

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

Ontario Justice Education Network



Executive Director's Message



Kristy Pagnutti

Executive Director, OJEN

My first full year as Executive Director of the Ontario Justice Education Network was a rewarding one. OJEN continues to grow and innovate as we carry out our province-wide mandate to develop and deliver educational tools to introduce young people to the justice system, help them understand the law, and build their capacity to manage the legal issues that may arise in their lives.

Every year, thousands of youth across Ontario participate in and benefit from OJEN's justice education initiatives. We not only work with students and their teachers, but also partner with community organizations, after-school groups, and summer programs in order to meet young people where they are.

OJEN's approach to justice education is not simply about providing youth with information about the law; our programs create space for a dialogue between the justice sector and the community. While justice sector volunteers share their legal knowledge and experience, youth participants in turn share their lived experiences and knowledge of their communities. Both volunteers and youth participants have an opportunity to challenge their assumptions of one another and to build better relationships.

In this year's annual report, we highlight some programs and accomplishments that align with the priorities established in the strategic plan approved by OJEN's Board of Directors in 2022. You will hear directly from some of the volunteers who make these initiatives possible.

On behalf of OJEN's staff, I thank our volunteers for their tireless dedication to youth justice education. We are also indebted to our funders, donors, and of course our Board of Directors. Thank you all for your contributions to such a productive year. We are proud of what we have accomplished and are excited to continue to meet the educational needs of Ontario's youth.

How justice education happened in 2024...



Courthouse visits

Approximately 20,000 students from 355 schools visited local courthouses.



Classroom visits

Legal professionals visited 40 schools engaging with approximately 1,900 students.



OBA-OJEN Competitive Mock Trials (OOCMT)

180 teams and over 1,800 high school students participated in local OOCMT tournaments.



Law Syrup podcast

The first 8 episodes were downloaded approximately 1,600 times.



Public Legal Education & information for racialized youth

More than 200 racialized youth attended 14 programs (104 sessions).



Tout droit vers de droit (Pilot program)

More than 130 Black and racialized middle school students attended 3 programs (9 sessions).



Braiding Diversity into Justice & Futures in Justice

More than 200 youth attended 6 programs delivered by local committees.



Professional Development for educators

Over 200 educators attended 7 PD workshops or law institutes.

Engage youth directly to increase the diversity of youth served

Law Syrup Podcast

Law Syrup is a co-production between OJEN and former Justice Education Fellow and current lawyer at Torkin Manes LLP, Herman Wong. Each one-hour episode features expert guests discussing a wide range of Canadian legal issues in an engaging, conversational format. Each episode is accompanied by a teacher's guide that includes suggested classroom activities, discussion questions, and links to additional resources.

Connecting with a broader youth audience means finding new ways to deliver Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI). Law Syrup allows us to connect directly with young people, regardless of where they live or whether they are attending school or participating in community-based programs.



“ Law Syrup is about creating conversations about our legal system in a casual, accessible environment. It’s about taking what might seem like complex topics and breaking them down in digestible ways which anyone of any age can understand and learn from.

My goal has always been to spark someone’s curiosity with every episode. If a listener is motivated to Google a topic or a person that was mentioned on the show to learn more about it, then I’ve achieved what I’ve set out to do.

I find it really rewarding to work on a project like Law Syrup that combines my experience in journalism school and my law degree. The feedback from listeners so far has also been super humbling and I’m glad that so many people have found this show to be both fun and educational at the same time.”



Herman Wong

Lawyer Volunteer/Co-producer - Law Syrup Podcast

Engage youth directly to increase the diversity of youth served

Yes We Can / Tout droit vers le droit

With Yes We Can / Tout droit vers le droit, OJEN reaches beyond our traditional high school audience to students in grades 7 and 8. This career modelling program, delivered in both English and French, gives Black and racialized students confidence that a career in law is not just attainable, but realistic. Students learn about legal careers through games, presentations, and Q&A sessions with visiting justice sector volunteers. The program also includes historical discussions on trailblazing Black and racialized individuals and their importance for Canadian legal history. Tout droit vers le droit also explores the unique intersections between the French language and the law in Canada. By connecting them with legal professionals who look like them and share similar backgrounds, students can challenge stereotypes and assumptions they might have about lawyers and other law professionals.





