



## **2024 - 2025 REPORT CARD**

# TEAM UPDATE

Together with our community partners, the BEP empowered youth across Waterloo Region with bold new opportunities to lead, learn, and shape their futures. This past year marked a season of change and renewal as we expanded programming, deepened youth engagement, and navigated key leadership transitions. A highlight for our team this year was being recognized for our community engagement as the recipient of the Cambridge and North Dumfries 2024 Community Collaboration Award.

We were proud to relaunch the Youth Creativity Fund, supported by a \$188,000 investment over 2.5 years. Already, 87 youth have received grants to lead community-based projects—bringing their ideas to life with funding, mentorship, and support. Our ICE Challenges offered real-world learning to 327 students, while the Speakers Bureau delivered 186 visits to 25 schools, connecting classrooms with professionals from a wide range of careers. We also piloted a new Career Coaching program, offering small group guidance to help grade 9 and 10 students. We connected with 14,500+ students this year and are excited to grow this impactful program. Launched in summer 2023, our Youth Ambassador Program continues to thrive. Through one-on-one mentorship, career development workshops, and direct feedback, we've built stronger relationships with youth and ensured their voices are central to our work. This year, we introduced a new panel series for youth and caregivers, featuring industry experts on topics from STEM and AI to Skilled Trades and Entrepreneurship. These conversations reinforced the critical role caregivers play in a young person's career journey. Building on this momentum, we are thrilled to bring back our Explore Your Future Career Expo this fall for students in Grades 7–12 and their families to connect with local employers.

We also experienced leadership transitions. A special thank you to Andrea Harding for stepping in as Interim Executive Director during my parental leave. I was proud to return to the BEP in early 2025 and am energized by what lies ahead.

We look forward to continuing our work with partners, educators, businesses, and youth to build a stronger, more connected future. The best is yet to come.



April Albano  
Executive Director  
Business & Education Partnership of Waterloo Region



**APRIL ALBANO**

Executive Director



**ANDREA HARDING**

Associate Director



**JENNIFER BIRNSTIHL**

Program Manager  
Speakers Bureau



**LAUREN HARVEY**

Marketing &  
Communications Manager



**ALETHEA ROBINSON**

Program Manager  
Youth Innovation



# SPEAKERS BUREAU

## DID YOU KNOW?

57% of our Speakers Bureau volunteers attended a post-secondary institution in Waterloo Region!



Speakers Bureau volunteers connect with local youth, share their knowledge and career story, inspire interest in their careers and industries and give back to the community. How they got where they are today, lessons learned along the way and what it's really like to work in that industry. Questions are encouraged and student's benefit from speaking to those who have actually been there. This is an excellent, and very flexible, commitment for local professionals to talk about the work they do while inspiring young people to consider pursuing similar work.

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
<b>SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS</b>	194	199	186
<b>STUDENTS REACHED</b>	9794	13590	12998
<b>REGISTERED VOLUNTEERS</b>	267	287	283
<b>EDUCATORS PARTICIPATING</b>	60	58	84
<b>SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING</b>	21	18	25



We are so grateful for the incredible collection of 283 local volunteers who generously share their time and expertise with students in hundreds of classroom and school visits across Waterloo Region. We know from our feedback that we are making a positive impact on their future decisions, direction and planning.

#### TEACHER SATISFACTION 4.75/5



#### SPEAKER SATISFACTION 4.95/5



#### STUDENT FEEDBACK: WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS PRESENTATION?

"Mostly the message of not needing to know what you want right away, and being able to pursue your dream at any point in your life. It was interesting to hear that he achieved his broadcasting career much later in life. I've felt I've known what I wanted for years, but in recent months I've been second-guessing my specific education choices or having conflict over pursuing what I want or what is realistic, and it was reassuring, in some way, to hear from an adult that I still have a whole life ahead of me, where I'm able to change my mind and not need to decide my whole future at seventeen."

"The expectations from them [about] hiring helped a lot which made me more aware of what to improve on when applying to a job."

