

March 4, 2019
Waterloo Region

On February 27, 2019, KW Counselling Services and the Waterloo Region District School Board hosted their 9th annual Gender and Sexuality Awareness (GSA) Conference at Bingemans.

The GSA Conference is designed for LGBTQ2+ students and allies to have a safe space to learn, network, and have fun. Nearly 350 students, educators, and volunteers from across Waterloo Region attended the event which boasted 32 different panels, workshops, and activities including an Interfaith Panel, a panel on Queer Parents, an Intro to Improv, a workshop on body image, and a session on Masculinity and Consent.

Washington Silk, the Coordinator of KW Counselling Services' OK2BME program for LGBTQ2+ youth has planned the event for the last three years. Wash notes, "this is the largest GSA Conference we have ever had in Waterloo Region. We have been able to expand this year thanks to the generous sponsorship of Toyota Motor Manufacturing of Canada, and a Grow Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation."

TJ who attended the conference says, "the 2019 GSA conference gave me every feeling of pride in myself and my accomplishments that was ever questioned by unsupportive people around me. Nothing beats walking into a room and feeling like you've made all the right decisions, and being encouraged to be nothing but undeniably true to yourself."

Deepa Ahluwalia, Equity & Inclusion Officer at the Waterloo Region District School Board says, "The GSA Conference is an affirming, positive and inclusive event that we have been participating in since it began. For many, this is the first time they have felt validated and like they truly belong. We are proud to partner with OK2BME and support this opportunity for our students. This event is part of our organization's commitment to equity and ensuring our schools are safe spaces for everyone."

Washington, who uses they/them pronouns, notes "this year we were fortunate to have students and educators from across Waterloo Region. We had 38 schools participating and were excited to include students from the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. Our vision at KW Counselling Services is of a community where no one is left behind and that has been the driving philosophy behind our OK2BME program since 2005."

About KW Counselling Services and OK2BME:

KW Counselling Services is a multi-service agency offering counselling supports to individuals, couples and families in the Waterloo Region. In addition to our counselling work we offer a variety of parenting education workshops, leadership training for members of the multicultural community, and community development support for newcomers to Canada and the LGBTQ2+ community. We are proud to have been supporting children, youth and families in this community since 1950.

The OK2BME program has been operating since 2005. It provides free counselling to LGBTQ2+ youth and their families, four different youth leadership and recreation groups across the region, and public education and consultations on LGBTQ2+ issues.

About Waterloo Region District School Board:

Waterloo Region District School Board serves more than 63,000 students in 121 schools and alternative and continuing education sites. Our school district partners with staff, families and caregivers to build students' confidence and success as they face the future. We are innovating tomorrow by educating today.

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