

Grad Speech

First of all, I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who made this program possible. To the Youth Workers, Angie and Josh, for your many hours of hard work. To Steve, for leading Wednesday workshop. To Mr. Burratini and Mr. Defoe from the school boards, and many others. This program wouldn't be possible without all of you.

This program taught me a lot of things. I learned a lot of new things, like resume writing and interview techniques. I learned skills through weekly workshops, such as stress management, conflict resolution, communication, Self-esteem, Teamwork, and motivation & positivity. We met once a week, to talk about these things, share our experiences at work, and generally have a good time playing ice breaker games or watching an episode of *The Office*.

But in complete seriousness, this program is a great asset to youth across the Region. As of 2011, the unemployment rate in Niagara was 9.2% while the national average was only 7.2%. This makes it harder than it already is for students who may lack experience or confidence in finding a first job. This program helps students find that job, which they may not have been able to find on their own. But, sadly, not everyone has this luxury. With 121 applicants to the program in Welland alone, only 51 of them were accepted. 3 different kids showed up to pre-employment training, without a phone call, "just in case" there was a spot for them, only to be sent away, just because there simply wasn't enough room.

INSERT TRANSITION SENTENCE HERE

This summer, I did my placement at Wendy's, on Niagara St. in Welland. It was a new experience for me, as I had never had a real job before this summer. But let me tell you, there was no time for being awkward. I walked in, and in the first five minutes, was handed a bag of fries, was showed how to cook them, and, as they say, the rest is history.

The last few months have been filled with little ups and downs, because trust me, I made my share of mistakes. But luckily for me, I had managers and co-workers who were more than happy to help. Whenever it came to scheduling, I was able to ask for any day, however many hours I wanted. It's only been two months, but it feels like I've been there forever.

At Wendy's, as part of your introductory training, you have to watch these short videos explaining some things about the company and what they stand for. Their Core Values not only apply to work, but to outside life as well. "Quality is our Recipe", which simply means, "don't cut corners". Integrity, which is really just being honest and respectful. Courtesy, which Dave explained as "Just being nice". "Profit Means growth" which basically means you get out what you put in.

The final core value is the one that got me thinking; “Give Something Back”. I thought to myself, what could I, a grade 11 student from Welland, possibly give back to my community? Then I realized, I can tell people about the experience I had here, in the John Howard Society’s Jobs For Youth Summer Co-op, and maybe some other kids will be able to share the same experiences I had next year, or the year after that.

The one thing I realized, and that I admire about this program, is that we’re all different. We all have different stories to tell. But the one thing we have in common is that we’re looking for work, and that’s exactly what the people and John Howard have helped us do. And I truly appreciate it.

In closing, I’d like to give one last thought. From Chris Gardner aka Will Smith in *The Pursuit of Happyness*. He says, “Don’t let nobody tell you that you can’t do something”. The world is out there, just waiting for you go out into it. Thankyou once again, and have a nice night.