

Highlights of the Thursday, 19 February, 2026 Weekly Meeting

President Maureen, welcomed everyone including our speaker Jennifer O'Brien with the topic: Redefining Family, to the Kiwanis Club of Brantford Weekly meeting Thursday, 19 February, 2026.



President Maureen called Phil Hoekstra to present the 50/50 Draw with Crystal Godwaldt, Dave Lewis, Leo Vos and Jim Steele holding potential winning tickets, but no one found the "Joker". Better luck next time.



President Maureen called Faye Prince to come forward as Funmaster.

Funmaster Kiwanian Faye welcomed everyone and asked the Audience if they remembered, Art Linkletter's, "**Kids say the darndest things**", TV series. Many confirmed that they had and Faye proceeded with a short video from vintage video clips.



Example: Mark Sheverton, 6 years old, when asked what was the hardest thing for him at school answered. "Buttoning my pants".

Each of the clips presented resulted in chuckles and chortles from everyone in attendance.

Birthdays (February)

Kirby Brown, 23

Anniversary of joining the Club (Yrs)

Judy Lillico	13
Nancy Thompson	7
Maureen Henry	5
Randy MacKenzie	24
Robert Saunders	23

Happy Stories

LG Randy had a happy story to share announcing that his daughter, Katelyn has just been approved as a Reverent after several years in training.

Bob Saunder had an odd story where he found, that the hat he found, in the inside pocket of his coat was not his hat. For the past week or so Bob has talked to various members on a search for his lost hat but, none of the members contacted has it. Bob would dearly like to exchange this hat for his own, as this hat is **two sizes, too large** for Bob Saunders. Would the **“Who”, who** has Bob Saunders hat please return it to our good **Who Bob**, no questions asked?

President Maureen thanked Funmaster Faye Prince and called Joan Griffin to introduce our guest speaker.

PP Joan Griffin came to the podium to introduce Jennifer O’Brien who would be speaking about the topic, “Redefining Family “. Joan said that she had met Jennifer and her husband many years ago and that they are wonderful people and she is very proud of their achievements.



Jennifer’s dedication to children and education began early. As an elementary teacher, mother and wife, and author, she has been passionate about supporting children in need. This path has led Jennifer to become a Child Welfare Advocate on behalf of her family. The O’Briens became a foster family and subsequently expanded their family through adoption. As a Family, they believe that having faith and love will always turn the worst storms into beautiful rainbows.

Joan asked that us to please join me in welcoming Jennifer O’ Brien to share her family story.

Jennifer O’ Brien thanked us for inviting her to speak at our meeting today, and letting her to introduce us to what she calls, “Our Unconventional Family “.

She said that she and her husband, Donny have been married for 25 years and initially had their 1st Child a year after they were married. Not long after that, they found that they could not have any more children. As time past they wanted to have more and looked into adoption and foster care. Jennifer said that all adopted children, no matter what age come to you with grief and loss.



Grief and Loss:

- Our children lost their parents and parts of their biological families.
- Loss of community and school for Thomas.
- Loss of siblings

Jennifer was inspired to write a book for her own children. This story offers hope, validates children’s emotions, and gives parents a starting point to discuss their grief. The book was called; “*A Pumpkin from a Prayer* by [Jennifer O'Brien](#)”

Hardships:

- Children’s health and development
- Career
- Time
- Advocacy
- Stress on family unit
- Isolation
- Loneliness



Joys

Donny "Greatest joy of growing our family is celebrating our children's milestones and accomplishment."

Thomas "I love how inclusive it is. Being an O'Brien means being accepted into this loving family. Sometimes it hard to accept feeling it but we are always love you no matter what."



Joys

Jen "The greatest joy that has come from growing our family through adoption is watching our other children sacrifice and learn to love unconditionally. They are humble and no longer ignorant to the needs of our community. They have become very compassionate to others both inside our family unit and outside too."

Devin "watching my brothers grow throughout the years. Playing with them and knowing I am an important part of who they will become."



Joys

Xavi "To live in a fun home with brothers and a sister."

Eli "Having fun with my family. We swim and skate and I love going to Grandma's and Grandpa's"

Elio "I love that we are open with each other, honest, loving and supportive. We are close because we are a big strong family. We have parents that represent the kind of people we want to be and they give us the kind of love we all deserve."



Community supports

- Church
- Woodview
- Landsdowne
- Scouts
- Interwoven connections
- ACO (Adoption council of Ontario)
- Kiwanis
- Early on programs



Openess

Adoption is not just a commitment to a child. It's a commitment to a whole new family.

What that looks like for us.....

- 12 half siblings
- 2 sets of parents
- 4 new grandparents
- Many cousins, aunts and uncles.



Saved to this PC

Our unconventional family

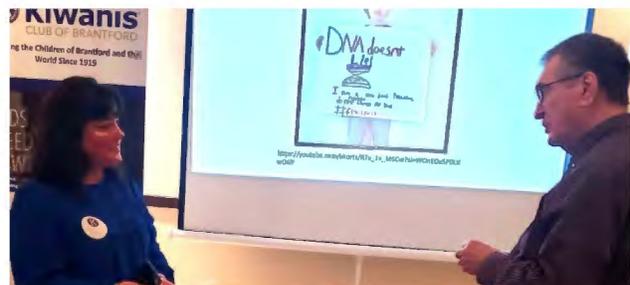
We are the O'Brien's



Now, sixteen years after their loss, the O'Brien's are busting at the seams and not taking a single moment for granted. Out of their loss, Jennifer and Donny, along with their two children, developed a deep desire to support their local community. They became a foster family and subsequently expanded their family through adoption. As a family, they believe that having faith and love will always turn the worst storms into beautiful rainbows.

At the end of her presentation, Jennifer handled a number of questions from the members.

She was thanked on behalf of the Club by Jim Steele indicating that, in recognition of her presentation, we have made a donation to a Charity we like to support. That charity is the Lansdowne Children's Centre Foundation.



Jennifer O'Brien was given a sound round of applause for her emotional and enlightening presentation.

President Maureen called for Committee Reports and Announcements:

- Melanie MacKay reminded us that there is a **Kiwanis Kindness Day** Planning Meeting - All Members Invited SATURDAY, February 21st Boardroom, 30 Brant Ave. **Coffee 9:00 a.m. Meeting 9:30 a.m. (approximately 1 hour).**
- Nancy Thompson reminded everyone that March 6-8 is the 2nd Annual OBAN Inn Weekend Getaway. Please let Nancy know that you have made your own reservations for the Friday and/or Saturday, so evening meals as a group can be made.
- President Maureen Henry mention that a Christmas Card sale idea was being reviewed and asked that if anyone had nature or some other appropriate Christmas image, to please send them to Graham Schram Email: grahamschram@rogers.com

President Maureen, thanked all members and guest speaker Jennifer O'Brien.

Closing Thought for the Day: "In family life, love is the oil that eases friction, the cement that binds closer together, and the music that brings harmony." Frederich Nietzsche

President Maureen asked If there was anything else for the good of Kiwanis, seeing none, she adjourned the meeting with the ringing of the Bell.