"I learned that it is good to put yourself out there and establish connections to different people because they could end up helping you get your foot in the door later on."

"Career paths aren't linear and it's completely fine if you don't follow the "normal" routine of getting a job. Also try to incorporate your passions and hobbies throughout all activities in your life."

*As the Program Manager of the Speakers Bureau, it's amazing to watch youth learn about a career and then come back and tell us years later that they pursued a job in that industry because of that interaction.*  
Jennifer Birnstihl, Program Manager - Speakers Bureau



# CAREER COACHING

The Business & Education Partnership of Waterloo Region is excited to announce the pilot of a new Career Coaching program for youth in grade 10. Volunteer speakers engage in small group career conversations with students, they share their career journey, answer student questions, and help them connect their interests to real-world opportunities. These conversations give students valuable insight into different career paths, the skills needed for success, and how learning in school connects to the working world.

Students, speakers and educators have all shared how impactful the program is, and we are looking forward to expanding the program for the 2025-2026 school year.



**22 EVENTS**



**90 SPEAKERS**



**485 STUDENTS REACHED**



Ministry of Education

Thank you to our Career Coaching sponsor, Halton Industry Education Council (HIEC) through the Ontario Career Lab.





# ICE CHALLENGES

Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship (ICE) Challenges help students learn about the world of work, develop skills, and grow their confidence by applying design thinking skills to problems facing local businesses and community organizations.

Over the course of the 2024–2025 school year, BEP facilitated eight sector-partnered ICE Challenge workshops, bringing together more than 325 Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) students to solve real-world problems in industries ranging from healthcare to hospitality, construction to community planning.

Students collaborated with professionals, prototyped creative solutions, and practiced their problem solving skills—while also discovering potential career pathways.

A huge thank you to our incredible partners and educators who made this possible.

**Would you like your business front and center to build meaningful connections with emerging talent?** Join us and offer an ICE Challenge in your business next school year!

## 2024-2025 ICE CHALLENGES

### **MADD Canada**

October 16, 2024 – 40 students

### **Children and Youth Planning Table**

November 11, 2024 – 48 students

### **Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging**

December 11, 2024 – 32 students

### **Centre in the Square**

February 12, 2025 – 60 students

### **Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging**

April 10, 2025 – 40 students

### **Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada**

April 23, 2025 – 35 students

### **Charcoal Group of Restaurants**

May 2, 2025 – 42 students

### **Habitat for Humanity ReStore**

May 5, 2025 – 30 students



*"I will take the advice I got from this workshop and apply it to real life situations that I will most likely be put into as I am growing up."*

ST. BENEDICT CATHOLIC SECONDARY  
SCHOOL STUDENT

### Student feedback in regards to Key Impact Statements;

*As a result of participating, I feel more confident to problem-solve real life challenges in the future.*



**87.2%**  
OF STUDENTS AGREED

*As a result of participating, I developed skills that can help me be more creative and innovative when approaching a problem.*



**91.1%**  
OF STUDENTS AGREED

*As a result of participating, I gained knowledge, skills, or connections that I believe will help me in my future career.*



**85.7%**  
OF STUDENTS AGREED

## THANK YOU ICE CHALLENGE PARTNERS!



*"Participating in numerous BEP events has been truly inspiring — it's opened student's eyes to the diverse career paths in our industry. Their interest and genuine enthusiasm highlight the impact these events have in shaping future talent."*

CHRIS MCLEAN, HR SENIOR MANAGER,  
TOYOTA MOTOR MANUFACTURING





# YOUTH CREATIVITY FUND

FUNDED IN PART BY

**CANADA  
SERVICE  
CORPS**

Canada

The Youth Creativity Fund (YCF) empowers high school students across Waterloo Region to bring their ideas to life through microgrants of up to \$1,000.

This school year, YCF supported over 30 youth-led projects, including student-run events, tech innovations, small businesses, community initiatives, and content creation.

Notable projects included an intergenerational AI app to combat senior isolation, a seed bank to support food sustainability, a neuroscience research project using EEG, and a space-ready heating device launching on a NASA mission.

