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Opening doors for students



2011 recipients of BUILDINGFoundations Bursary Fund with Rick Frost, CEO of The Winnipeg Foundation (back left), Deputy Minister Joy Cramer and Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross (seated, centre). Photo courtesy of Manitoba Housing.

Its role may begin with putting roofs over heads, but Manitoba Housing is also helping to build stronger families and more secure futures.

Since 2008, Manitoba Housing has helped 36 students pursue their education goals through the BUILDINGFoundations Bursary Program, part of Manitoba Housing's commitment to build capacity within individuals and the wider community.

Post-secondary students who receive rental subsidies through Manitoba Housing programs are eligible to apply for the \$1,000 awards, which

are based on academic achievement and community service. To date, approximately three-quarters of recipients are women, and more than half are Aboriginal. Most are facing challenges such as low-to-moderate income, being single parents or being newcomers to Canada. (Meet two of the 2011 recipients, Claude Michell and Yi Yan Huang, in the sidebars opposite.)

The BUILDINGFoundations Bursary Program was established in 2007 by Manitoba Housing, which entered into an agreement with The Winnipeg Foundation in 2010 to manage the fund. Manitoba Housing continues to

oversee and promote the Program, accepting applications, determining recipients, and creating the annual awards event.

A committee made up of Manitoba Housing staff, community partners and past recipients select award recipients. Manitoba Housing has a long-term goal to grow the fund over time.

The BUILDINGFoundations Bursary Fund is one of more than 300 scholarship funds held at The Winnipeg Foundation. Last year these funds generated 850 awards, totalling more than \$1.2 million to help local students realize their dreams.



Claude's Story

Claude Michell. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Housing.

Claude Michell is a firm believer that people can change.

"Regardless of what your life has been, you can change if you want to," he says.

Michell dropped out of school in grade eight, and didn't pick up his studies until several years later, when his life had changed drastically. While incarcerated, he obtained his GED and developed a strong interest in psychology. He was set to start university after his release, but, "I developed some nasty habits [that] followed me out onto the street," says Michell of his experience with addiction.

Twenty-five years later, Michell is sober, employed in construction, and just four credits away from his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Winnipeg. He's also working toward custody of his 12-year old daughter.

"I want to be a role model for my daughter. I want to tell her 'school is good for you'," he says. He also wants to help others who share his struggles. After graduation, he plans to become an addictions counsellor.

"It has been hard. I've had to face a lot of issues. I know I'm not going back to the way I was before. I've always walked with my head held high and I walk with it much higher these days," he says.

Claude says that receiving the Building Foundations Bursary last year meant more than just money.

"It gives a person a sense of pride to think 'I was picked because of my achievements'," he says. "I've never heard much praise in my life. It's nice to hear that."



Yi Yan's Story

Yi Yan Huang. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Housing.

Yi Yan Huang has energy, drive and a focus on

constant self-improvement. Since coming to Canada from China three years ago, she has learned a new language, adapted to a new culture and is now training for a new career. Her first job in Winnipeg was at a travel agency that catered to Chinese clients, but she was determined to expand her options and expertise.

After hearing about strong job prospects in the legal field, she enrolled in Red River College's Legal Administrative Assistant Program. She's now half-way through the 11-month program and she's already volunteering with a law firm to get a jump-start on her career.

"It's an intensive program," she says. "It's important to focus on my program, but for that I need a lot of support." Receiving a Building Foundations Bursary last year has helped Yi Yan offset the cost of the program.

"The tuition is \$8,000, plus books it's \$10,000. It's so expensive. I'm very lucky that I could get support from Manitoba Housing."

Huang is a full-time student, a parent, and an active volunteer at New Journey Housing, where she helps Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking newcomers gain the resources they need to find adequate housing in Winnipeg.

"I got help from somebody else and I'd like to help also," says Huang.

You can help students like Yi Yan and Claude pursue their education goals and future dreams. To make a gift to the BUILDING Foundations Bursary Fund, visit www.wpgfdn.org or call the Foundation at 204.944.9474 (toll-free 1.877.974.3631).