

*“Just wanted to say what a great job Frank, Brittany, Joanne, and Kasia did at St. Wilfrid yesterday! They shared their stories and experiences in an engaging and relatable way that made an impact on so many of our students! Their energy and involvement with the kids really showed that they care and are passionate about what they are doing! The assembly style presentations and follow up workshops were interactive and allowed for so many of our students to gain a better understanding of mental health and all the challenges that can come with it, as well as some practical coping strategies. Many of our students even felt comfortable enough to go and chat with them one on one after their presentations were done and your crew spent as much time as was necessary to listen and make our kids feel a little more at ease. Thanks so much for allowing these young people the opportunity to share their stories and experiences in a positive and inspirational way!”*

**Christina Scopa, Teacher, St. Wilfrid, Toronto**

*“Your speakers were wonderful! Both the teachers and students really enjoyed listening to their stories and more importantly, it allowed them to start up open conversations afterwards. You should all be proud of the work that you do.”*

**Judith Belligero, SERT, Michael Cranny PS, Maple**

*“The fact that there are positive coping strategies that actually work was amazing for our students to hear. I think the fact that it was coming from youth made it that much more impactful. Our students were talking about them the entire day in the halls and classrooms. I heard words of empathy and I heard words of hope. One of the young girls that I work with in guidance came to chat with me about Roxie’s story – not wanting advice but just relating to what she had said in her presentation. Overall, the messages were very powerful and clear. I would highly recommend your organization to teachers in our community.”*

**Julie Iafrate, Teacher/Guidance Counsellor, Beverley Heights MS, Toronto**

*“Thank you again for sending Joanne, Brittany and Brendan to Tilbury yesterday for our event. I have many words of expression I wish to convey about our event. I personally commend them all for their courage, strength and openness. Their ability to teach and inform is extremely powerful and thought provoking. They work magic with the information that they share and their stories resonate with all ages. It truly was a pleasure meeting them and getting to know them.”*

**Tamara Dick, Member of Tilbury Drug Awareness Team**

*“I’d like to add my name to the list of people praising the presentations. I was so impressed by the speakers. Their experiences, coupled with a hopeful message was very important and spoke in a very powerful way to the students (and staff). I have to mention one statement in particular, made by Will when he said, ‘Don’t give up before the miracle happens’. It resonated so profoundly with me and I will use it as a personal ‘mantra’ when needed.”*

**Stacey Michener, Superintendent of Education, Toronto District School Board**

*“They were wonderful and I want to adopt all 3 of them!! The students spent much time speaking about them afterwards and it all invited wonderful discussion after they left!!*

**Rita Goverde, Child and Youth Worker  
W.J Watson PS, Keswick**

*“We had a fabulous time. I was really really pleased with your team and the messages they shared with our members. I have to applaud them, specifically, for checking in with me once more before they spoke to hear our hopes for the presentation. Whether you had chosen speakers perfectly, or they simply adapted, they did a phenomenal job of speaking TO our members. Watching them when the speakers began, there were a lot of them avoiding eye contact with the front of the room. There was a noticeable discomfort with the topic. But, within 30 minutes, that discomfort broke for a great many, and they were very engaged...they definitely felt spoken to. WE needed to give you guys more time/space. I really wish we had booked your team for two hours, and were able to build in a solid half hour of unsolicited “approach” time, for your speakers to just interact with the members.”*

**Emily Brown, 4H Clubs of Canada**

*"We received very positive feedback from parents - they appreciated the honesty and courage the speakers demonstrated and felt that their presentations reflected concerns that they have for their children. We have seen increased, demonstrative acts of empathy between students."*

**Patti Catenacci, Vice-Principal  
St. Justin Martyr, Thornhill**

*"Thanks Una, for sending Matt, Malcolm and Joanne today. They were great, Joanne is an incredible speaker definitely very good at this. It was pretty great to hear one of the teachers say he wishes you guys could come monthly. To see kids crying then the message hit home...that's what I wanted to accomplish. I'll keep in contact and definitely let everyone know about you guys."*

**Crystal Sanford, Parent  
Worsley PS, Wasaga Beach**

*"They were informative and honest and I feel that by the facilitators putting that out there it was easy for the youth to relate and in return share their own experiences with the group. The facilitators made for a positive experience all around and since the YouthSpeak workshop the group appeared to be more comfortable with themselves and each other. I believe that what YouthSpeak is doing is great."*