Through this program, students gain real-world experience in budgeting, planning, and problem-solving while addressing issues that matter to them. Many participants also received coaching, mentorship, and opportunities to showcase their work publicly.

The YCF continues to foster youth leadership, innovation, and civic engagement by investing in students as change-makers in their schools and communities. We look forward to continuing this program next school year. Since its inception, the Youth Creativity Fund has achieved the following;



**263**

STUDENTS  
RECEIVED  
GRANTS

**111**

STUDENT-LED  
PROJECTS  
FUNDED

**\$88,785**

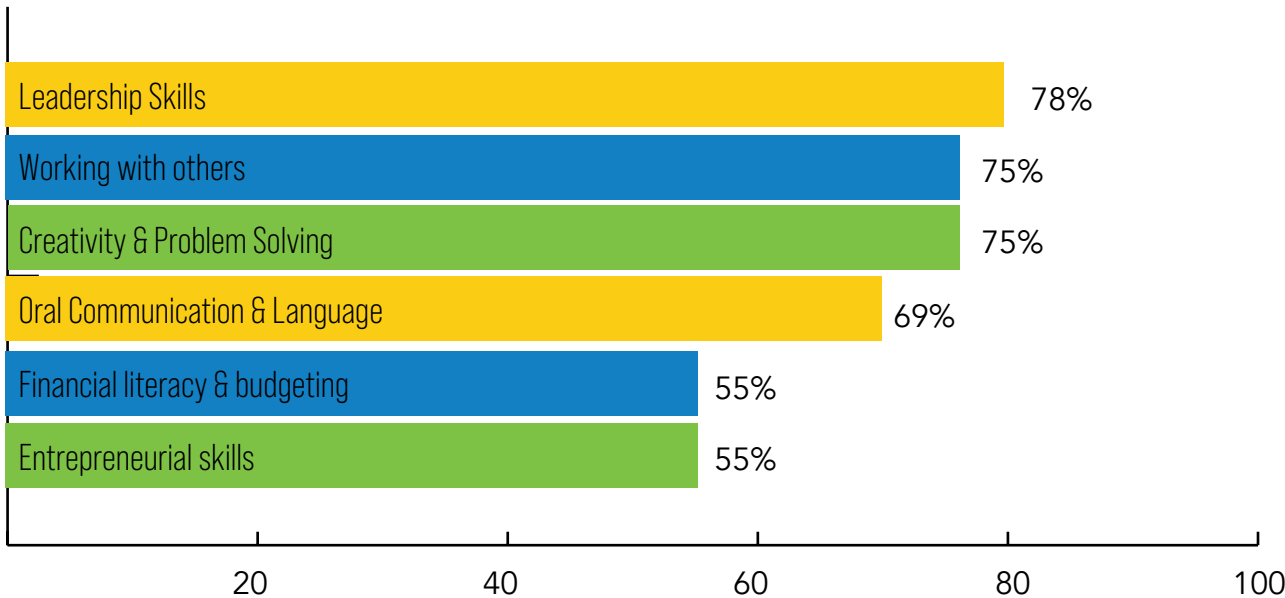
DISTRIBUTED  
IN GRANTS

From tackling social isolation to advancing green tech, this year's Youth Creativity Fund projects reflected passion, purpose, and innovation.

Riya's Stress Buster Buddy supports student mental health through a wellness kit. Olivia's team is building an AI-powered app to connect youth with seniors, while Chloe's YouTube channel captures her coming-of-age journey. Benson's EV team is designing a high-efficiency electric car for competition, supported by engineering partners. Meron and Camryn revived Senior Tea, a community-building event bridging generations.

From personal storytelling to sustainable design, these projects show the powerful impact of youth-led ideas—driven by creativity and supported by BEP.

## ON-GOING REPORTED SKILLS DEVELOPED



Cambridge Chamber  
of Commerce Fund



GrandBridge  
ENERGY



Thank you also to our individual donors!



