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Greg
Photo by Hilary Gauld from
One for the Wall Photography

Message from the Chair

As we move further into 2026, it's been wonderful to see our WWDSS community already so active and engaged in the first few months of the year.

Since January, families have connected through events like our Moms & Dads Night Out at Escapology and our annual Bowling Party — both of which were fantastic opportunities to socialize, reconnect, and strengthen the relationships that make our community so special. Our adult social program, The Office (18+), has also been busy planning a full calendar of gatherings through June, including bowling, holiday celebrations, and creative workshops that continue to support friendship, independence, and community participation.

Looking ahead, March is always an exciting and meaningful time for WWDSS as we celebrate World Down Syndrome Day on March 21st. This year, we are thrilled to partner with the KW Titans as they host an Inclusion Game on March 8 in recognition of WDSO — helping to raise awareness and celebrate the contributions of individuals with Down syndrome in our community. Families, friends, and community supporters are also invited to join us for our annual WDSO Celebration on March 21st at the Alpine Club, as we come together to celebrate inclusion and the many accomplishments of our members.

We are also continuing our WDSO advocacy efforts within local schools by encouraging classrooms to participate in Rock Your Socks Day. Classes are invited to share how they are celebrating and learning about Down syndrome in their school communities, with participating classrooms entered to win a pizza party courtesy of WWDSS.

We're also excited to once again see the return of the AJ & Zeus custom lemongrass pale ale in partnership with TWB Brewing. Available in time for WDSO celebrations, proceeds from this special brew directly support WWDSS programs and services.

Registration for our Summer School Camp is already open and spots are filling quickly. This incredible program supports campers aged 4–21 in developing social, literacy, fitness, and life skills in a fun and supportive environment — all while building friendships that last well beyond the summer. Be sure to register soon to avoid missing out.

As always, none of this would be possible without the ongoing support of our volunteers. WWDSS is truly a volunteer-driven organization, and it is the willingness of our members to give their time — whether it's helping plan an event, supporting a program, joining a committee, or volunteering in a small behind-the-scenes role — that allows us to continue offering meaningful opportunities to our community.

Volunteering doesn't have to be a large commitment to make a big impact. Even a few hours throughout the year can help strengthen our programs and ensure that we remain a welcoming, supportive, and connected community for all families. If you've ever considered getting involved, we encourage you to reach out — there are many ways to contribute, however small it may seem.

Together, we continue to build a stronger WWDSS community for our members today and into the future.

Warm regards,
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 Jenn Burechails	WWDSS Calendar Kate Herron	WWDSS Social Media Vanessa Richard	Independence Skills Program Jocelyne Bridle Sylvia Cook
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 Julian Gordon	Camp Bursary Sylvia Cook	New Parent’s Connection TBD	
	WWDSS Bowling Party Merita Elmazi	Moms’ Night Out Janice Duncan	

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 - 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.



**Waterloo Wellington
Down Syndrome Society**

join us...

for a casual get together
to celebrate the **UP** side
of **DOWN** syndrome!

Tickets now
available at
www.wwdss.ca

Wear your **SILLY MISMATCHED SOCKS**
and join in for some dinner, dancing, fun and fellowship.

- Event** WWDSS' World Down Syndrome Day Celebration
- Date** Saturday March 21st
- Time** 5:30 PM - 8:30 PM
- Place** Alpine Club - 464 Maple Avenue, Kitchener

Cost	WWDSS Member	Non Member
Individual with DS	\$0.00	\$0.00
Adult (over 18)	\$10.00	\$20.00
Child (Age 0-18)	\$5.00	\$10.00



Moms & Dads Night Out – Escapology

by Janice Duncan

Our first event of the year with the Moms & Dads Night out happened on Saturday, January 31, 2026, at Escapology in Waterloo. It was a huge success, with a total of 15 Moms & Dads waiting to solve a mystery. We divided up into 3 groups, and each group went into a different escape room.

The escapes rooms were: Agatha Christie's Murder on The Orient Express, Batman & Mansion Murder.

All three groups were not successful in escaping out however we had the best time trying. I guess we need more practice.

At the end of our adventure a pizza/wings snack was provided along with laughter & conversation.

More adventures await the Moms & Dads Night Out!!!

