



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Ontario Justice Education Network

Executive Director's Message



The Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) experienced significant growth and transformation in 2023. Longstanding executive director, Jess Reekie, departed from us, but left a solid foundation to build on. We are deeply thankful for her commitment and vision, and look forward to continuing to work with her in her new role at Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO).

We continued to navigate the post-pandemic environment. With great excitement, our favourite programs, such as mock trials and the Summer Law Institute, returned in-person. We also developed new and innovative justice education programming.

At the same time, we progressed in our shift from creating content for youth (youth-focused) to creating content with youth (youth-centred). There are now even more meaningful opportunities for young people to develop skills, work with justice sector professionals, and create relevant and engaging content. This approach ensures our work reflects young people's priorities and is delivered in ways that resonate with them. In this year's annual report, we highlight the youth who have worked in a few of our successful programs. You will hear from OJEN's Youth Leadership Team members, and other youth directly.

OJEN's successes depended heavily on the contributions of tireless staff, committed volunteers, dedicated funders, and generous supporters. Similarly, we are indebted to our caring and committed board of directors, who collectively made navigating 2023 possible. Thank you all for a productive and rewarding year! We look forward to continuing our amazing work and achievements together.

Kristy Pagnutti

Executive Director

OJEN Staff

Jessica Reekie

Executive Director (Jan. - Mar.)

Kristy Pagnutti

Executive Director (Mar. - Dec.)

Raras Azzahra

Digital Communications Associate

Amelia Berot-Burns

Project Coordinator

Jean-Paul Bevilacqua

Program Developer and Legal Education Consultant

Rena Bruce

Finance & Administration Manager

Nadine Demoe

Communications Manager

Thomas Gallezot

Project Leader

Hanna Holmes

Program Manager

Enisoné Kadiri

Director of Outreach Programs

Eki Okungbowa

Project Officer

Nat Paul

Director of Educator Support (Jan.)

Bryn Rieger

Director of Educator Support (Feb. - Dec.)

Kassandra Thompson

Project Officer

Students and Interns

Crystal Binag

Project Officer

Valguena Morina

Project Intern

Apps for Justice Challenge Pilot Program

The Apps for Justice Challenge is the product of a partnership between OJEN and the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Law. It was piloted in 6 Ontario classrooms in the spring of 2023. The program explores access to justice issues through the lens of technology. Students work in teams to create a mock-up of an app or website that could help solve an access to justice barrier. Students have the option of presenting their apps at the Final Pitch for feedback and a chance to win the Challenge.

The program fosters critical thinking, research skills, and teamwork. It launches officially in 2024.

“ It has been wonderful to collaborate with OJEN and see material that we created at uOttawa be built upon and deployed in Ontario high school classrooms. And it has been absolutely amazing to see the concepts that participating high school students have developed. We face huge challenges in improving the public's access to justice, but it is so heartening to see the thoughtfulness and energy that these students demonstrate in tackling this issue.”

**Dr. Amy Salyzyn, Associate Professor,
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law**



Jazmine Yerbury

Student, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law

Participating in OJEN's Apps for Justice Challenge has been an incredibly enlightening and rewarding experience. Participating in this project has deepened my understanding of access to justice, honed my collaboration and communication skills, and reinforced the importance of leveraging technology for positive social impact. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such a meaningful initiative and look forward to seeing its continued success in empowering young people with legal knowledge and capabilities.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS FROM CLASSROOM PROGRAMMING

175 students participated in the Apps for Justice Challenge pilot

Justice sector volunteers engaged approximately **2,500** students in classroom visits and **22,570** students visited local courthouses

Approximately **1,300** students participated in **14** OBA-OJEN Competitive Mock Trial tournaments

Together 180

Together 180 (T180) was funded by the Department of Justice Canada's Youth Justice Fund and the Law Foundation of Ontario to support the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of youth in custody. This multi-session program was delivered to over 180 youth before concluding at the end of 2023.

Participants gained knowledge and skills to navigate post-custody challenges such as securing housing and employment. It provided them with reliable sources of public legal information and community support. It also facilitated connections between the youth and justice sector professionals that fostered empathy, understanding, and mutual respect.

“ The Together 180 and Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) programs have greatly benefitted the youth in offering practical life skills and knowledge as it relates to youth justice - while navigating human rights issues that greatly impact reintegration.”

Josh Torres, Associate Director of the Youth Services Bureau's Youth Justice Services Department - Ottawa



Andre Mandela Lopez
Youth Leadership Team member

It's important for youth to be given a voice and explore concepts often avoided in schools. This dialogue is necessary in our community.

I'm grateful to be a part of the healing process.