# YOUTH AMBASSADORS

This year, BEP welcomed five Youth Ambassadors to help shape student resources and represent youth voices in our work.

Together, they developed the Career Resource Toolkit for Students, a student-led collection of videos, blogs, and worksheets designed to help their peers explore future careers with confidence.

Along the way, Ambassadors contributed to other BEP initiatives—supporting panel events, reviewing Youth Creativity Fund applications, and helping to tell the stories behind student projects through interviews and social media.

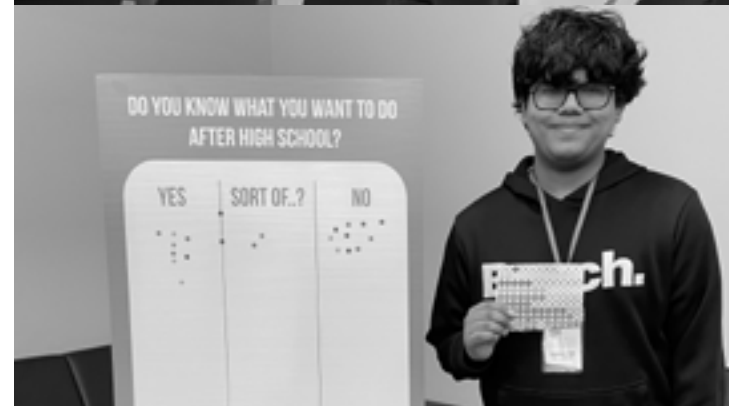
The program offered real-world experience in leadership, collaboration, and content creation, while giving BEP a direct line to student perspectives and ideas. We're proud of what they've built—and excited to grow this program next year.

***With the BEP I did find a lot of mentorship resources as well as meeting people through workshops, and they helped me get to know what I want to pursue in the future. It opened up new opportunities that I never really saw so that did help me with choosing my post-secondary goals.***

***- Yash,  
Senior Youth Ambassador***

***I learned a lot of things, I met a lot of people, and I met professionals, panelists that helped me know about my future career, school, and my goals, and how I can make them come true.***

***- Dalia,  
WCDSB Student Ambassador***





# EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE

This year, the BEP hosted four Explore Your Future events, attracting over 480 students and caregivers to explore career paths in 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, entrepreneurship, the skilled trades, and STEM & AI.

Each session featured diverse panels, open Q&A, and networking opportunities to connect caregivers and youth with local professionals and real-world insights. Held in welcoming public spaces, these events supported informed career conversations and built excitement around future career possibilities.

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



**Waterloo Catholic  
District School Board**  
Quality, Inclusive, Faith-Based Education



**OYAP**  
ONTARIO YOUTH  
APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM



**CONESTOGA**  
Connect Life and Learning



**WATERLOO REGION  
SMALL BUSINESS  
CENTRE**



**Waterloo Region  
District School Board**



**Kitchener  
Public Library**

**Waterloo**  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

**SPECTRUM**  
Waterloo Region's  
Rainbow Community Space



# EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE

Keep an eye out this fall for our next Explore Your Future Career Expo happening Tuesday, November 4th 2025, at Tapestry Hall in Cambridge.

This is our long-standing event that gives an opportunity for caregivers and students in grades 7-12 to directly speak with businesses, organizations, and local post-secondary institutions about future possibilities.





# TRADES PD

Throughout the 2024/25 school year, the Business and Education Partnership hosted 3 different Trades PD Tours in our series hosting a total of 103 local educators as they toured and learned about three very different trades.

They were able to see first hand careers in the skilled trade of sheet metal, the skilled trades at the Conestoga College Reuter Skilled Trades Campus, the automotive industry at Toyota Motor Manufacturing and engineering and manufacturing at Linamar.

The Trades PD series features in-person professional development experiences and tours that educate and support local educators to better advise students about opportunities in the skilled trades and share insights into these sectors. We are pleased to partner with incredible community partners like the Sheet Metal Workers International Union, Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Conestoga College, Linamar, and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board on this amazing opportunity.