UP Celebrating the **UP** side
of **DOWN** syndrome
SIDE DOWN
• CHARITY •
GOLF TOURNAMENT

12th Annual Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament

Monday June 15, 2026 - 12:00 PM Shotgun
Ariss Valley Golf and Country Club - Ariss, ON

More information
in the insert



by Lori Maloney

The Office met by Zoom in early January to plan our gatherings until June.

Here is our outline:

March 17	St. Patrick's Day Party - Becky and Emily will lead Irish Dancing
March 21	World Down Syndrome Day Party (Register with WWDSS)
March 31	Easter Egg Hunt at Waterloo Park
April 14	Zoom
April 28	Make Mother's Day and Father's Day gifts
May 12	Zoom
May 26	The Office BBQ
June 9	Watch performance of our Carousel friends
June 22	Watch performance of Our Studio friends

If you are an adult or teen with Down syndrome, please join us!



Infant Speech & Language Group

Because communication starts before words

Join our supportive, play-based parent and baby group designed to help you nurture your baby's communication skills from the very beginning.

What We'll Focus On

- Understanding your baby's cues
- Encouraging early sounds, babbling, and gestures
- Building back-and-forth conversations
- Using play, books, and routines to grow language
- Supporting feeding and daily routines safely
- Knowing when and how to seek extra support
- Using sign language to support communication

Group Details

Ages	0-18 months
Format	Parent-baby interactive group
Length	8 weeks, each session being 60 minutes
Date & Time	Wednesday March 11th @ 10:30am
Cost	\$400 for the 8 week program
Location	McLennan Speech & Language Services, Waterloo
Led by	Annie Oxby M.S. Ed SLP Reg. CASLPO

Babies are welcome to feed, nap, move, and be themselves. Spots are limited to keep the group supportive and interactive. Please reach out with any questions and to register.

Register Today

Email: info@mclennanspeech.com

Check with your private insurance to see if you have speech and language therapy coverage

Waterloo Region District School Board Literacy & Service Updates

by Roberta Thompson, WRDSB SEAC Chair

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Report

At the recent Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meeting, Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) staff provided updates related to literacy supports and service delivery for students with special education needs.

Reading Support Initiatives

Staff shared an overview of ongoing reading support initiatives across the Board. Funding received for the 2024–2025 school year has allowed for continued professional learning and collaboration to strengthen literacy instruction for students with diverse learning profiles.

Professional development has focused on:

- Increasing educator understanding of students with complex learning and communication needs
- Building comfort with Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) tools
- Strengthening the use of inclusive literacy frameworks
- Supporting collaboration between resource and classroom educators

These efforts aim to build staff confidence, increase consistency in instructional approaches, and support meaningful literacy development for students across a range of abilities.

Literacy Supports for ACE Students

Professional development sessions were also provided specifically to support literacy instruction for ACE (Accessing the Curriculum through an Alternative/Adapted Education) students.

The October session focused on key areas of emergent literacy:

- Shared reading
- Shared writing
- Independent writing

Educators explored how these strategies could be implemented immediately in classroom settings, and practical resources were shared.

The January follow-up session included:

- Reflection on strategies that were effective and areas needing adjustment

- Discussion of additional emergent literacy components, including alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness (understanding and working with the spoken parts of language)
- Adaptations to worksheets and classroom materials to increase accessibility

These sessions emphasized practical, classroom-ready strategies to support literacy growth for ACE students.

SEAC Representation – Call for Community Organizations

Do you know someone in the community who is involved in an organization that should have a voice at the SEAC table?

Under Ontario's Education Act and Ministry of Education Regulation 464/97, every school board is required to have a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) that includes representation from local associations supporting students with exceptionalities.

WRDSB SEAC is currently seeking broader representation from community organizations.

To be appointed, an organization must:

- Be a local not-for-profit association that supports children or youth with special education needs
- Submit a request for an appointment to the Board
- Designate a representative and alternate to attend monthly meetings

SEAC members advise the Board on special education programs and services, review the annual Special Education Plan, and bring forward community perspectives to support equitable and inclusive practices.

Organizations interested in learning more are encouraged to contact WRDSB or the SEAC Chair for additional information.

The next SEAC meeting will take place virtually on Wednesday, March 11, 2026.