My favourite parts of the T180 program is what I learned from the youth and their unique experiences and perspectives, and the funny moments where we all couldn't stop laughing.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUTREACH PROGRAMMING

10 needs assessment consultations were conducted with community partners for our PLEI project for racialized youth

Over **530** youth built legal life skills and connected with legal professionals through OJEN outreach programming

24 paid positions created for youth in outreach programs

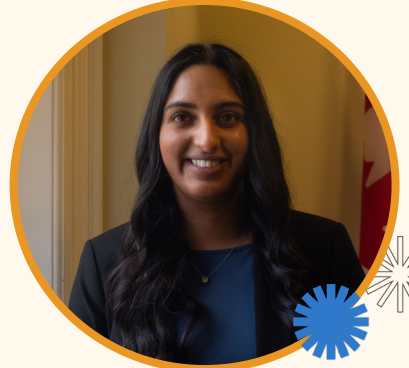
Youth leadership programs

OJEN provides youth with opportunities to learn and also to lead. Our youth-centred approach to justice education not only empowers youth with the knowledge and skill-building they receive through our programs. It also provides them with training and meaningful work experience to advance their educational and career pursuits.

Through work placements, our Justice Education Fellowship program, and Youth Leadership Team positions, youth contribute to all aspects of our work. The benefits are mutual. Working with youth connects us to the communities we serve and is a constant source of inspiration.

“ Having OJEN participate as an employer every year in Summer Jobs Program since the program began has made an incredible impact on the students we place there. They created an opportunity for our youth to have a safe space to experience their first job and helped them feel comfortable during the learning process. We look forward to continue working with OJEN to provide our students with valuable work experience.”

**Christina Rajkumar, Summer Program Coordinator,
Law in Action Within Schools**



Crystal Binag

Student, Bora Laskin Faculty of Law

As a student at Lakehead University's Bora Laskin Faculty of Law, I heard about OJEN's programs and applied for an internship. The following year, I returned as a Justice Education Fellows. My tasks ranged from reviewing OJEN classroom resources to ensure they were accurate and up-to-date to doing legal research for a new justice education program. I especially enjoyed facilitating workshops for youth. I now feel more confident in my public speaking and plain language skills.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS FROM OJEN YOUTH TRAINING PROGRAMS

10 students received OJEN Justice Education Fellowships and delivered programs to more than **600** high school students

10 Youth Leadership Team members worked with OJEN staff to design and deliver outreach programs

OJEN hosted **2** LAWS summer student placements, **1** college work place student and **3** summer students

PLEI for racialized youth

OJEN's newest program, PLEI for Racialized Youth, delivers culturally relevant public legal information for African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) youth and Indigenous youth living in urban communities. It addresses topics such as workplace problems, consumer and debt issues, police encounters, racial discrimination and human rights.

Throughout the multi-session program, youth learn about their rights, how to access legal help, and develop the legal life skills necessary to navigate legal issues they may encounter. Funded by the Department of Justice Canada's Justice Partnership and Innovation Program and the Law Foundation of Ontario, this program runs until 2026.

“ The OJEN program helped create a safe space for youth to discuss their fears, experience in the justice system and enhanced their knowledge. They all expressed how fun and informative the sessions were and are excited about participating in more! We look forward to continuing this much needed community program and partnership with OJEN.”

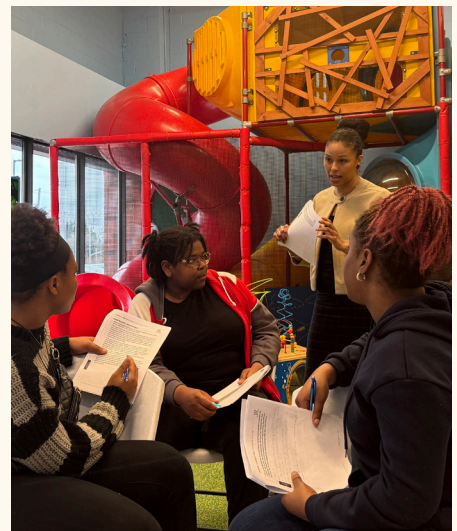
Stayce Grant, Program Director, Kidnetix Kidz Association