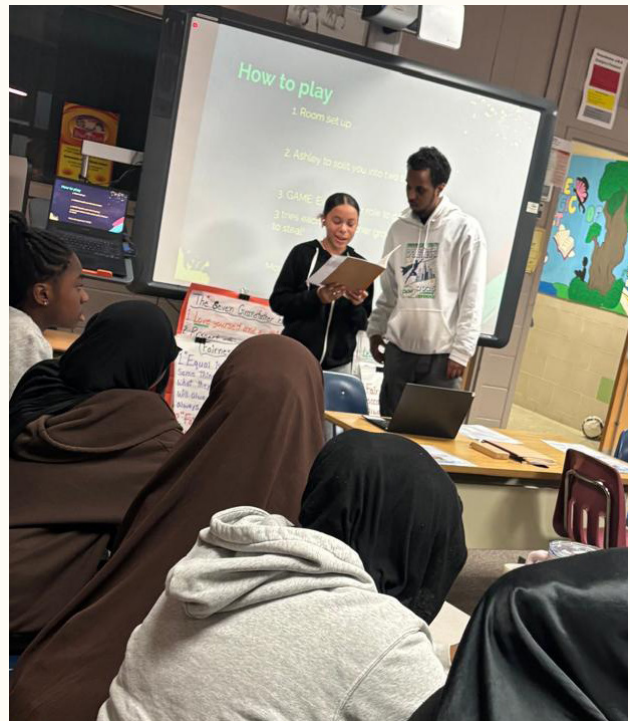
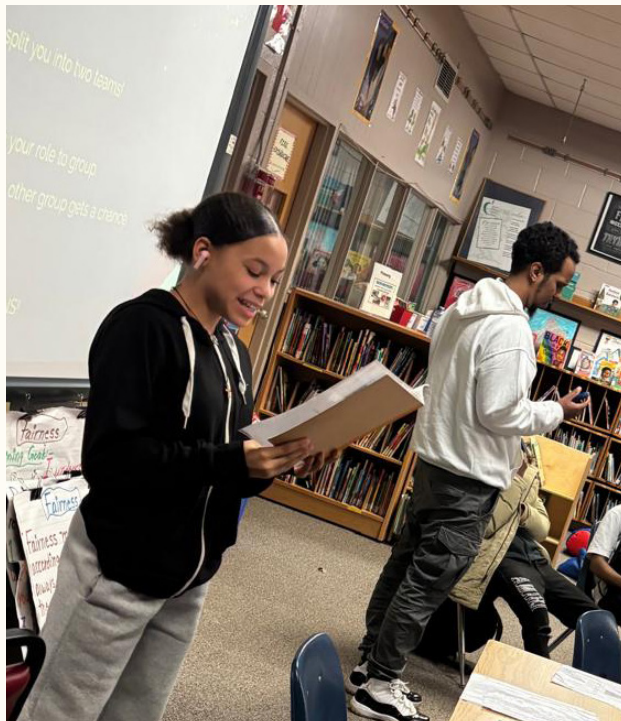
Nadine Tawdy

Lawyer volunteer -
Tout droit vers le droit

“ I think this program highlights a lot of important issues and topics surrounding diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. It also allows students who may not have a lawyer in the family to have access to someone they can ask questions to and hear firsthand what it's like to practice law as a person from a minority background and to see that it is possible.

The students gained a broad understanding and overview of what it means to be a lawyer and why French is particularly seen as an asset in the practice of law. They gained an understanding about the requirements of becoming a lawyer and the steps they would have to take. They also had the benefit of knowing and seeing that coming from a minority background should never hold you back, although the profession is still underrepresented by the BIPOC community.

I had a great time volunteering for this program and meeting so many keen students who are interested in law. I thought it was a very fulfilling experience and I would definitely do it again.”