AJ & Zeus Lemongrass Pale Ale Returns for 2026!

by Alex Szaflarska

We're thrilled to announce that, in celebration of World Down Syndrome Day, TWB is excited to be able to partner with WWDSS once again! We are bringing back the extra special lemongrass pale ale named after Anthony Tamming (AJ) and his beloved pup, Zeus. Anthony, a dedicated team member at TWB, helped us design the beer and helps brew it every year - proceeds from sales of the ale support WWDSS. The delicious mix of bright lemongrass flavours mixed with a hoppy bitterness make for the perfect beer for springtime!

Mark your calendars for the AJ & Zeus Launch on Saturday, March 7 from 12:00 - 3:00 PM! Join us for a fun afternoon, grab a pint (or a few!), and show your support for the Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society. Bring a friend and make sure you have a beer to cheers when you celebrate on March 21st!

Starting March 3rd, you can purchase the beer at TWB (300 Mill Street in Kitchener) or online at TWBbrewing.com. Every sip supports a great cause, so come out, enjoy the beer, and help make a difference!



Notice of Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of WWDSS will be held in person at a location to be determined on **Saturday, April 25, 2026** at 1:30 PM.

We request WWDSS members attend this meeting. Members must register for this event by April 18, 2026 by emailing info@wwdss.ca. They will be provided with materials for the meeting by email.

The Chair will present a report, followed by a Treasurer's report. The membership will then vote on the renewal of current board members and the election of new board members.

Reminder: In order to vote at a general meeting of members, you must have a current 2026 WWDSS membership. One vote can be put forward at the meeting per paid membership (membership is available to individuals, families or organizations).

WWDSS Summer School Camp

**REGISTRATION
NOW OPEN**

Date: August 10-14, 2026

Location: Creekside Church, Waterloo

Ages: 4-21

Camp groups:

JK – Grade 2

Grade 3 – Grade 6

Grade 7 – Grade 9

Grade 10+ (up to age 21)

Come join us at a fun-filled summer school camp designed especially for our members with Down syndrome.

This program will focus on enhancing campers' capabilities in several areas:

**Art | Music | Social Skills | Fostering Friendships
Games | Fitness | Literacy | Numeracy | Printing**

TIME 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM each day

WHERE Creekside Church Waterloo Campus,
660 Conservation Drive, Waterloo

COST \$375



Registration is on a first come, first served basis.

There are 10 spots in each age group. Once spaces are filled, a wait list will be created.

Please register your child at the grade level they are currently in.

Upon registration you will be sent an info package and detailed camper information form, which you will fill out and return.

Campers will bring their own lunch, snacks and refillable water bottle.

Support will be provided for each camper based on their specific needs.



WWDSS Bowling Party

On Sunday February 22, many WWDSS families came out to enjoy an afternoon of bowling at Victoria Bowl in Kitchener. This yearly event is always fun for everyone. Members enjoyed pizza, drinks and catching up with one another. Thank you to Merita for organizing a fun afternoon.



Come to the

ANNUAL PWWWSS PICNIC

Date: Saturday, June 20, 2026
Rain date will be provided if needed

Time: 3:00pm - 7:00pm

Location: Ross and Lisa Buurma's Farm in Puslinch

**Hamburgers, hot dogs and drinks will be provided.
Members are asked to bring a salad or dessert.**

Please bring lawn chairs/blankets. Lots of fun with outdoor games, beach volleyball, soccer game, candy scramble and a bouncy castle. Bring a bathing suit and towel for a splash in the pool (lifeguard will be on duty). Bring a lifejacket for small children.



**Waterloo Wellington
Down Syndrome Society**

Watch your email for
registration information.

World Down Syndrome Day Update

by WDSO Committee

We are excited to celebrate **World Down Syndrome Day** on Saturday, March 21st at the Alpine Club in Kitchener. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m., and dinner will be served at 6:00 p.m. Be sure to register at wwdss.ca by March 14th. It promises to be a fun-filled evening for all our members, with face painting, a photo booth, and of course a DJ and dancing. Don't forget to wear your WDSO shirt and funky socks as we come together to celebrate!

Earlier this month, members came together for an exciting and inclusive game-day experience with the **KW Titans** on Sunday, March 8th. It was a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness and celebrate individuals with Down syndrome in our community. We can't wait to hear how much everyone enjoyed the game and to see photos of our members showing their spirit! A special thank you to the KW Titans for helping us kick off the celebration for **World Down Syndrome Day** early. One lucky member had the honor of tossing the ball for the ceremonial opening tipoff, and the **"I Belong"** video was featured on the Jumbotron during the game.

