

# KAITIE

## RESILIENCY PROGRAM

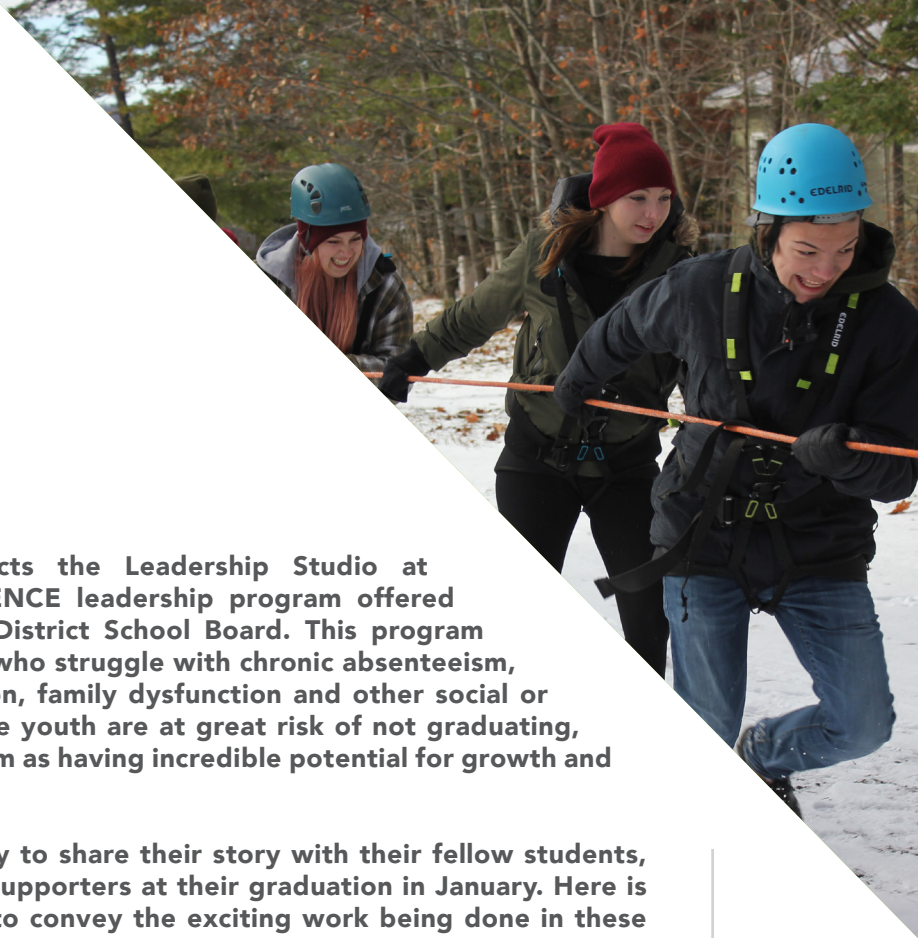
The Resiliency Program connects the Leadership Studio at Muskoka Woods with the CADENCE leadership program offered through Guelph's Upper Grand District School Board. This program works with high school students who struggle with chronic absenteeism, conventional classroom instruction, family dysfunction and other social or emotional challenges. While these youth are at great risk of not graduating, their teachers have identified them as having incredible potential for growth and development.

Each student had the opportunity to share their story with their fellow students, family members and community supporters at their graduation in January. Here is an excerpt from Kaitie's speech to convey the exciting work being done in these teens' lives through this program:

*"During my last semester at Cadence, I tried to convince myself I was of worth. Worthy of having a fulfilling life and being loved. After this semester, I believe those words. I never thought real change would ever happen for me. I always thought I was destined to live a life inside my head, alone and depressed. "How do you pick up the threads of an old life? How do you go on, when in your heart you begin to understand... there is no going back?" Those words Frodo Baggins said have always stuck with me. I've come to understand that we cannot change the past, we can only accept and move on in hopes for the future. Cadence showed me that the life I thought was carved into stone, was actually changeable.*

*I've become a totally different person since the beginning of Cadence. I never knew the potential I have or how strong I really am. I handed in work early, something I don't think I've done in five years. I challenged myself to show up everyday and make sure the work I handed in was good, not rushed. Cadence has given me the purpose I needed to move on with my life. I've learned how to push through hard times and remember there's another day. I think things through before I react, or at least most of the time.*

*My times at Muskoka Woods will stay with me forever. I'm usually scared of being away from home, but Muskoka Woods felt like a home itself. I've cried, laughed and fell in love with the people I have met in this class. They've helped me and encouraged me. The environment is accepting and sincere. When people say they care, they mean it. Being vulnerable has saved me. I broke down the walls surrounding my heart and let*



people in. I realized I had to feel at my lowest in order to reach the highest. Letting people know that scared girl inside really opened my eyes to the world and people, especially. I thought I would be mocked, but I was greeted with sweetness and support. Real change takes time and effort. Vulnerability was something I thought was holding me back, when I actually should have been embracing it this whole time.

Waking up early at Muskoka Woods to zipline on an empty stomach was an interesting experience for me. I freaked out and almost cried because I was so scared to step off the high platform. I felt like I was going to fall to my death. I stood up on that platform for a few minutes, people were encouraging me from below. Finally I closed my eyes and the instructor gave me a nudge off. I was sent sliding down the zipline and it was awesome. Thinking back on the whole experience, I've realized that, in life, you may need that terrifying little nudge of support. I know without my family, friends and especially the teachers pushing me to come to school, I don't think I would have shown up. The two semesters that changed my life here would have never had happened.

Leaving Cadence gives me this bittersweet feeling. It's prepared me for my future and to do things I never would have done. I don't think I would even be in school anymore if it weren't for this program. I'm going to miss Cadence, but I will carry everything I learned and all the amazing memories in my heart forever. I'm finally ready to face my reality, graduate at the end of next semester, and become a true adult.

Thank you to the Muskoka Woods staff for being so helpful and supportive to me during my time there. Thank you, Ellen, for being one of the strongest and sweetest ladies I've ever met."