

YWCA Niagara Region and Brock University

2023 PARTNERSHIP UPDATE



YWCA Niagara Region hosted the 2023 Niagara Leadership Summit for Women at Brock University, with Brock as presenting sponsor. Approximately 100 women and feminist leaders gathered to encourage and celebrate one another's efforts in the community.

After years of collaboration, Brock University and the YWCA Niagara Region formalized their partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Friday, March 4, 2022. The agreement between the two organizations represents a mutual goal of empowering local women and improving the lives of their families. This collaborative partnership reflects Brock's commitment to community engagement, knowledge mobilization, experiential learning, and research to increase support for women in the Niagara region and their families.

Projects and Initiatives in 2023

YWCA Niagara Region and Brock University spent the year sharing their expertise and resources for the mutual benefit of one another. The two organizations created various research, service, and experiential learning opportunities that support the social and economic well-being of women and their families. In this first full year of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations, the efforts were able to grow even greater, continuing to empower local women and improving the lives of their families together.

Research

Brock and YWCA Niagara Region continued to collaborate on community-engaged research in 2023. This year's activities included additional knowledge mobilization and impact efforts on 2022's research endeavours related to affordable housing for women in Niagara. Additional activities included:

Homeless Children's Experiences of Living in Transitional Housing

- Initiative led by Professor Rebecca Raby and Professor Christine Tardif- Williams from Brock's Department of Child and Youth Studies.
- Brock's Social Justice Research Institute worked to support the research grant led by Rebecca Raby to learn more about children's experiences in transitional housing, with research activities underway as of Spring 2023.
- This research grant funded project aims to learn about children's experiences in transitional housing and will be conducted until 2025.
- This research initiative involves two Brock Graduate students, one from the Master of Arts in Critical Sociology, and one PhD Candidate from the Department of Child and Youth Studies.
- This effort will enable researchers to learn about and share children's experiences in order to educate the public about children's homelessness, with the intended impact of bolstering support and funding for programs serving children experiencing homelessness, and refining policy and programming.

Service

YWCA Niagara Region and Brock University continued to support each other through acts of service in 2023, with the shared goal of improving the well-being and safety of women and children in the Niagara Region:

- Meaghan Rusnell (Interim Vice-President, External) completed her term as Directors on the YWCA Niagara Region's Board of Directors in 2023.
- Joanne Heritz (Assistant Professor, Political Science), and Shawna Chen (Associate Professor, Organizational Behaviour, Human Resources, Entrepreneurship & Ethics), and Katherine Keays (Office of Human Rights &

Equity Manager, Gender and Sexual Violence Intake) serve as Directors on the YWCA Niagara Region's Board of Directors.

- Brock students volunteered at two YWCA Niagara Region shelters as part of the Brock Cares Day of Service in September 2023.
- Brock employees volunteered with YWCA Niagara Region as part of National Volunteer Week in April 2023, supporting the community organization through landscaping.

Niagara Leadership Summit for Women

This annual event was sponsored and hosted by Brock University in 2023, through the University's Women in Leadership program lead by Faculty of Social Sciences Dean Ingrid Makus.

- The event brought together over 100 women and feminists of all genders to celebrate and encourage one another under the theme of Reunite, Recharge, and Recreate the Idea of Leadership.
- Brock community members conducted presentations and workshops on topics including "Using Multiple Intelligences to Reframe and Recreate Leadership" and "Moving Forward Backwards" where attendees learned about spotting the signs of burnout and prioritizing self-care in their careers.
- Community Experience Assistant student staff member in Brock's Student Life & Success office joined the YWCA Niagara Leadership Summit for Women planning committee as part of their paid work plan.
- Brock's Women in Leadership initiative was recognized at YWCA's 2023 Annual General Meeting with a YWCA Community Partnership Award, with honours being presented to Dean Ingrid Makus, founding member of Women in Leadership at Brock.

Student Experiential Learning

Student experiential learning provides unique opportunities for students at Brock to gain real world experience as a part of their studies. These experiences range from Co-Op placements, to career support, to work-integrated learning projects.

In 2023, the partnership between YWCA Niagara Region and Brock University included the following experiential learning efforts:

- In Communications 4F00, YWCA Niagara Region is a community partner with whom students can complete a minimum 120-hour practicum. One student completed this practicum opportunity, wherein they developed and executed a social media calendar for the YWCA's signature fundraiser, Coldest Night of the Year.
- In the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, a student placement was held with the YWCA Niagara Region, supporting the student's learning and YWCA's programming efforts.

- Two students, from Biochemistry and Psychology, conducted their Co-Ops with the TechGyrls program at YWCA Niagara Region. These students created and facilitated STEM education infrastructure and activities with youth facing housing barriers, developed and implemented community engagement efforts, and evaluated the program upon completion.

Next Steps

Brock University and YWCA Niagara Region will continue to work closely together towards mutually beneficial outcomes in 2024. Initiatives and potential collaborations are being explored to advance the partnership on an ongoing basis.