A special thank you to all the members who submitted videos for our "I Belong" social media campaign in support of the 2026 calendar. This meaningful video highlights what the members are doing in the calendar. The "I Belong" video was shared at the KW Titans game and will also be shown during our World Down Syndrome Day celebration at the Alpine Club.

This year, members with Down syndrome were invited to order a complimentary **"I Belong" T-shirt**. We are excited to see our members proudly wearing them throughout the community. T-shirts are also available for purchase through the WWDSS store and will be available to purchase at the World Down Syndrome Day event.

Since March 21st falls during the school March Break, we are encouraging schools to celebrate early on **Friday, March 13th**. Families can share the WDSO Google Slide presentation with teachers and school staff to help spark ideas for creating awareness and celebrating inclusion. The slide deck includes books, videos, and activities to support meaningful classroom discussions and school-wide participation. Be sure to check out the details in the Google Slide about our popular **Pizza Party Contest!** One winning class will be selected from **Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge, and Guelph** to receive a pizza party for tagging a photo of their class wearing colourful socks for WDSO and posting it to social media. Please see the flyer for full contest details and participation guidelines.

Let's come together to raise awareness, promote inclusion, and celebrate the value and contributions of individuals with Down syndrome in our community.



Rock Your Socks!

Wear brightly coloured and mismatched socks. Snap a picture and submit it using the link in the Google slide for a chance to **win a class pizza party!**



Dance Party!

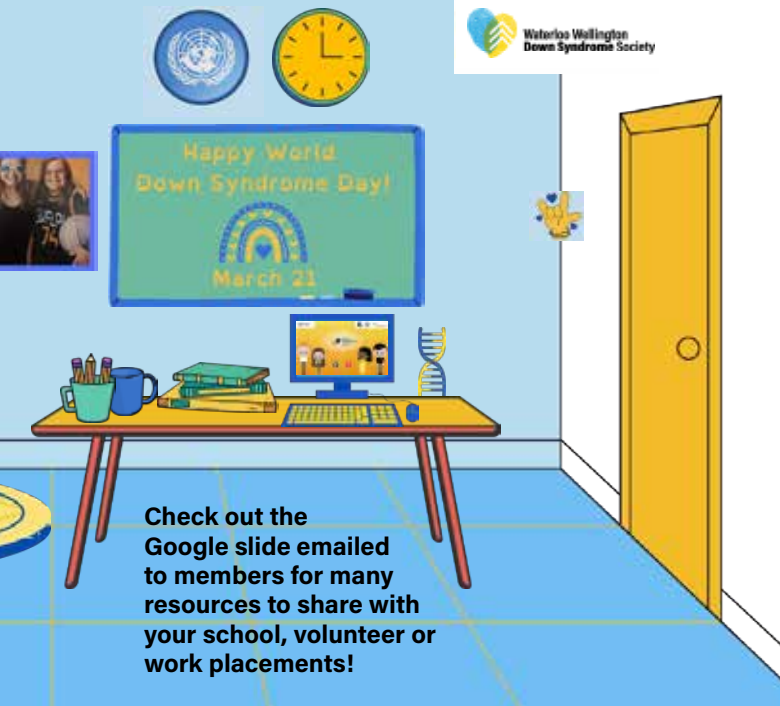
Get moving with the **3-2-1 Rock Your Socks Dance** video!



Story Time!

Listen to *Different* by Heather Avis, read by Miami Down Syndrome community.

ities and learn about the Down Syndrome community.



Check out the Google slide emailed to members for many resources to share with your school, volunteer or work placements!



Learn Something New!

Discover how to say 'Hello' in sign language.



Join the Fun!

Participate in special events and celebrate **World Down Syndrome Day** with us!

Thank you for celebrating **World Down Syndrome Day** with us. We can't wait to see your creativity and participation!

Get Ready to Celebrate World Down Syndrome Day!

Visit wwdss.ca shop for

Socks That Rock

\$15



T-shirt

\$15

Baseball Hat



\$15

Visit wwdss.ca/shop



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 — 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
Teen Hangout Group Coordinator	<p>Role: Plan and run monthly teen hangouts; manage volunteers and communications.</p> <p>Duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a monthly update to the Board. ▪ Choose monthly activity based on participant feedback; book venue and support workers. ▪ Coordinate and confirm volunteers and book additional workers as needed. ▪ Prepare website content, registration details and reminder emails. ▪ After each hangout, approve workers' hours and forward to Treasurer for payment. 	2-4 hours / month
Community Representative	<p>Role: Represent WWDSS at local collaborative meetings.</p> <p>Duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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. 	1-2 hours / month



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.

