

Thank you to our 2026 sponsors for making this program possible and affordable for so many local youth!



**KW SERTOMA CLUB**

**Rotary**  
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Barb and Greg Billo Fund  
The Brian and Pauline Fisher Fund

### Vital Support for Local Young Victims and Their Families

Did you know **27%** of Canadians experienced at least one instance of physical or sexual abuse by an adult **before the age of 15?**

At Child Witness Centre, we deliver trauma-informed programs that **support, protect, and empower** children and youth impacted by abuse and crime – while advancing prevention and early intervention. The work we do makes our entire community safer, healthier, and stronger for us all.

Every year, we support **over 1,000** young victims and their families in Waterloo Region, Guelph, and Wellington County.

Learn More



### HOW WE HELP

Trauma-informed support, including a safe landing place and listening ear, makes an immediate and long-term impact – and helps break the cycle of harm.



Trauma-informed care & crisis response



Safety planning, harm reduction & coping skills



Our facility dogs offer their amazing comfort



Advocacy, guidance, & caregiver support



Court accompaniment & testimonial support



Circle of care with our multi-disciplinary team

### OUR IMPACT

When supported, young survivors are set on a far more positive trajectory in their relationships, schooling, career success, lifestyle choices, and more.



Healing, recovery, & resiliency



Positive mental health & wellbeing



Brighter futures for decades to come



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[childwitness.com](http://childwitness.com)

19<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL

# 2026 YOUTH SYMPOSIUM

New venues, new format, and the same trusted program for **2,600 grade 8 students** across Waterloo Region, Guelph, and Wellington County!

## DAY 1

**Thursday  
April 23**

**Rozanski Hall**  
University of  
Guelph  
98 Trent Lane  
Guelph

## DAY 2

**Tuesday  
April 28**

**Lazaridis Hall**  
Wilfrid Laurier  
University  
64 University Ave. W.  
Waterloo

## DAY 3

**Wednesday  
April 29**

**Lazaridis Hall**  
Wilfrid Laurier  
University  
64 University Ave. W.  
Waterloo

All dates will run from 10:00 a.m. to 1:20 p.m.

*"My experience was amazing. The presentations were all very inspiring, funny, and informative."*

– Student



Our Youth Symposium is a large-scale outreach and preventative program for grade 8 students. Through dynamic presentations grounded in lived experience and storytelling, students learn about resilience, healthy coping, self-worth, and the power of their voice. It equips youth with tools and strategies to develop resiliency, while empowering them towards strong futures.

## Program Information

- Open to all grade 8 students and their teachers in public, Catholic, and independent schools in Waterloo Region, Guelph, and Wellington County.
- Strategically scheduled in April, reaching students as they prepare for high school.
- Registration fee is \$15 per student, teacher, and supervisor.
- This is a one-day educational experience, run over three days.
- It's an engaging event where every student hears the same key messages.



## Program Objectives

- Provide grade 8 students with current and relevant information that supports their mental health and wellbeing.
- Help youth shift their mindset from feeling overwhelmed to believing they can overcome.
- Equip students with skills, confidence, and resources to navigate challenges and seek help early if needed.
- Support teachers in their important work with students by aligning with Ontario curriculum priorities.
- Offering educators shared language and themes that can be extended back into classroom discussions.
- On-campus experience helps students to begin envisioning themselves in a post-secondary setting in the years ahead.

Grade 8 is a pivotal transition year as students prepare for secondary school. By equipping them with practical strategies, hope-centered messaging, and a sense of personal agency, Youth Symposium boosts their academic and emotional readiness for the next stage of education.

## 2026 Featured Speakers



### Chris Gray

**The Grit Factor: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities**  
Chris inspires students to persevere through adversity and pursue their goals with strong determination. Drawing from his own childhood challenges, he reminds students that their circumstances do not define their future.  
[chrisgrayspeaks.com](http://chrisgrayspeaks.com)



### Christene Lewis

**I Rise Up: The Power of Agency**  
Christene challenges students to reclaim their personal narrative and step into ownership of their future. Through powerful storytelling and lived experience, she encourages young people to make their impact greater than their intention.  
[christenelewis.com](http://christenelewis.com)



### Jeff A.D. Martin

**I Am Worth It, I Am Enough**  
Jeff focuses on the topics of self-worth and belonging, equipping students with practical strategies to build confidence and challenge negative self-talk. His core message is simple and powerful: "You are worth it."  
[jeffadmartin.com](http://jeffadmartin.com)



### Child Witness Centre

**Support and Advocacy When Needed Most**  
A brief presentation by Child Witness Centre staff will also be included, connecting students to age-appropriate information about safety, support, and where to turn for help.  
[childwitness.com](http://childwitness.com)

*"Youth Symposium is **one of the best field trips** that a teacher could take their grade 8 class to." – Teacher*