**Matt Maracle, Special Projects Coordinator Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres**

*"I was at the morning assembly and it was amazing. The team was powerful and touching, and seeing them share their vulnerability and victories gave many of our students the capacity to share their own voice as well. We had a follow-up lunch two days later where kids participated in a "self-talk" session in a more intimate setting to expand upon their thoughts and strategies as they relate to various mental health related issues. I know having the positive example from YouthSpeak made them that much more courageous during that session. Thank you to you and the whole team."*

**Maria Maccarone, Guidance Department, Barrie Central Collegiate**

*"Thank you so much for providing such excellent speakers!!!! Their life stories were very moving and the youth were encouraged by their recovery and their honest/open dialogue on their current struggles and effective coping skills. The youth had many questions and were very comfortable talking with both speakers. They were simply AMAZINGLY strong as they have overcome such significant challenges e.g. anorexia, bullying, negative body image, drugs and alcohol addiction."*

**Mary Ann Cunningham, Children Services Worker, Durham Children's Aid Society**

*"Listening to such authentic & powerful stories is so impactful to our students. YouthSpeak is fulfilling a very important role in school communities by letting young people know there is hope and care. Their voices all matter!"*

**Aline Daniel, VP Richmond Hill HS**

*"Katie and Will, thank you very much for coming to Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre today and sharing your lived experience with the Mental Health and Addiction Program inter-professional team. Your stories are powerful and you both articulated your messages with compassion, insight and yes Katie, awe inspiring! I think it is important for us as professionals working in this field to hear from you that your healing process is a journey. We know this, and yet it can be hard at times when we see individuals over the years come and go in their journey wondering if we make a difference at all. I learned early on that we "plant seeds" and the clients are the experts and you certainly reminded all of us of that today. I also heard how key it was and is, that as professionals we have a positive attitude and great energy that fuels your healing. Thanks Will for your "willing2change" stairwell story, I will always remember that! And to you Katie for seeing that you can pick up that giant boulder, hug it and love yourself!"*

**Crystal Bell, Manager, Mental Health Outpatient Services,  
Mental Health and Addiction Program, Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre, Barrie**

*"I really related my own life to the speaker's stories since I am dealing with similar issues. Having them at the school was amazing and inspired me to get help."*

**York Region Student**

*"At the recent Ontario Academic Advising Professionals (OAAP) Conference on June 26, three young women from YouthSpeak came to share their story with Advisors. I was running the conference, so unfortunately didn't hear them speak at their roundtable, but the feedback on how powerful their message was is the talk of the conference."*

**Devon Hutchinson , BES, Academic Advisor University of Waterloo**

*"The feedback from students and staff was that the presentation, presenters and activities were absolutely spot on! Amazing engagement of the material and age appropriate (relatable). During class discussions students seem to have a greater understanding of how the outside of a person is what we choose to show people and the inside is a completely different story – their level of empathy for others and their personal story was definitely elevated. We would love to have you back again next year!"*

**Litsa Antoniou, Teacher, Charlton PS, Richmond Hill**

*"I have never attended a school - wide assembly where the audience was as captivated as they were in listening to these moving stories of personal struggles and journeys."*

**Grace Cantarutti, Department Head of Guidance, Cardinal Carter CHS, Aurora**

*"I am speechless today! I had to email you to let you know that the 4 speakers you sent us blew me away! I was so proud of them and was overwhelmed with emotions! Our students and staff were in awe of how brave they were to share their stories and how articulate they were. Words cannot express my gratitude and the emotional roller coaster I was on today! Can you please connect with them and let them know that they are incredible young adults who have reminded that compassion, passion and strength will shine through when one strives to be the best they can be! They have reminded that we can change the lives of people we connect with just by sharing our own story! They will never be forgotten and I wish them all the best!"*

**Anna Bruno, Pierre Burton PS, Woodbridge**

*"Thank you SO much for all your messages and patience. I can't thank you and your team enough for yesterday. The students and staff were very moved by Eleanor and Matthew's stories and Joanne has such great energy. The benefits of your presentations far exceeded what we had hoped for. Even last night and this morning I am hearing such wonderful stories from staff and students (as well as a few parents) who appreciated the candid and raw emotions shared as well as the tips and support your team offered when answering questions at the end of the presentations."*