***"I highly enjoyed the opportunities presented in the Toyota tour and have already communicated with my students about the incredible opportunities that exist right in our backyard! Excellent tour!"***

***"Great practical experience where I was able to gain knowledge about the sheet metal trade to share with my students. It was also great to see the St Benedict's technology workshop and get an explanation about what the equipment does."***



# LEGACY BUILDERS

The Legacy Builders program is offered by the Grand Valley Construction Association in partnership with BEP for Grade 8 classes in Waterloo Region. The Legacy Builders Program is a fun and integrative way to learn about the vast amount of career options that exist in the construction industry.

Sessions include introduction to trades by a construction professional, personal stories about how the presenter entered their trade, the ways in which they've grown their career in the trades, and examples of different career paths one can take. Students receive swag and information sheets to take home to their families (i.e., a flow chart showing career options, estimated salaries, education required).

Students are placed into small groups and play a fun and interactive game focused on pricing a construction job with prizes for the winning team.

This year we facilitated fourteen events impacting 450 students from:

- Canadian Martyrs CES
- Moffatt Creek
- Lester B Pearson
- Clemens Mills
- Northlake Woods
- Westheights
- McGregor
- Sunnyside
- Margaret Avenue



# LIFE AFTER OYAP

Graduating OYAP is a free online Zoom session offered to all graduating WRDSB and WCDSB grade 12 Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) students and their parents. We provide next steps for students by increasing awareness of various services available to graduating OYAP students in the skilled trades and the apprenticeship pathways. These events feature presentations from our partners, Starling Employment Services, Support Ontario Youth (SOY), Apprenticesearch.com. They each shared supports available to youth including:

CAREER PLANNING, RESUMES, COVER LETTERS, INTERVIEWS AND  
THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET

INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL EMPLOYERS, SKILLED TRADES,  
AND APPRENTICESHIP

JOB PLACEMENT HELP FOR QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

This January, we had **70 attendees** join us for Graduating OYAP. We look forward to our second and final event of the year this June.





# JOB TALKS



In partnership with the WCDSB and WRDSB, the Business & Education Partnership offer a series of free online webinars promoting careers in the skilled trades. These events feature prominent keynote speaker and skilled trades expert Jon Callagher, PhD who is the Executive Director of Job Talks. Representatives from both school boards also delivered presentations about OYAP specific programming in the schools followed by an interactive Q & A.

508 families with students in grades 7-12 viewed and took part across both events, "What Caregivers Need to Know about Careers in the Skilled Trades for parents and caregivers" and "5 Great Reasons to Pursue a Career in the Skilled Trades aimed at students". Our goals are to increase awareness of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program; what it is, its benefits, and how a student could get started. We also seek to increase awareness of the benefits of a career in the skilled trades, and specifically the apprenticeship pathway.

***"Thank you so much - this information was very useful. As a twelve year old in grade 7 this is nice to know for my first year in high school."***

***"We learned that you can have a great life-long career in the skilled trades and be very successful and fulfilled."***

JOIN US THIS WINTER FOR OUR  
**FREE VIRTUAL SERIES**

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER** Dr. Jon Callagher Ph.D.  
Executive Director & Skilled  
Trades Speaker with JobTalks

**WHAT CAREGIVERS NEED TO  
KNOW ABOUT CAREERS IN THE  
SKILLED TRADES**  
January 23, 2025 6:30-7:30 p.m.

**5 GREAT REASONS FOR  
PURSUING A CAREER IN THE  
SKILLED TRADES**  
February 13, 2025 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Visit our events page to  
learn more and register  
[www.bepwr.ca](http://www.bepwr.ca)

Logos: Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), Business & Education Partnership (BEP), and various school board logos.



# CAREER HUNT



In partnership with JA Southwestern Ontario Inc., Career Hunt events bring students together with career mentors working in a variety of desired fields, industries and professions. Each student participates in interactive sessions that will open up a world of choices and help them learn first-hand what it takes to be successful. This experience clarifies career and educational pathways and students become actively engaged in designing their own career path.

