





Who we are

The **Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)** is a charitable, non-profit, youth-focused public legal education organization. We create opportunities for young people in Ontario to learn about the law, build skills to manage legal problems, and meet people who work in the legal system. We want young people to feel comfortable and confident when dealing with the legal issues they face now, and in the future.

OJEN is committed to fostering diversity, a culture of respect, and the inclusion of all our stakeholders. To do this, we bring together legal professionals, educators, community workers and diverse groups of young people. Together, we plan and coordinate public legal education in schools and in community spaces. We engage in honest conversations about the legal system and its challenges. We encourage everyone to explore how power and privilege impact access to justice, to acknowledge systemic racism, and to work towards a more responsive and inclusive legal system for all Ontarians.

Making a difference: OJEN's theory of change

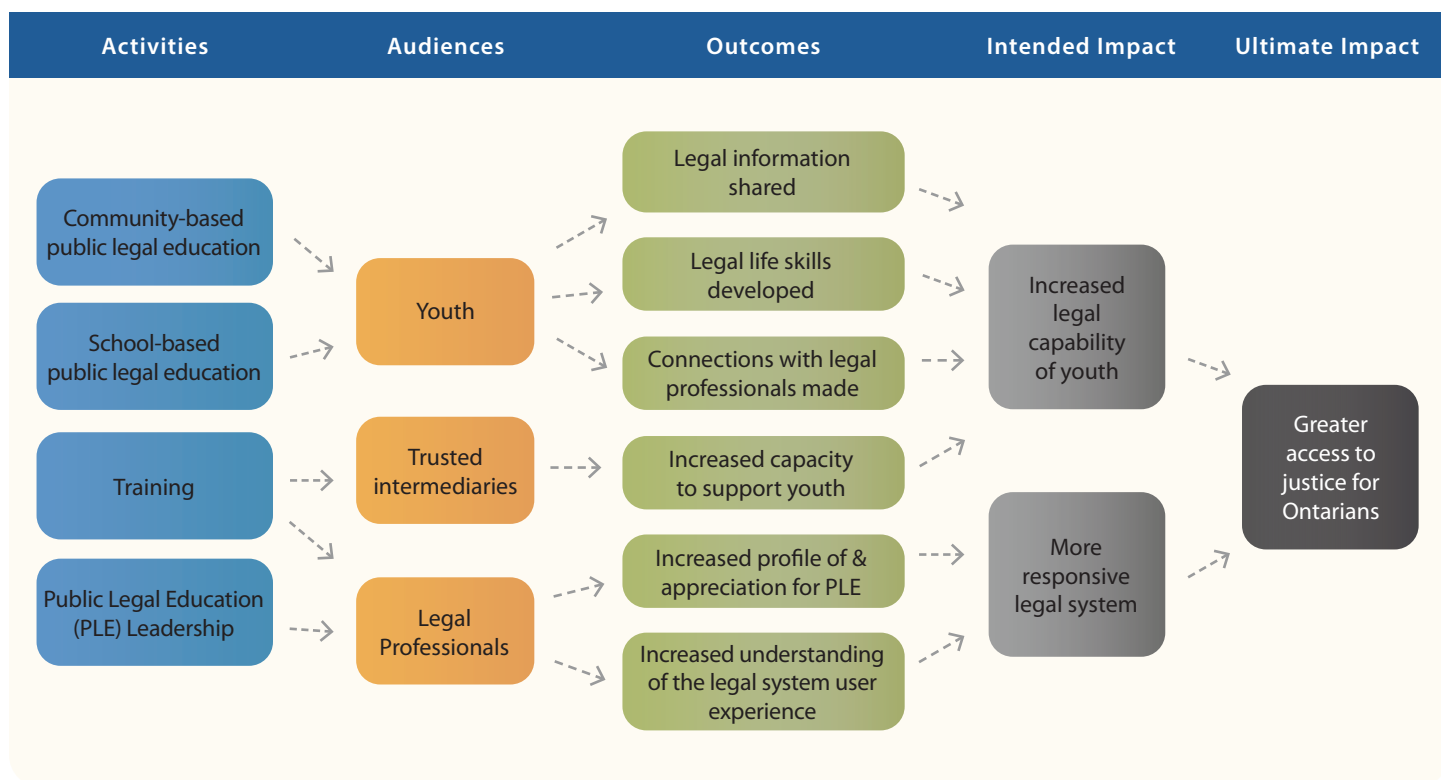
OJEN believes that building legal capability in young people is one of the most effective strategies for advancing access to justice. **Legal capability** is the measure of a person's ability to manage the legal aspects of everyday life. At OJEN, we talk about building legal capability by focusing on three core elements:

1. We **share information** about the law, legal processes and where to go to get help, so young people can make informed decisions;
2. We identify and encourage the **development of legal life skills** that help young people use legal information effectively; and
3. We **create connections** between young people and legal professionals, so young people can feel more comfortable and confident about accessing legal services

We also work with **trusted intermediaries** like teachers and youth workers. These adults support young people and have relationships of trust with them. By working with trusted intermediaries and supporting their work with young people, we are able to reach a wider youth audience in Ontario.

We rely on **legal professionals** like lawyers, judges, court staff and police officers to volunteer their time and share their knowledge with young people and their trusted intermediaries. Involving legal professionals in our programs also builds connections between them and the communities in which they work. We create opportunities for legal professionals to listen and learn from people who are involved with the legal system and consider how they can improve access to justice for Ontarians.





OJEN's strategic plan (2023-2026)

OJEN's strategic planning process focused first on listening to the needs, priorities, opinions and experiences of young people, teachers, youth workers, legal professionals, and funders. We used a variety of methods in the information-gathering phase of this project, including electronic surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews. We also reviewed published reports that focused on relevant legal issues, educational trends and the needs of specific demographic populations.

After listening to the diverse perspectives shared with OJEN Board and staff, we considered the potential implications for OJEN's future programs and services.

We decided to focus on five broad strategic directions for the next four years:

1. Engage youth directly to increase the diversity of youth served;
2. Listen, learn and seek guidance on implementing relevant Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and incorporating First Nations, Inuit and Métis teachings in our work;
3. Implement a comprehensive strategy to recruit, train and retain volunteers;
4. Expand relationships with trusted intermediaries in schools and other communities;
5. Invest in cultivating greater sustainability.



1

Engage youth directly to increase the diversity of youth served

Continue to engage youth in meaningful ways

We connect with young people where they are, and on their terms. We respect their autonomy and their capacity to impact the world. We believe young people deserve to understand the law and the ways it affects their lives. We share information about the legal system, without minimizing or misrepresenting its challenges and limitations. We invite young people to reflect on how the legal system could work better.

Expand OJEN's reach to diverse youth

We are committed to using new channels to deliver public legal education and information to youth directly, including online tools and platforms. In this way, we hope to engage youth no matter where they live, what school they go to, whether they are in school, or whether they are living in vulnerable environments.

Be more youth-centered

We will be thoughtful in how we engage directly with youth. We are committed to an increasingly youth-centered approach. We want to shift from creating content for youth (youth-focused), to creating content with youth (youth-centered) that reflects their priorities and is delivered in ways that resonate with them.



2

Listen, learn and seek guidance on implementing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and incorporating First Nations, Inuit and Métis teachings in our work

Commit to listening and learning

We recognize that the Canadian legal system has been a source of oppression and harm for many Indigenous people in Canada. As public legal education practitioners, we must acknowledge and respond to this reality. We also have much to learn, so we are committing ourselves to an intentional path of learning with our Board members, employees and volunteers. We will listen and seek to understand how First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachings can inform our approach to OJEN programs and services.

Partner and support the leadership of others to guide us in our work

OJEN's ultimate objective is to improve access to justice for Ontarians. There are relevant Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that are connected to our public legal education activities. We recognize that OJEN may not always be best placed to lead this work, and our role may be to support others doing work in this area. We will seek guidance from our Indigenous partners on the actions we undertake to do our part in reconciliation.

Recognize that we will make mistakes, learn from them, and aim to do better

We are committed to taking action. We know that we may receive feedback that we need to change course or do things differently. We are committed to learning and accepting feedback with humility, sincerity and grace.



