



“Embracing Our Abilities”

October 16, 17 & 18, 2026

Presented by:

New Vision Advocates (London),
New Day (Essex County),
Our Choice Matters (Elgin),
People 4 People (Guelph, Wellington)

WELCOME TO SPEAKING OUT 2026!

We are thrilled to welcome you to the 2026 Speaking Out Conference!
Get ready for another year of learning, connecting, and inspiring one another.

The dedicated Conference Planning Committee has organized an event for self-advocates, families, and support professionals to come together, share ideas, build relationships, and learn from one another — all while continuing to focus on the theme of “Embracing Our Abilities.” Throughout the conference, you’ll have the chance to take part in engaging sessions during the day and enjoy entertainment and social opportunities in the evening.

To honour the memory of founding members, Kim Sparling & JP Regan, a memorial plaque is displayed in the Welcome Area. On Saturday, Kim’s family will also be present to introduce the 15th annual **Kim Sparling New Vision Advocate of the Year Award**.

We believe this year’s conference will leave you feeling inspired and empowered, with fresh ideas and practical tools to take with you — helping to grow the Speaking Out movement and encouraging people to stand up for themselves and support one another in meaningful ways.

We hope you enjoy your time and take part in all the sessions, activities, and networking opportunities available.

Sincerely,

The 2026 Speaking Out Conference Planning Committee

Speaking Out Conference at a Glance 2026

	Friday, October 16
4:00 pm – 6:00 pm	Conference Registration Main Entrance in Lobby
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm	Dinner for Full Conference Participants Dining Hall-2 nd Floor
8:00 pm – 10:00 pm	Dance Union Station-2 nd Floor
	Saturday, October 17
7:00 am – 8:30 am	Breakfast Dining Hall-2 nd Floor
7:45 am – 8:30 am	Registration for day-only conference participants Main Entrance in Lobby ** Check out for guests staying Friday night only
9:00 am – 10:15am	Keynote Speaker Ryan McTavish “Start Living Acceptance” Classrooms - BIAWOC/Anishinaabe main floor

10:15 am – 10:45am	Break	
10:45 am – 11:45am	Classroom- BIAWOC	Classroom- Anishinaabe
	Can I Pet Your Dog? - Life with a Service Dog, and what Service Dog Etiquette looks like in public Avery Nickerson	Ashlee's Alberta Adventure: A Photo, Auto – Ethnography Study of Traveling with Multiple Complexities. Ashlee Dagenais
12:00 – 12:45	Lunch Dining Hall 2 nd floor	
12:45 pm – 1:00 pm	Presentation of the Kim Sparling New Vision Advocate of the Year Award Dining Hall 2 nd floor	
	Saturday Afternoon	
	Classroom- BIAWOC Main floor	Classroom-Anishinaabe Main floor
1:30 pm - 2:30pm	The Power of Yes Jessica Rotolo & Lauren Abela	Nothing about us without us: My time at Waypoint Gillian Martin
2:30 pm – 3:00 pm	Break	

	** Check in for Saturday overnight guests	
3:00 pm – 4:00pm	Classroom- BIAWOC	Classroom-Anishinaabe
	A Bird Cage & the road Home: Using Art to tell Stories Moir Robertson	Out of the Ashes Ray Renaud
5:30 pm – 6:45 pm	Dinner Dining Hall-2 nd Floor	
8:00 pm – 10:00pm	Games night Union Station 2 nd floor	

	Sunday October 26	
7:00 am – 8:30 am	Breakfast Dining Hall 2 nd Floor	
8:30am – 9:00 am	Registration for day-only conference participants Main Entrance – Front Lobby	
8:30 am – 9:30 am	**Room Checkout for Overnight Guests	
	Classroom BIAWOC	Classroom Anishinaabe
9:30 am – 10:30 am	Family Feud P4P Melissa, Amanda, Tom	Speaking Up for Yourself CLO Council Niko, Amber, Keith & Brianne