**Michelle Backus, Teacher, Haliburton SS**

*"Thank you for 2 amazing sessions today at Sam Sherratt PS. Roxy, Shawn and Matt were equally as inspiring- sharing their personal stories unplugged. But most importantly, they shared how they connected with people to get help. Joanne, you nailed it - especially the quote "hurt people, hurt people". When I know speakers empower is when a group of girls who have huge issues with anxiety approached the social worker and sang your praises grateful that not only did you tell your story but they get now that they are not alone in their journey. They want to continue the conversation- and want to plan activities for mental health week in April. Thank you so much- again- for sharing, and making a difference in our world!"*

**Karen Must, Vice Principal, Sam Sherratt PS, Milton**

*"I expected that the program would be powerful, as I heard YouthSpeak at the Youth Voice conference. However, I was blown away by the response of our students; they actively participated in the conversations and truly appreciated the courage of the speakers to share their stories. The students continue to thank us for having YouthSpeak come to the school and they have expressed interest in bringing their parents to the parent session."*

**Marisa Benakis, Teacher, St. Jerome, Aurora**

*"Had the pleasure of participating in the YouthSpeak presentation at St. Jerome tonight. Thank you. You guys are truly inspirational. Both young presenters touched my heart in ways I can't even find the words to express. I left feeling empowered and with a better understanding of what my daughter feels and a renewed sense of hope. Such an amazing organization. Together we can break through the stigma and overcome. Thank you"*

**Parent, St. Jerome, Aurora**

*"Students commented that YouthSpeak was one of their most beneficial parts of the days. We have seen an increase in students asking for help following the conference, which included the assembly."*

**Tanya-Lynn Paul, Department Head - Social Science and the Humanities: Family Studies, Thornlea Secondary School**

*"I've had several students so moved, that they are going back to their clinical placements, and looking at ways to engage youth and mental health. I have noticed increased empathy, awareness and understanding relating to youth mental health. I've also had a few students so impacted with the workshop, it brought up old feelings they've experienced in their own lives. Overall, the students found the workshop to be valuable, impactful, engaging and eye opening."*

**Monica Gola RN MN CPMHN(c), School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University**

*"The best talk I have ever heard. Very brave and inspiring. I have learned a lot"*

**Josephine, York University student**

*"The Legacy Conference is a leadership initiative that Cardinal Carter Catholic High School hosts yearly on a Saturday in October. Over the last ten years, YouthSpeak presenters have spoken at our conference and have had a positive impact on our young leaders. Time and time again students come to me saying that the Youth Speak presenters are what they connect to the most. When asked for feedback, our leaders tell us that the YouthSpeak presenters are often one of the best things about our conference. Students feel empowered by the messages of hope that come after the difficult situations YouthSpeak presenters face. Many of our leaders said they felt less alone and inspired by YouthSpeak. Some of our students have gone on to be speakers at Youth Speak. This is a testament to the lasting power of YouthSpeak's message, that from the ruin, transformation is possible."*

**Silvana Pasquariello, Arts Head/Legacy Chair, Cardinal Carter Catholic High School**

*"I am sure you reached many students who are hesitant to speak up for themselves and ask for help. Your stories and advice are heart-warming. You are making a difference in a big way!"*

**Pat Weismiller, Guidance Vaughan SS**

*"I wanted to send an email to say how wonderful ALL the speakers were. What a tremendous amount of courage to get up and share their stories!! I was truly touched by each of their stories and I have already had many teachers come to me to share many positive comments about the speakers and their messages. Our students were very engaged and each grade will be continuing the discussions in their classrooms with follow up activities. Thank you so much for coming to our school."*

**Kim Moses, ESL Teacher, Trillium Woods P.S., Richmond Hill**

*"I am so proud of all your speakers and staff today - I heard nothing but praise and people being so impressed - job well done!!"*

**Jackie Glendenning, SHSM Coordinator & Teacher, Maple HS**

*"The Rogers PS students rated your program #1 out of all the programs they had at the school that year...no surprise there, you guys are amazing!!!"*

**Lee-Ann Smith, CYW, Rogers PS, Newmarket**