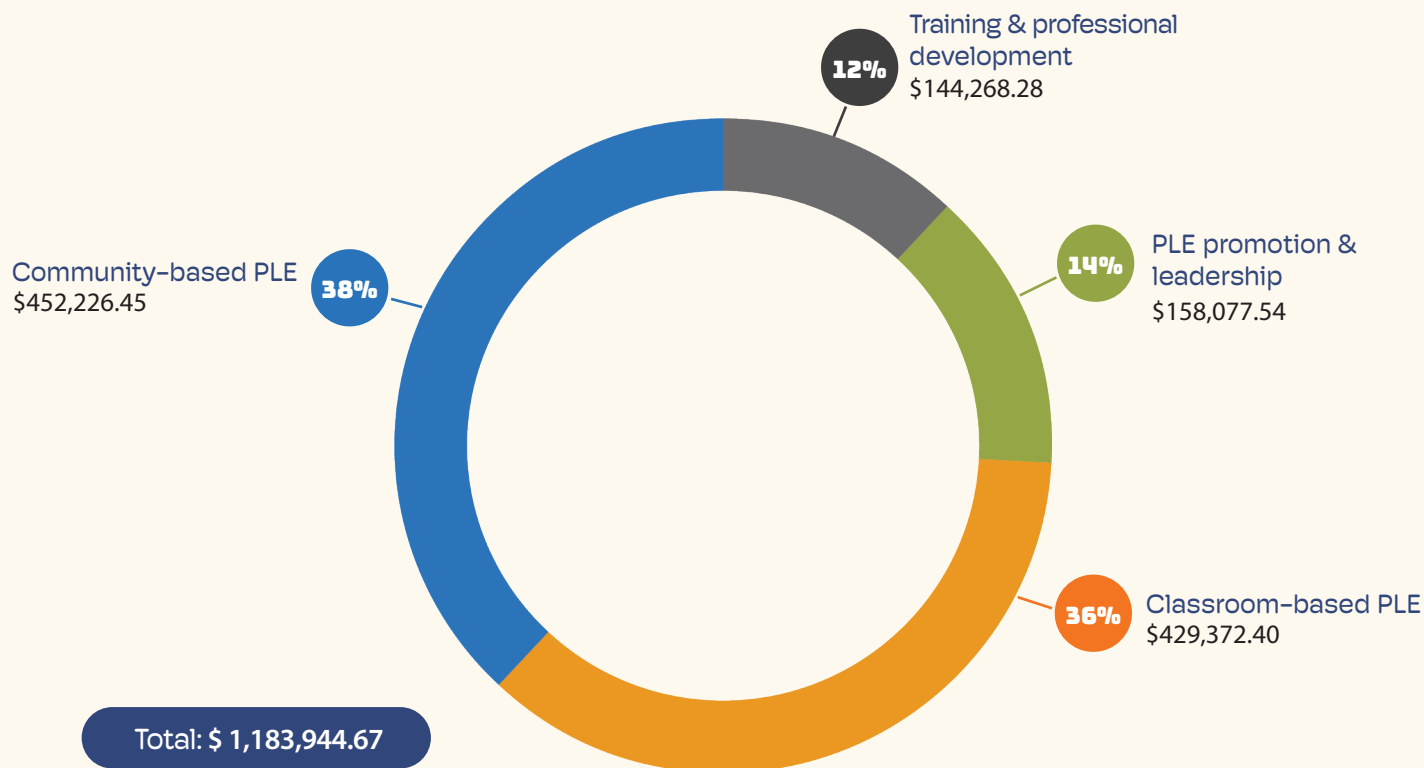
Ashanti Campbell
Local Youth Project Officer

Empowering youth with legal education supports is like giving them a key to unlock their potential and navigate the harsh complexities of the justice/legal system.

It's not [just] about understanding rights and legal policies but about fostering empowerment, resilience, and hope for a brighter and more successful future.



How we spent our funding in 2023



Charitable registration number: 85548 9134 RR0001

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.

Donations from individuals can be directed to programs that respond to an urgent need. We are grateful to:

[Donor list.](#)

Lerners LLP for their generous gift honouring the legacy of the Honourable George R. Strathy.

The Herbert family and donors to Tate's Tableaux. This annual evening of music and improv commemorates the life of Tate Herbert. Since it was established in 2014, Tate's Tableaux has raised nearly \$60,000 for OJEN!

Donors to the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon. OJEN entered this annual charity run for the first time in 2023. Thanks to the runners and donors who made it a great success.

OJEN Awards 2023

OJEN's annual awards honour outstanding leadership in justice education.

Chief Justices' Award

For exceptional contribution to promoting public understanding, education and dialogue in support of a responsive and inclusive justice system.

Sarah Pole

Director, Childhood Arrivals Support & Advocacy Program (CASA), Justice for Children and Youth

Hux-Kiteley Exemplary Justice Educator Award

To an educator in the province of Ontario who has demonstrated exceptional leadership in the area of justice education.

Luis Filipe

Teacher, Toronto District School Board

Tate Herbert Post-Secondary Volunteer Award

Recognizing a post-secondary student volunteer who has made significant contributions to OJEN's justice education initiatives.

Herman Wong

York University, Osgoode Hall Law School

Directors & Officers

John Adair

appointee of OJEN (Jan. - Nov.)

Emma Barz

appointee of Legal Aid Ontario (Jun. - Dec)

Simone Bern

appointee of Legal Aid Ontario (Jan. - May)

Marc Boissonneault

appointee of the Ministry of the Attorney General

Halime Celik

appointee of OJEN

The Hon. Breese Davies (Co-chair)

appointee of the Superior Court of Justice

Luis Filipe

appointee of OJEN (treasurer)

Aiman Flahat

appointee of Community Legal Education Ontario

Jennifer Gold

appointee of the Law Society of Ontario (Nov. - Dec.)

The Hon. Ferhan Javed

appointee of the Ontario Court of Justice

Leigh MacDonald (Co-chair)

appointee of the Ontario History & Social Science Teachers' Association

Geoff Pollock

appointee of the Law Society of Ontario (Jan. - Nov.)

The Hon. Julie Thorburn

appointee of the Court of Appeal for Ontario

Paul Saguil

appointee of the Law Foundation of Ontario

Diane Vautour

appointee of OJEN



Ontario Justice Education Network

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