These events feature:

- Career "Breakout Sessions" set up in different online rooms where students join to learn about the careers that interest them most
- Mainstage Speakers – Inspirational keynotes
- Interactive chat – moderated Q & A format for students to ask questions
- Career Expo – Event area with additional career mentor videos to be accessed during asynchronous time

Together we have reached over 5100 students through this program!

## **A World of Choices – October 29, 2024**

A wide spectrum of careers in different sectors.

## **Business Builders – December 4, 2024**

Putting the focus on entrepreneurs and job creators across all industries

## **Caring Careers: Healthcare and Hospitality – January 30, 2025**

Exploring careers that put service first – from patients to clients

## **Get Curious – March 4, 2025**

A wide spectrum of careers in different sectors.

## **Jobs of the Future – April 9, 2025**

A look at newer careers in technology and other industries, including what may be coming next.

## **Get Curious – June 3, 2025**

A wide spectrum of careers in different sectors.



Member of  
JA Canada

# COMMUNITY EVENTS

## CAMBRIDGE & NORTH DUMFRIES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE COMMUNITY AWARDS

We were honoured to be nominated for two awards at the 2024 Cambridge North Dumfries Community Awards, the Community Collaboration Award and Organization of the Year - Under 10 Employees.

April, Andrea, and Lauren attended the ceremony in November and accepted the Community Collaboration Award on behalf of the team. This recognition has encouraged us greatly as we continue to build partnerships with other organizations to reach youth of all backgrounds across Waterloo Region.

The BEP is incredibly thankful to all our partners who have collaborated with us on events and programs, who have helped us learn and educate ourselves further, and who also work tirelessly to make Waterloo Region a better place to live, work, and grow.



## BLACK BRILLIANCE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

On February 24, 2024, BEP had the opportunity to participate in the Black Brilliance Leadership Conference at Elmira District Secondary School, as part of the school's Black History Month programming. Themed "Flourish," the conference created a space for local African, Caribbean, and Black-identifying (ACB) students to be celebrated, represented, and empowered.

BEP's Program Manager, Youth Innovation, Alethea Robinson, delivered the keynote address, sharing a personal and inspiring message about what it means to thrive in spaces where you're not always expected to. The day also featured student-led panels, engaging workshops facilitated by Adventure4Change, and a high-energy closing session led by Rhythm and Blues Cambridge.

WRDSB Trustee Maedith Radlein and Equity and Inclusion Officer Teneile Warren were in attendance to support the students and school staff. Special thanks go to the teachers and school leadership at Elmira District Secondary School, whose commitment to creating safe, affirming spaces made the day possible.

The Black Brilliance Conference was a powerful example of what happens when we invest in youth voice, representation, and leadership—offering a meaningful space for students to be seen, heard, and inspired to flourish.

# COMMUNITY EVENTS

## BETTER TENT CITY SLEEP OUT

Hundreds of students from four WCDSB secondary schools came together November 2024 for the second annual sleepout as part of the Homes for Hope campaign. The sleepout offered students powerful learning experiences, fostering empathy, building awareness and raising funds for the challenges faced by those facing systematic housing inequities issues in the region.

The BEP was proud to support this incredible event by arranging the impactful kick off keynote speaker from our volunteer Speakers Bureau, Ashley Schuitema, executive director and lawyer with Waterloo Region Community Legal Services and homeless advocate. Ashley delivered a powerful keynote that opened the students eyes to the challenges of the growing number of unhoused individuals in Waterloo Region.

The ultimate goal was to inspire students to see their role in building supportive communities and is a vital effort to raise funds for the Homes for Hope campaign.



GREATER KITCHENER WATERLOO  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
BUSINESS-BUILDING COMMUNITY

## WRDSB FUNDING FAIRS

Throughout the spring, our Marketing & Communications Manager, Lauren Harvey, attended funding fairs to raise awareness of our Youth Creativity Fund program. She attended events at Grand River Collegiate Institute, Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate Institute, Southwood Secondary School, Glenview Park Secondary School, and Preston High School.