PLEI for Racialized Youth

OJEN's Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) programming engages racialized youth and their trusted intermediaries across Ontario through culturally relevant, and responsive programs. Each program is tailored to the unique needs of the participants. Using scenarios, games and experiential activities, the program employs a collaborative, interactive, dialogue-based approach. With support from Knowledge Keepers and community partners, participants explore topics that address law-related challenges such as housing, employment, consumer debt protection, and human rights. Youth Leadership Team members play a key role in program design and delivery. Their age and similar lived experience help make programs relevant to the audience and create an environment where youth feel comfortable expressing themselves.





Andre Mandela Lopez

Youth Leadership
Team member

“It’s hard for a lot of youth in these communities to look up [legal information] online or even go to a regular legal professional. The legal system can be very confusing and intimidating. But the youth know that they’re safe with us to ask any questions that they have. We understand the culture of these youth. A lot of the [Youth Leadership Team] come from the same lived experience as these youth. Seeing people that look like them in these positions teaching them is a huge thing. That’s super important and unique to this program.”



Brandon Roberts

Youth Leadership
Team member

“Building relationships and getting to know the youth is really cool. I think [the program] is super beneficial because, with the information they receive, they know how to navigate the outside world. Whether it’s dealing with police or dealing with landlords, they have an understanding because they’ve acted it out [through scenarios]. They can transfer that information to a friend or to a parent or just use it themselves. I’ve definitely learned a lot. Now, like the kids, I’m able to do exactly the same thing. I can be that bridge for my friends in terms of making sure they have the knowledge that they need. I’m super proud to say that I can help.”

Futures in Justice

The Futures in Justice program introduces young people, who might not otherwise have connections with legal professionals, to a variety of careers in law. Braiding Diversity into Justice was developed by the Waterloo OJEN Committee in 2018 as a full day activity for racialized or marginalized youth who identify as women, between the ages of 16 and 20. Since then, other OJEN committees throughout the province have delivered the program, tailoring it to the unique needs and interests of youth in their communities. It has been adapted for French-speaking, racialized and Indigenous youth of all genders. Whenever possible, legal volunteers are recruited from similar backgrounds to the youth audience, encouraging participants to “see themselves in a law career”.





Kaisa Zatti

Volunteer - Trial Coordinator,
Thunder Bay & Satellites

“ It is absolutely important to customize the program to the unique needs of participants. Since our city and our region has a high Indigenous population, we reached out to a guidance counsellor at Dennis Franklin Cromarty, which is our local First Nations high school that educates students from remote communities. As part of our event, we were able to spend time in our Indigenous Peoples courtroom, which is a stunning round room. Working with Nookiiwin Tribal Council, we were able to hold a mock Restorative Justice circle.

It’s incredibly fulfilling seeing the students enjoy themselves, engage with the committee and volunteers, and being able to provide a safe space to do all of that. All of our volunteers continue to return year after year, because they also love talking with the students. As a mother of teenagers myself, I really get inspired listening to our youth talk about what inspires them, what motivates them, and what they are hopeful for.”



