into action.

In 2024, we hosted the **Life After High School Workshop**, bringing together parents and self-advocates for a focused brainstorming session. That conversation helped narrow our scope of action and identified employment as a key area of need.

The 2025 Employment Skills & Services Workshop built on that groundwork by inviting local service partners to share their programs and meet directly with families. Presentations were given by:

- **Community Living – Student Links** – mentorship opportunities for youth exploring future pathways.
- **Developmental Services Ontario (DSO)** – the access point for adult developmental services.
- **KW Habilitation – Career Compass** – employment planning, coaching, job development, and on-the-job supports.
- **Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region – WALES Group** – peer-led programs to build skills, friendships, and community connections.

Following brief presentations, families and self-advocates connected one-on-one with agencies during a breakout

session, asking questions and exploring opportunities. For many, the chance to meet directly with service providers helped provide clarity, answers, and inspiration for the next steps in their journey.

This ongoing work reflects the power of listening to families, setting priorities together, and moving forward step by step. Thank you to all the families who have participated every step of the way — your voices and dedication continue to shape the future of WWDSS initiatives.

Resources from the Employment Skills & Services Workshop

- Community Living – Student Links Connects students ages 14–21 with mentors who share their interests.
 - Student Links Program Info
- Developmental Services Ontario (DSO)

First point of contact for accessing adult developmental services in Ontario.

- info@dsontario.ca
- www.dsontario.ca

KW Habilitation – Career Compass

Employment planning, job coaching, training, and development for individuals with developmental disabilities.

- info@kwcareercompass.org
- 519-744-6307 ext. 1252

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.

Connect with our local coordinator, Eric Humphreys, at ehumphreys@communitylivingontario.ca 548 405-5000

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

Attention **Kitchener & Guelph** Families

Student Links Mentoring Initiative...

- Currently recruiting youth (14-21) who have an intellectual disability.
- Exploring ideas and roles for life after high school.
- Welcoming French and English students and families to contact our local coordinator.



Upper Grand District School Board SEAC

by Amber Barens

As we come into a new school year, regrettably, I am no longer able to continue serving as a member of SEAC as I have been hired by UGDSB for the upcoming academic year.

I am very excited about this new chapter and where it will take me in the future.

Sitting on SEAC has been an incredible experience. I have gained a great deal of knowledge and met many wonderful people. We are very hopeful that we will find another member who is enthusiastic about filling this important role.

Here is some information from the Upper Grand District School Board's website about SEAC:

What is expected of SEAC Members?

- To represent and express the perspective and concerns of parents and children with exceptionalities.
- To provide information to and from their represented associations and local families with exceptional children.

What does SEAC do?

- Makes recommendations for the establishment, development and delivery of Special Education programs and services for exceptional pupils in our Board.
- Participates in the Board's annual review of its Special Education Report.
- Participates in the Board's annual budget process and financial statement review as they relate to Special Education.
- Provides information to parents, as requested.

When are SEAC Meetings held?

- Meetings are open to the public. Monthly meetings are typically held on the second Wednesday of each month throughout the school year. Meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Upper Grand District School Board office in Guelph.



**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 and Guelph. 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 insert included with this newsletter.



Save the Date Events

Any Which Way You Can A-Thon

September 28

Save the Date Programs

The Office

September 9, 23

October 7, 21

November 4, 18

December 2, 16

Speech & Social Groups

Waterloo: September – November 2025

Guelph: September – November 2025



by Lori Maloney

We are looking forward to another fun year at The Office. The Office is our social group of adults who have Down syndrome. We started getting together in 2020 on zoom during the pandemic and then moved to some in person gatherings. A lot of our members would like to meet more often in person so for this year we will be planning more opportunities to meet in person.

Last year we went to the movies, created gifts, met at the mall, had Christmas and Valentines Day Parties.

This year we will meet on zoom on September 9th to plan our year together. The following are the dates we will be meeting:

September 9	October 7	November 4	December 2
September 23	October 21	November 18	December 16

Please join us on September 9th and bring your ideas of what you would like to do together. If you can't make the meeting, please e-mail me at lm50@gmail.com and I will share your ideas on the 9th. The only requirement to join in the fun is that you are a WWDSS member with Down syndrome. We look forward to seeing you there!!!

Buddy Choir is up and running for our 18th year!



Buddy Choir will be starting our 18th year together! Buddy Choir is for ANYBODY who wants to perform. We meet Mondays from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm starting on September 8 at Our Studio at 109 Ottawa St. S Kitchener. We perform throughout Waterloo Region and sometimes at other places - basically wherever we are asked to. In April, we won the Spirit of the Festival Award at the Kiwanis Music Festival in Stratford. Please join us - we have a lot of fun singing together and building community. For more information email Lori at lm50@gmail.com.

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

For more info call Lori Maloney at 519-501-6747 or email her at lm50@gmail.com.