These Funding Fairs highlighted multiple organizations across our region providing opportunities to bring youth-led initiatives to life. We want to thank Student Engagement Officer, Delia Loveless, for her hard work in bringing these together and creating this opportunity to reach and engage with more youth.

## CHAMBER EXPO

In April we were able to participate in the Chamber Expo put on by the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, and Cambridge Chambers of Commerce. It was an incredible opportunity to connect with our community, recruit volunteers for our Speakers Bureau, and share with the business community how we are impacting the next generation of our workforce.

We are thankful to the Chambers for inviting us to this event, and to all who stopped by and shared career advice that we can pass on to our youth!

# COMMUNITY EVENTS

## WOMEN IN STEM CAREER FAIR

The Speakers Bureau has proudly supported this exciting event run by a team of Galt Collegiate Institute students to showcase women in STEM careers and bring awareness, encourage diversity and empower young women to consider pursuing these underrepresented industries.

12 Speakers Bureau female professionals actively took part at career stations, where they shared their career stories with hundreds of students. The event showcased a wide variety of careers and sectors in science, technology, engineering and math including civil and chemical engineering, welding, construction, IT, biology, environmental science, pharmacy and finance



We are very thankful to all of our individual donors this past year! We couldn't provide the programming we do without their support. A special thank you to long time supporter and previous BEP Director, Mike Stork, for supporting our yearly matching campaign. This campaign runs each fall and matches the first \$15,000 donated to go directly to BEP programming that is helping youth build their paths to rewarding careers.

## POST-SECONDARY VOLUNTEER FAIRS

This past fall, Jennifer and Lauren were able to represent the BEP at volunteers fiars hosted by Wilfred Laurier University and the University of Waterloo. It was an incredible opportunity to speak to young people and encourage them to support students coming up after them.

We believe involving more young people in our programs and events can have a large impact. Including young adults helps youth envision their future a few steps ahead and hear advice from others who understand the impacts the pandemic had on their education and thinking about the future.



## WUSA CONFERENCE

This past March, we were chosen as the community partner for a leadership conference put on by Waterloo University's Student Association. For their service project, students filled out postcards with encouraging messages to be added to our Youth Creativity Fund acceptance packages! To create the postcards we involved past Youth Creativity Fund recipient, Arielle, to design them.



# COMMUNITY EVENTS

## OK2BME GSA CONFERENCE

This year marked our second time hosting a panel at Camino's OK2BME GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) Conference.

The BEP arranged speakers for a panel titled, "Navigating Your Career Path with Confidence" through which our volunteers shared their personal experience navigating careers and how their personal journeys impacted their decisions. This year we were able to set up an anonymous Q&A platform and participants were able to submit questions such as "How do you know if a workplace is genuinely accepting, or if they are just using the right buzz words in their posting?", "How have you navigated discrimination in the workplace?", and "How did you find mentors/community?"

This event is always a highlight for us. Our team had a great time interacting with youth, connecting with other organizations, and watching our volunteers shine!



## PRIORITIZING ALTERNATIVE LEARNING

This academic year, our team made it a goal to expand our outreach to new and diverse communities across Waterloo Region. Team members joined educators and social workers early in the fall to learn more about how we could better support youth involved in alternative learning programming. Our goal was to engage, connect and inspire these students and connect them with resources throughout the Region.

We are proud to say that we took part in a diverse variety of visits reaching a diverse group of students who benefitted from our Speakers Bureau visits. We are appreciative of our volunteers willingness to try something new and tailor their talks to meet the unique needs of these students.

Our goal was to send volunteers out to 10 speaking engagements, and we were able to arrange 13! We have also worked closely with educators to make the Youth Creativity Fund more accessible and approachable for these students.

Our programming reached:

- U-turn Waterloo
- New Dawn Alternative Learning Program
- School Within a College (SWAC)
- ACE (Alternative Continuum of Education)
- ELAWS Program (Elmira Life and Work)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF  
THE BUSINESS & EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP OF WATERLOO REGION**