OJEN Awards 2024

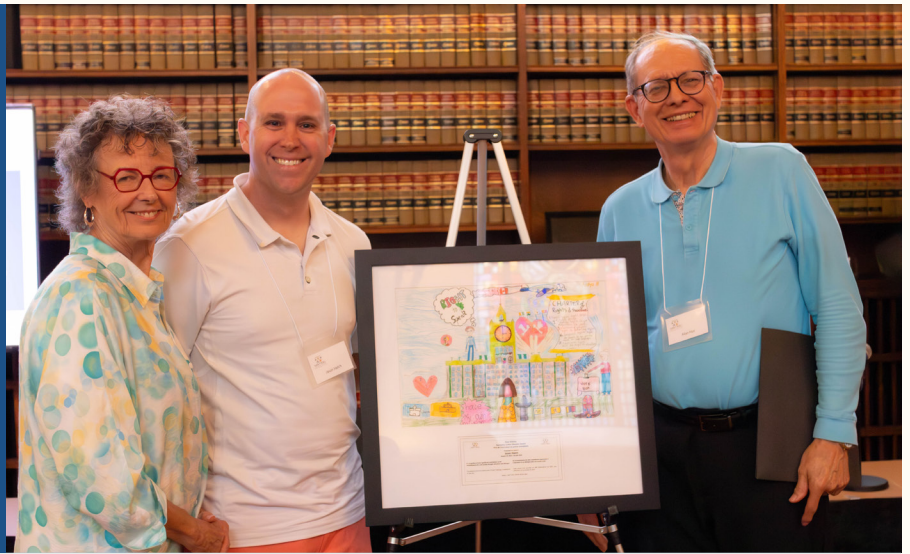


Chief Justices' Award

Established by the three Chief Justices, this annual award recognizes individuals who have made exceptional contributions in promoting public understanding, education and dialogue in support of a responsive and inclusive justice system.

The PROSE Writing Team is the 2024 recipient, seen here with the Chief Justices of the Ontario Courts. L to R: Constable Kelsie Annaert, Constable Abigail Whitenect, Constable Andrew Gamble, Hon. Geoffrey B. Morawetz, Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Justice, Hon. Michael H. Tulloch, Chief Justice of Ontario and the Court of Appeal for Ontario, Hon. Sharon M. Nicklas, Chief Justice of the Ontario Court of Justice, Secondary Teacher Meghan Cameron, PROSE Liaison Karen Edgar, Secondary Program Coordinator Jason Hall.

Hux-Kiteley Exemplary Justice Educator Award



Named after two of the members of OJEN's original Board of Directors: Allan Hux and The Honourable Fran Kiteley, this annual award recognizes an educator in the province of Ontario who has demonstrated exceptional leadership in justice education.

Jason Hatch, a law teacher at Strathroy District Collegiate Institute in the Thames Valley District School Board is the recipient of the 2024 award. He is recognized for his significant impact on the growth and development of justice education in the London area.

