



SPRING 2025

Your spring edition of *The Path* is here. You'll find a story of growth and giving back, a reflection on 20 years of OK2BME, and more!

May is Mental Health Awareness Month —  
let's take a moment to care for ourselves and each other.

May 1st marks the start of Mental Health Awareness Month – a time to pause, reflect, and consider ways you can strengthen your wellbeing. We hope you'll begin the month by setting positive, actionable intentions that can boost your mental health. Steps like practicing mindfulness, prioritizing rest and sleep, cultivating gratitude, and embracing self-compassion can be part of your journey. Follow us on social media as we continue this important conversation.

## Rooted in Care, Growing With Pride

A Look Back on 20 Bold Years of OK2BME

Look inside to  
see the supports  
OK2BME offers



**What was happening 20 years ago, in 2005?** Mariah Carey was at the top of the music charts; YouTube launched; and Marriage Equality became law in Canada. It was also the year Camino (KW Counselling Services at the time) and Family and Children's Services came together to create something bold: **OK2BME, a safe, affirming program for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and their families.**

The program is rooted in the belief that every person deserves to feel seen, heard, and supported. Through OK2BME, queer and trans individuals and their families can find a place where they belong, knowing they are celebrated just as they are.

Twenty years later, the need has evolved, and this work is still vital. OK2BME has grown from counselling support and one small youth group to a multi-dimensional program of support and connection.



**OK2BME provides support, education, and advocacy for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in Waterloo Region through...**

## Youth Groups

Weekly spaces where 2SLGBTQIA+ youth aged 12-18, connect with peers and share experiences, all within a safe, welcoming environment where their wellbeing and mental health are supported.

## Counselling Services For All Ages

Confidential, affirming mental health support for 2SLGBTQIA+ children, youth, adults, and their families.

## Educational Workshops & Community Training

Training sessions and workshops for schools, workplaces, and community organizations to foster supportive environments where 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals can thrive.



## OK2BME's message has always been clear: It's okay to be yourself!

Weekly youth groups, counselling services, and keystone events such as Pride Prom and the GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance) Conference continue to positively impact hundreds of people in this community. Thank you to community connections who help these events be the joyful, affirming spaces that they are!

Throughout the years, workshops and educational initiatives have focused on strengthening the community's ability to support and nurture 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, including youth and their families.

Twenty years ago, the community saw a need and we stepped forward. We are just as committed now as we were then to working toward a world where everyone is not only safe to be themselves, but is celebrated!

## Follow Along

We'll be celebrating OK2BME's 20th anniversary all year long. Keep up with events, stories, and more by following [@caminowellbeing](#) and [@ok2bmeca](#) on social media!





# From Participant to Program Support: Isabella's Camino Journey Comes Full Circle

Even under the best circumstances, parenting can be challenging. For young parents, the journey often comes with added hurdles—like housing and financial instability, mental health concerns, discrimination, and limited family or social support. With so much to navigate, having a safe place to land is essential.

At the heart of Camino's Pregnant and Parenting Youth (PPY) Program is trust—something Isabella\* discovered when she first connected with us in early 2020. Encouraged by a friend, she visited Camino unsure of what to expect. A warm welcome quickly changed that. She realized it was a place to learn, grow, and feel supported.

That first visit led to enrolling in Camino's Education Community Partnership Program, where young parents can earn school credits at their own pace. With childminding on-site, Isabella could focus on her education while parenting. The program supports each participant's unique needs—whether through therapy, life skills, or simply time to build relationships.

When home life became difficult, Isabella and her daughter moved into Camino's supportive housing in Cambridge. Despite COVID restrictions, she found comfort in baby groups, outdoor play, and meaningful connections. **"It really started to feel like a home," she says. "Somewhere I could be heard, encouraged, and just be myself."**

After graduating in 2021, Isabella remained connected to Camino. A year later, she began

working in housekeeping while completing her Educational Assistant diploma. After graduation, she moved into a new role as a Direct Care Worker in Camino's Day Program. She now supports other young parents through groups and workshops and helped develop a March Break program focused on play-based learning. **"We had over 50 participants that week, including some new to Camino," she says. "It was so special to see families engaging, learning, and having fun together."**

While she once considered becoming a teacher, Isabella has found purpose in her current role. **"Because of my own experience and my age, I can really connect with participants here," she says. "They find comfort and inspiration in my stories. I'm an example of someone like them who has completed high school, gone onto college, and am now in my own place – all while being a young, single parent."**

Her daughter is now a thriving kindergartener, and Isabella continues to grow, both personally and professionally.

**"I don't think I'd be the parent or person I am without Camino," she says. "Even now as an employee, I still feel the support. It really is a community—and there's always a door open."**

*\*Name changed to respect privacy*

# Your Benefits at Work: Support for You, Support for Your Community

**What if using your benefits could support your own wellbeing – and someone else's, too?** Our counselling is open to everyone — whether you're looking for short-term support, ongoing therapy, or just a safe space to talk things through. And when you use your benefits at Camino, you're not taking a spot away from someone else. In fact, you're helping create more access.

Here is how: when you use your benefits or pay privately, you are helping make sure someone else – who can't afford to – still gets the support they need. It is care that pays forward, ensuring there's no wrong door to accessing wellbeing and mental health services.

We often hear: "Am I eligible?" or "Is this just for people who may have a financial barrier?"

**The answer is simple: anyone can access our services.** Whether you're navigating stress, grief, family challenges, or just feeling off, we're here to help.

Camino's team of trusted mental health professionals have a wide range of specialties and areas of focus. When you choose Camino, we're able to connect you with a counsellor who is most suited to your unique situation. This is another reason why Camino is a top choice for wellbeing and mental health support in Waterloo Region.

If you've been thinking about talking to someone or know someone who is, **check your benefits and reach out.** By caring for your own wellbeing, you're also helping to strengthen your community.

## Did You Know?



A monthly donation helps us plan for the future and expand our services.

Your ongoing gift in any amount - \$5, \$10, or \$15 a month – is an investment that makes brighter futures possible.

By becoming a Monthly Donor, you're helping to reduce administration costs, connecting even more people to the services that help them to thrive. **We hope you'll join us in opening the doors that help people realize their full potential!**

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