



Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Decade:

A Decade of Advocacy and Representation for Down Syndrome Community

Waterloo, ON – *Decade*, the 10th installment of a groundbreaking collaboration between photographer Hilary Gauld and the Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society (WWDSS), celebrates a decade of challenging stereotypes and advocating for authentic representation of individuals with Down syndrome. Breaking down stereotypes, one photo at a time, *Decade* commemorates 10 years of impactful advocacy through image-based storytelling.

The 10th-anniversary photo series, *Decade*, along with a documentary film, is set to be released at an in-person event on October 27th, 2024, coinciding with Down Syndrome Awareness Month in the US and Down Syndrome Awareness Week in Canada. This year's photo series, featuring 62 individuals with Down syndrome aged 1 to 36 years old, underscores the profound impact of Gauld and WWDSS's work in closing the gap of authentic representation of the Down syndrome community.

This series began in 2014, when Photographer Hilary Gauld was approached by her friend Kate to photograph a fundraising calendar for WWDSS, featuring Kate's son, Caleb. As Gauld took on the project, it quickly became apparent that in 2014, not only did very little imagery exist of the Down syndrome community, but the images that did were tokenistic and stereotypical and did not properly represent the lived experiences of those with Down syndrome. In an effort to fill this gap, what began as a single, community-based photoshoot blossomed into a yearly advocacy series that has since garnered global recognition.

Today, an online search for "Down syndrome" looks very different. Gauld's series has bridged the gap in authentic representation online, challenging stereotypes around relationships, life expectancy, and emotional range, showcasing a full spectrum of life experiences within the Down syndrome community. "These images have not only raised awareness but have sparked meaningful dialogues and challenged stereotypes," says Gauld. "I believe in the power of a photograph."

"[Doing these photoshoots] makes me feel happy and special. It makes me feel beautiful and noticed by other people."

— Meghan Martin, *Decade* participant (Age 23)

People with Down syndrome are now being reflected in mainstream media in more ways than ever. Over the past decade, Gauld's imagery has not only become a prominent fixture in online searches but has also been featured by renowned news organizations and publications worldwide, including Breakfast Television, CTV News, People Magazine, The Business Insider,

The Huffington Post, Bored Panda, and Peta Pixel.

Throughout the past ten years, Gauld and WWDSS have tackled various stereotypes and misconceptions that exist through their annual photo series, covering various aspects of life with Down syndrome. In addition to their annual series, Gauld has also co-produced two national campaigns with the Canadian Down Syndrome Society – *Love Means* and *Here I Am* – and created the personal series *Living With Purpose*, highlighting adults with Down syndrome in the paid workforce, exemplifying what it means to create with the community, for the community.

“I want the community to know there are resources available to employers who want to learn how to hire, train and onboard employees with disabilities. I very much wish to see increased acknowledgment from employers regarding the capabilities of individuals with Down syndrome. I believe the community will respond positively by supporting businesses that demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusivity.”

— Kim Murphy, Mom of *Decade* Participant Chloe Murphy (Age 21)

To further amplify their message and celebrate these past 10 years of advocacy, Gauld and WWDSS have commissioned a documentary film, also entitled *Decade*, produced by Digital Sabbath Film Company with funding from over a dozen community and corporate sponsors. This short documentary will centre three families across three different generations, as well as the journey of Gauld and WWDSS over the past ten years, reflecting on the evolving landscape of mainstream media representation and the growing visibility of individuals with Down syndrome.

You can follow the series at:

https://www.instagram.com/wwdss_wwdss/

<https://www.instagram.com/oneforthewall/>

Link to photos from *Decade*:

<https://oneforthewall.shootproof.com/gallery/24669383/>

Decade documentary (including the trailer):

<https://www.decadedocumentary.com/>

About the Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society:

The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society (formerly the Waterloo Regional Down Syndrome Society) is a charitable, non-profit organization created in 1988 by parents of children with Down syndrome. Entirely run by volunteers, every dollar raised goes towards helping fund the various programs and services provided to individuals with Down syndrome and their families. The Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society supports and informs individuals, families, and the community on issues related to Down syndrome. They advocate for persons with Down syndrome to lead healthy and active lives, enabling them to contribute their unique gifts to our community.

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