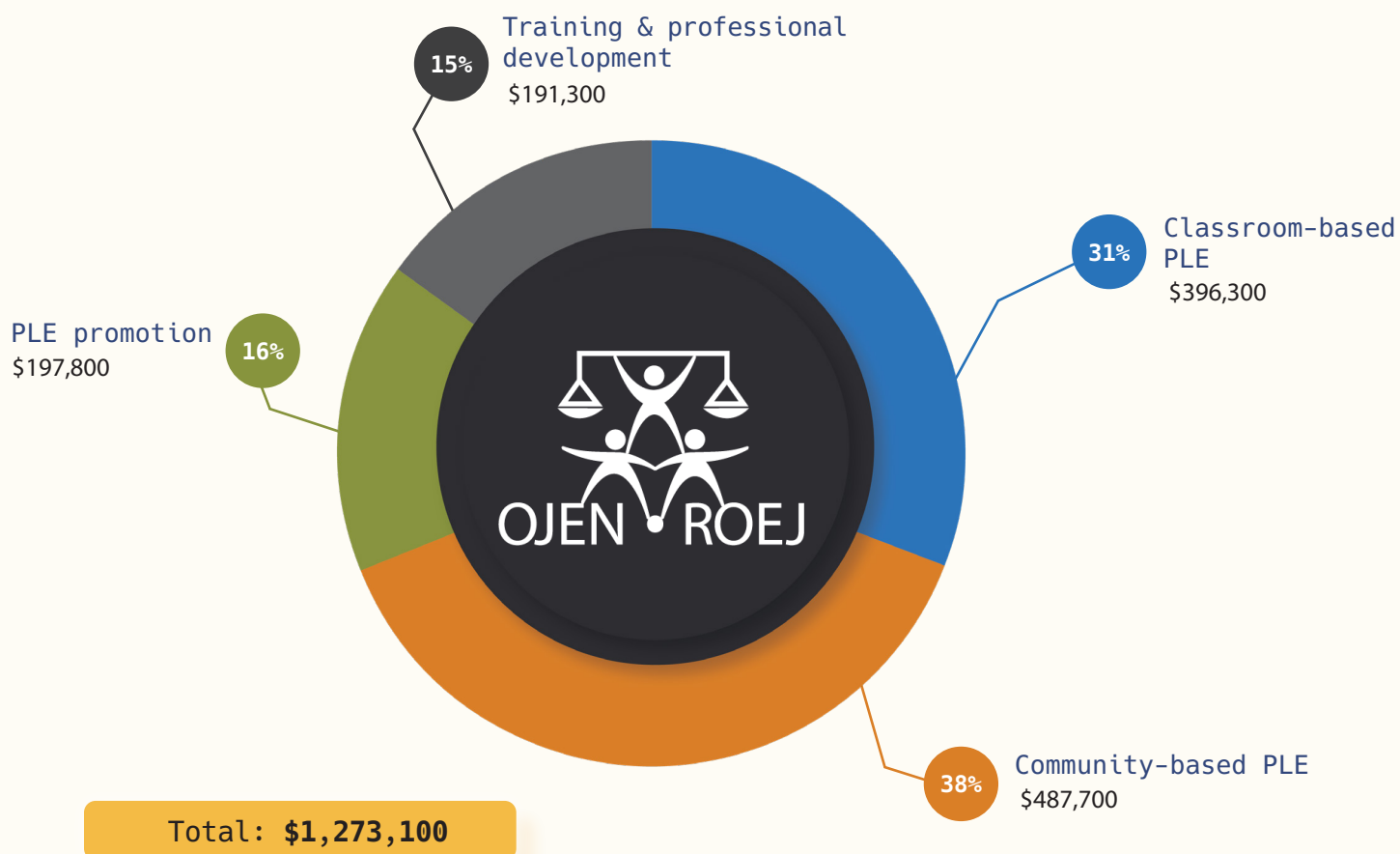


Tate Herbert Memorial Post-Secondary Volunteer Award

This annual award commemorates the life of Tate Herbert. It recognizes a post-secondary student volunteer who has exceeded expectations and made a significant contribution to OJEN's justice education initiatives.

Fatima Kaalim is the recipient of the 2024 award. As Justice Education Fellow from the Paralegal program at George Brown College, in addition to delivering classroom workshops, she developed resources, flyers, and materials for youth, for current and future Fellows to use in their presentations.

How we spent our funding in 2024



Funders



As a charitable, not-for-profit organization, OJEN is funded by grants and contributions from: The Law Foundation of Ontario, the Department of Justice Canada, the Ontario Bar Association and the Ontario Bar Association Foundation.

2024 Donors

As a not-for-profit, charitable organization, donations are extremely important to us. Unlike project funding that is tied to specific activities, individual donations can be directed to areas where it is needed most. Donations allow us to respond to unexpected circumstances and requests for programs that would otherwise not be possible.

Champion \$5000 - 15000

Gloria Epstein

Allan Hux

Russ Martin

Anne Molloy

Ashley Pierrepont

Isabel Rodriguez

Thel M Simpson

Steven Skalitzky

Lorie Vogels

Riley Vogels

Advocate \$1000 - 4999

Breese Davies

Edward and Ann Herbert

Katrina Mulligan

Paterson Smith Family
Foundation at
Toronto Foundation

Supporter \$100 - 249

Gary Bond

Luis Filipe

Susan Goddard

Frances Kiteley

Brian Lennox

Derrek Longhurst

Henry Longhurst

Glenn McKenney

Jacqueline Palumbo

Friend \$20 - 99

Deborah Antenore

Kevin Feheley

Brittany Quinn

Family \$250 - 999

Elvio Del Zotto

Jennifer Gold

We also thank the donors and runners who supported OJEN's participation in the 2024 Toronto Waterfront Marathon.

Charitable registration number: 85548 9134 RR0001

OJEN Staff

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appointee of the Ontario Court of Justice

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appointee of OJEN

Zahra Taseer
appointee of the Law Foundation of Ontario

The Hon. Julie Thorburn
appointee of the Court of Appeal for Ontario

Diane Vautour
appointee of OJEN



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Visit www.ojen.ca to subscribe to our mailing list and find out more about us.



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