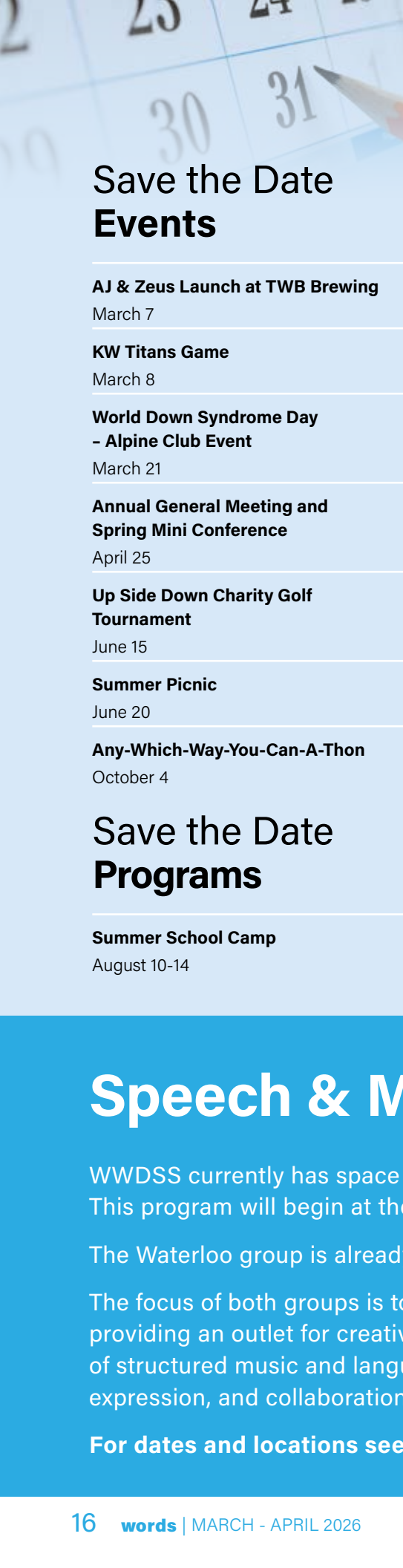
Buddy Choir continues to rehearse on Monday evenings. We will be performing at the Kiwanis Arts Festival on April 23rd at 6:20 p.m. and will be performing on April 24th at Waterloo Region Family Network's evening of Elegance.

We really enjoyed performing O Canada for The Kitchener Titan's game in December!

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

For more info call Lori Maloney at 519-501-6747 or email her at lmec50@gmail.com.





Save the Date Events

AJ & Zeus Launch at TWB Brewing

March 7

KW Titans Game

March 8

World Down Syndrome Day – Alpine Club Event

March 21

Annual General Meeting and Spring Mini Conference

April 25

Up Side Down Charity Golf Tournament

June 15

Summer Picnic

June 20

Any-Which-Way-You-Can-A-Thon

October 4

Save the Date Programs

Summer School Camp

August 10-14

Waterloo Catholic District School Board SEAC Meeting Highlights

by Kim Murphy

January 7, 2026 – Community Transitions: Filomena Cruz, Community Transition Support Worker, and Erin Sutherland, Special Education Transition Navigator, presented to SEAC about their respective roles. They also shared updates on Community Connections, partnerships with local agencies, and emerging trends.

February 4, 2026 – In Person Caregiver Event: We held their board meeting and hosted a “Grace For All – Sacramental Planning” event at St. Anthony Daniel Parish Hall for caregivers. The turnout far exceeded our expectations and was a great example of the collaboration between home, school, and parish.

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

Speech & Music Social Groups

WWDSS currently has space available in the Guelph Speech & Music Social Group. This program will begin at the end of March and run through June 2026.

The Waterloo group is already underway and will continue until the end of April.

The focus of both groups is to build language and social skills among participants while providing an outlet for creative musical communication. Participants will engage in a variety of structured music and language-based activities designed to encourage interaction, expression, and collaboration.

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