10:30 am – 11:00 am	Break	
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	Classroom-BIAWOC	Classroom-Anishinaabe
	Choice Driven Support Sarah-Lynne Leask	My Journey of Growth, Independence & Speaking Up Stephen Hickey
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch Dining Hall –2 nd Floor	
1:00 pm – 2:00pm	Closing Plenary and 3 Minutes of Fame Dining Hall–2 nd Floor	

WELCOME / INFORMATION AREA

Throughout the weekend, be sure to stop by the **Welcome & Information Area** to check out:

- **Kim Sparling & JP Regan Memorial Plaque**
- **Picture Slideshow** (featuring highlights from past conferences)
- **Advocacy Group Display Tables**

PHOTO BOOTH

Don't miss the **Photo Booth** near the Welcome Area! Gather your friends, grab some fun props, and snap some photos to capture the memories of this year's Speaking Out Conference.

HUMAN BINGO

Looking to meet new people? Have some fun and join in **Human Bingo!**

- Move around, introduce yourself, and find different people who can answer the questions on your bingo card.
- Have them sign their name in a box.
- Complete your entire card and your name will be entered a **second time** into the prize draw!
- Be sure to hand in your completed cards by the end of dinner on Saturday.

ENTERTAINMENT

Friday Night – Dance Party

Join us in Union Station as we kick off the weekend with music, dancing, and fun! Bring your song requests and don't forget—door prizes will be drawn throughout the night.

Saturday Night – Games Night

Head to Union Station for a night of games and laughter with friends, old and new. Door prizes will also be drawn during the night.

KIM SPARLING MEMORIAL AWARD

Join us on **Saturday at 12:45 p.m.** in the **Dining Hall** (immediately following lunch) for a special presentation of the **Kim Sparling Memorial Award**. Let's come together to celebrate and congratulate this year's recipient.

PHOTOS WANTED

Help us build this year's conference slideshow! 

Share your photos by uploading them to the Speaking Out Conference Facebook Page.

You can find us on Facebook at ***Speaking Out Conference***.



You can also email photos to Vicky.Pearson@cll.on.ca

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

Saturday, October 17, 2026

9:00 – 10:15 am

Classrooms - BIAWOC/Anishinaabe main floor

“Start Living Acceptance”

Keynote Speaker – Ryan McTavish

Everyone has unique abilities that deserve to be recognized and valued. When we embrace our own strengths and learn to respect the diverse abilities of others, we create more inclusive, confident, and accepting communities.

Ryan will share his journey of embracing his abilities through music, and advocacy for inclusion and belonging. Diagnosed with autism at the age of 5, he is a drummer, disability advocate, and is the founder of the Start Living Acceptance initiative. Ryan will share his stories and sense of humor to teach the audience to be proud of their abilities, while also respecting the abilities of others.

Concurrent Sessions

10:45am- 11:45am

Classroom: BIAWOC

Can I Pet Your Dog? - Life with a Service Dog, and what Service Dog Etiquette looks like in public.

Presenter: **Avery Nickerson**

Have you ever been out in your community and seen a dog in a leather harness or brightly coloured vest? Have you heard about service dogs before, but want to learn more about what they do and how they help disabled individuals in their day to day life? Avery Nickerson has been a service dog handler for the past three years, working with her Autism Assistance Dog, Lumalee, to help her navigate being out in the community. In this talk, Avery and Luma will be working together to provide education about the different types of Service Dogs, why accessibility for Service Dogs matter, and what to do if you encounter a Service Dog and their handler out in public through personal stories and anecdotes, educational videos, and a presentation that will change how you see service dogs.

Classroom: Anishinaabe

Ashlee's Alberta Adventure: A Photo, Auto-Ethnography Study of Traveling with Multiple Complexities.

Presenter: **Ashlee Dagenais**

Learn that travel is an important part of quality of life, independence, joy, and belonging. I hope this presentation inspires caregivers and professionals to think about how they can support people with disabilities to access travel opportunities. I hope people leave the presentation with a better understanding of the ableism disabled travelers face, as well as the importance of supporting disabled people to lead, shape, and share their experiences.