3 Implement a comprehensive strategy to recruit, train and retain volunteers

Offer comprehensive support to our volunteers

With the help of 1600+ active volunteers, OJEN reaches thousands of young people each year through our public legal education programs and resources. We want young people to feel respected and safe when they participate in an OJEN program. We also want volunteers to have positive experiences in their volunteer work with OJEN. We are committed to creating a comprehensive program that prepares volunteers to engage in meaningful, culturally attuned and inclusive-focused ways to represent OJEN in the community.

Encourage legal professionals to forge stronger connections with young people and their trusted intermediaries

For many, the justice system is rarely transparent and can be difficult to navigate. OJEN volunteers are a source of legal information, referrals, and support – not only for the young people who participate in OJEN programs, but also for the adults who work with and support these young people and their families. We want to support our volunteers in creating lasting connections within their communities, including French-speaking legal professionals who can best support our Francophone communities.

Ensure our public legal education activities have an impact on volunteers too

While young people gain from the legal knowledge and expertise of OJEN volunteers, these volunteers benefit equally from the insights they gain into the lived experiences of young people and their communities. Recognition of the reciprocal nature of the learning experience is central to OJEN's public legal education philosophy. Our volunteers have the opportunity to learn how young people and their families experience the legal system, which we hope will encourage them to make changes that will lead to greater access to justice for Ontarians.



4

Expand relationships with trusted intermediaries in schools and other communities

Increase the range of trusted intermediaries we work with in schools

Trusted intermediaries are adults who have built a relationship of trust with youth. In the past, OJEN has primarily engaged with teachers of high school law and civics courses. With this strategic direction, we intend to work more intentionally with guidance counsellors, school social workers, youth leadership groups, etc.

Involve youth workers and other community-based trusted intermediaries on local OJEN committees

We recognize the need for responsive, context-sensitive programming for specific groups of youth. OJEN committees across the province are excellent hubs of local public legal education activity. Many of them include representatives from both the legal and education sectors. We will encourage these committees to outreach to local community-based trusted intermediaries and invite their participation on local OJEN committees.

Create more opportunities for trusted intermediaries to connect with and benefit from their experiences with public legal education for youth

We know that many trusted intermediaries, especially those working in rural and remote parts of the province, sometimes feel isolated in their work. OJEN offers professional development opportunities for teachers and youth workers, but these trusted intermediaries have much to offer each other as well. We will find new ways to bring together trusted intermediaries to share their knowledge and experiences and increase their capacity to support young people.



5

Invest in cultivating greater sustainability

Promote OJEN program sustainability

OJEN has adopted a careful and thoughtful approach to developing and documenting successful pilot public legal education programs. The process results in the production of planning and facilitation guides that allow others to replicate the program in their communities. Over time, this practice will build a body of work that can be shared with local OJEN committees, volunteers and community partners to support public legal education program replication and adaptation across the province.

Improve financial sustainability

We are fortunate to receive core funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario and periodic project funding from various government agencies and foundations. Like many other small non-profits, OJEN ends each year with a very small surplus or deficit. To protect the organization during emergencies and unexpected events, we will develop our fundraising capacity to build an adequate reserve fund and increase our financial resiliency.

Strengthen organizational sustainability

OJEN sustainability lies not just in the quality of our volunteers and commitment from our community partners, but also in the skill and expertise of our staff and Board. We are committed to ensuring a positive work environment that promotes diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. We want our staff and Board to reflect the diversity of the population we serve. We will adopt human resource practices that support effective recruitment, retention and succession planning. We resolve to listen to our employees and Board members to ensure that we do not become over-stretched in our activities and the work remains rewarding for everyone.



OJEN's reputation for thoughtful, innovative programs and services

Throughout the strategic planning process, we heard that OJEN is doing many things right. These affirmative comments about the value of OJEN programs and services confirmed that it is important for us to continue with many of our core practices. Going forward, we will continue to:

- Ensure equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging principles are central to all our work;
- Recognize and address the effects of historical injustices that continue to challenge equitable access to justice;
- Avoid duplication and step aside where the need is met by others;
- Focus on filling gaps in services;
- Work closely with community and educational partners who can provide insight and feedback about the needs and learning preferences of young people;
- Listen, respond with empathy and amplify the lived experience of diverse young people;
- Value the expertise of young people, and employ them whenever possible;
- Thoughtfully and carefully work on our public legal education program design;
- Prioritize experiential learning;
- Share the public legal education resources we produce so that others can easily implement our public legal education programs.