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1:30 - 2:30pm

Classroom: BIAWOC

“The power of Yes”

Presenters: **Jessica Rotolo & Lauren Abela**

“The Power of YES” is a story of friendship between two new students at college, one born with Down syndrome and one born neurotypical. Since that day almost 7 years ago, the friends, Lauren and Jessica (who commonly call themselves sisters), have gone on many incredible adventures together, making an impact in their communities along the way as advocates and public speakers. Now, they want YOU to say Yes to friendship, advocacy, and inclusion too! We hope you will join us!

Classroom: Anishinaabe

Nothing About Us Without Us: My Time at Waypoint

Presenter: **Gillian Martin (they/them)**

In this session, I will share my story of becoming a self-advocate while living at the Bayview Program for Dual Diagnosis at Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care. People in the hospital did not see us as being capable of advocacy. I realized that if we wanted things to change, someone had to speak up. I started advocating for myself and for the other people living on the ward because everyone deserves to be heard.

Come to this session to learn about:

What life is really like on an in-patient ward.

Why speaking up for yourself and others is so important.

How we can make sure our communities see us, respect us, and listen to us.

3:00 – 4:00pm

Classroom: BIAWOC

A bird cage and the road home: using art to tell our stories

Presenter: **Moira Robertson**

Art can be a good way to tell stories and art can be done in different ways. A bird cage and the road home are both parts of my story that I tell in a poem. Art is a way to interact with the world as a person with a disability. This presentation will give participants an opportunity to create art to tell their story in whatever way is comfortable for them. People will walk away with their own art piece, as a way to share their stories.

Classroom: Anishinaabe

Out of the Ashes

(Warning: This presentation contains discussions of abuse and trauma that may be upsetting to some people)

Presenter: **Ray Renaud**

No matter how many setbacks you encounter, you have the Power to transform challenges into strengths by building on the positive aspects of your experiences.

This presentation will show that although negative experiences can weigh you down, focusing on the positive can empower you to turn your life around.

Sunday, October 18, 2025

9:30 - 10:30am

Classroom: BIAWOC

Family Feud

Presenters: **Tom Huxley, Amanda Abraham, Melissa Lindsay**

Join P4P members Tom, Amanda and Melissa in a fun and interactive game show,

FAMILY FEUD.

They will share real life challenges and questions about advocacy. This session requires audience participating and involvement. Learn team building skills, creative thinking and problem solving while having fun!

Classroom: Anishinaabe

Speaking Up for Yourself: A Guide to Self-Advocacy

Presenters: **Niko Pupella, Amber Taylor, Keith Metcalf & Brianne Taggart.**

In this presentation, we explore what self-advocacy means by sharing our lived experiences as members of the Community Living Ontario Council, a group of self-advocates from across the province. We share practical tools, strategies, and real-life examples to illustrate what self-advocacy looks like in action. To engage participants, we incorporate interactive activities that encourage reflection, participation, and discussion. Through our stories, we demonstrate how people can speak up, participate in decision-making, and collaborate to drive positive change. Most importantly, we show that self-advocacy is about using your voice, learning from experience, and helping others understand how to foster inclusion.

11:00am – 12:00pm

Classroom: BIAWOC

Choice Driven Support

Presenter: **Sarah - Lynne Leask**

During this presentation, Sara-Lynne from Supported Choices will lead a small group activity to demonstrate how even the loss of the smallest piece of autonomy through choice will impact their willingness to participate. Participants will be divided into small groups and given a list of rewards-based tasks. The tasks will be inclusive to all abilities. The activities will be followed by a group discussion on the impact choice had on their willingness to participate.

SPONSORS

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the generous sponsors who have contributed to the **2026 Speaking Out Conference**.

The Sparling Family



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CONTACT INFORMATION

You can use this page to write the contact information of new people you meet.

NAME	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS