

Merit Award Bursary Program

ESTABLISHED IN 1995

**Year in
Review**
2022-2023

Kick-starting
opportunity

for GTA
high school
students.



November 2023



“MERIT MEANS
NEVER GIVE UP.
THERE IS SO
MUCH
SUPPORT WITH
MERIT, IT
HELPS YOU
BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF”

Merit Recipient

In this Review

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Mission

Inspiring, providing financial support, and personal development opportunities for youth to pursue higher education and contribute to the community.

Vision

To be a leading contributor of recognition and financial awards to senior secondary school students in high needs Greater Toronto Area schools, providing:

- * incentives to youth of all abilities to pursue advancement through education;
- * incentives to youth to contribute to their community;
- * mentorship and networking opportunities; and
- * a powerful motivational tool which can be employed by educators and parents.



Message from the President

Brian Smeenck

Several times over the past few years, I've written or said to a group, "This has been the biggest and best year ever for the Merit Award Program!"

Well, I'm proud to be able to write those words again. As this report will detail, in our 2022/23 fiscal year ending April 30, the Program awarded more bursary dollars (\$326,500) to our highest number of recipients (315), conducted more non-financial Alumni Support Programs like mentorships and career workshops, and involved more volunteers (more than 220), than ever before.

And it's not just growth for the sake of growth. The feedback that we get from the students we help is ever more telling. They tell us that this Program has a **HUGE IMPACT** on them.

Below is a Message sent to me from a recipient on the eve of his graduation from his bachelor program recently:

"I just wanted to reach out to say a big thank you. I am graduating on the 13th and am finishing my undergraduate degree with High Distinction (highest notation on the degree). ... This diploma is as much yours as it is mine; Your mentorship and support, whether directly or whether behind the scenes, has helped me immensely. Merit Award as an organization changed my life, and I am forever grateful to giants like yourself who believe in me. These past 4 years have been instrumental in shaping me as a young man"

Wow. That is impact!

Thank you Merit supporters for making it happen!





Kick-starting
opportunity



For over 27 years
Merit Award has been
breaking down barriers
and creating opportunity.

\$2,855,750

Distributed

3,655

Recipients

10,593

Applications

66.4 %

Merit recipients
report coming
from families
earning less than
\$60,000 a year.

47.5%

Merit recipients
report coming
from families
earning less
than \$40K/year.

88.6%

Merit recipients
report they are
first- or second-
generation
Canadians.



A Merit Recipient's Journey

from the time of application to the Awards Evening, through mentorship and networking events and potential selection on the Alumni Advisory Council.

1 APPLICATION ALERT

Educators advise grade 10, 11 and 12 students to consider applying



2 INFORMATION GATHERING

Grade 11 and 12 students work on application-attend Merit Q and A's



3 SUBMIT APPLICATION

In March students submit application with references



4 SELECTION PROCESS

In May, 95 volunteers in 19 groups select recipients-executive team review



8 ALUMNI MENTORSHIP

Recipients are paired with career professionals over the summer



7 BURSARY AMOUNTS

\$500-Gr.11
\$1K/2KGr. 12
\$5K-Gr.12 Leaders
Disbursement pending proof of school enrolment



6 AWARDS EVENING

Mid-June 300+ students are celebrated in person



5 AWARD NOTIFICATION

In early June all applicants are notified of their success position



9 ALUMNI PEER COUNSELLING

Peers help recipients transition to undergrad



10 ALUMNI SKILLS CHATS

Conversations with job sector experts i.e. Law, Medicine, Finance



11 ALUMNI NETWORKING

Every August alumni and donors meet to discuss skills and opportunities



12 ALUMNI COUNCIL

An opportunity for selected alumni to work with and guide the board



2023 Merit Award Bursary Program Celebrates with Recipients at Peel and Toronto Awards Ceremonies





This year

96 Participating Schools

- 59 Toronto District School Board
- 20 Toronto Catholic District School Board (4 new schools this year)
- 17 Peel District School Board

743 Applications Reviewed

315 Bursary Recipients

- 60% from the TDSB
- 22% from the TCDSB
- 18% from the PDSB

56 Grade 11 Students

- 56 \$500 Awards

259 Grade 12 Students

- 181 \$1,000 Awards
- 39 \$2,000 Awards
- 3 \$5,000 Leaders of Tomorrow
- 36 computers



Saheed

Saheed had to go through 18 other schools on his refugee journey from Nigeria to settlement in Canada just four years ago. He dove into his passion for innovation through engineering in school and community, inspiring others to pursue STEM through Rexdale's STEM Club. He took on robotics, tutoring, and soccer among other activities and he plays as an instrumentalist at his local church. Saheed was accepted at the top engineering programs in the country, from which he chose the University of Waterloo to study Mechatronics Engineering this fall.

2023 Leaders of Tomorrow Recipients


Natalie

Natalie plays flute, sax, guitar and piano. She is a singer, public speaker, karate student, political campaigner and a humanist - all wrapped up in a stunning cumulative average of 99%. During the pandemic, she created Natalie G. Music to help lift spirits by posting concerts and videos on social media. Natalie helped design a space module to harvest energy for the Engineering Idol Competition. This fall she begins attending U of T for Civil Engineering.

Stephanie

Stephanie served on her high school Student Council for years, as a Student Trustee of the TCDSB and as the Catholic Board Council President of the Ontario Student Trustees Association. Stephanie also worked in an array of school clubs and played Varsity rugby. In the community, Stephanie works to advance Filipino culture and for a Not for Profit that helps students. This fall, she began a Bachelor of Education degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy and Global Development at Queen's University.



A portrait of Rita Audi, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a teal dress, large hoop earrings, a ring, and a bracelet. She is looking slightly to the side with a gentle smile. The background is dark, and there is a blue vertical bar on the right side of the image.

**Rita Audi,
2019 Leader of Tomorrow
Merit recipient**

**A keynote speaker
at the recent Merit
Annual General Meeting**

An excerpt
from
Rita's AGM
comments
on the
impact of
Merit

"I can't talk about Merit without talking about the peer support and mentorship received from Merit's volunteers. These volunteers have been strong pillars that have shaped me, supported me and opened many doors of opportunity.

In 2019 I was one of three people selected to receive \$5,000 from Merit. Back then this number was unimaginable to me, to put it into perspective, my family of three had a total income of \$40,000 a year and here I was getting \$5,000 just for my education.

Merit truly touches lives.

Without your support neither I, or any of my Merit friends would be on the path that we're walking today.

So thank you from the bottom of my heart for every dollar, every minute, and every ounce of hard work that you have put into making education affordable for people like me."





This year more than 315 alumni participated in Merit Alumni programs

RECIPIENT ORIENTATION

New alumni event welcomed new recipients to the alumni community in early summer.

SUMMER MENTORSHIP

The focus was on the job search

Total Pairs: 36
72 individuals
51 were Merit Alumni

3 WORKSHOPS

- Career workshop
- Self-Defence and Empowerment
- How to Network Workshop/ Networking Event

5 CAREER FIRESIDE CHATS

- Medicine,
- Law,
- Engineering,
- Computer Science,
- Education

LEADERS OF TOMORROW

Leaders of Tomorrow meet once or twice a year under the guidance of a past board member to discuss school and career challenges

ALUMNI COUNCIL

12 - Member Alumni Council Provides advice on Alumni Programs. Members are paired with a board member for mentorship.

BUDDY PROGRAM

An Alumni-led committee has helped develop this new program to connect first-year students with others at their post-secondary schools.

ENEWSLETTER

A monthly newsletter with a strong minimum 50% open rate.



Merit Alumni are stepping up to volunteer.

"As someone who benefited immeasurably from the award, I am wondering if you know of a way that I can get involved and pay it forward."

- Mikhiala is now a member of the Communications Committee and the School Outreach Committee, where she'll be an Alumni Ambassador visiting high schools to talk to students about the Award, answering their questions and encouraging them to apply.



Merit volunteers
are the backbone
of the program.
This year was
no exception.

Board of Directors

- 13 members

Alumni Council

- 12 Members

Awards Selections Committees

- 95 volunteers helped with this year's selections process
- 21 Selections Committees

Guest Speakers

- 40+ volunteers participated in more than 10 events

Mentors

- 51 volunteers met 1:1 with alumni

Committees:

- 18 volunteers in addition to Board and Council members





Thoughts from Merit volunteers on their experience.

A mentor who participated in the summer mentorship program said:

"Great program. I was happy to help my mentee... I learned from them. So thank you Merit... I look forward to doing this again."

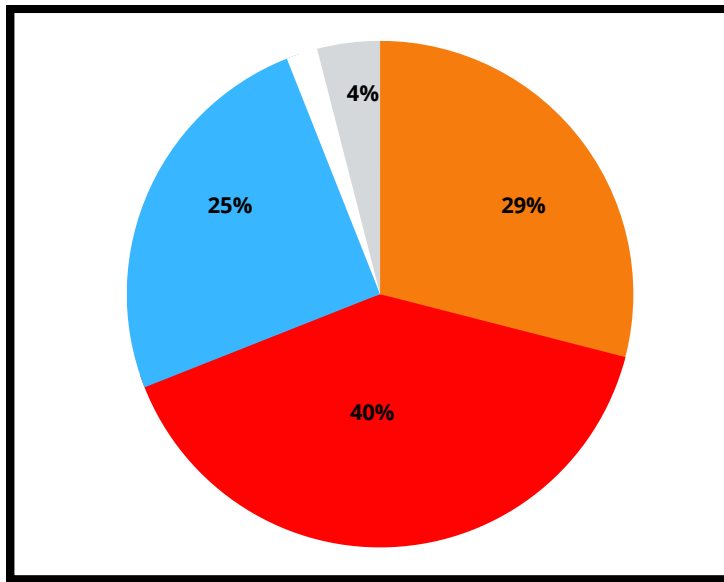
A Recipient Selection Committee member said:

'Being on the Selections Committee is so rewarding. You can really see the time and effort that went into the submissions from students.

It was very inspiring to read through their challenges and how they've overcome them."



Incredible Donor Support



Merit is 100% donor funded.

More than 80% of the funds go to support the bursaries.

All Merit bursaries and alumni programs are supported by the generous gifts of Corporations, Foundations and many individuals.

40%	29%	25%	4%	2%
FOUNDATIONS	CORPORATE	INDIVIDUALS	WINE RAFFLE	CHARITIES
\$196,501	\$143,273	\$121,204	\$17,540	\$8,251

In 2022-2023 we raised almost \$490,000 for the program.

Our Holiday Matching campaign was our most successful one yet. Thanks to the support of Deloitte and two anonymous donors who committed a total of \$50,000 to match donations, we were able to raise just over \$51,000 from individuals. When matched, this campaign raised more than \$102,000.

This past March, we were fortunate to have an anonymous donor provide a \$15,000 matching fund to support a special Named Awards campaign. This program created 35 awards of \$1,000 for Grade 12 students, with 19 of them being named in honour or memory of individuals.



FASKEN

Own tomorrow



The Catherine and Maxwell
MEIGHEN FOUNDATION

MEDIA  EXPERTS

**BICKLE-WILDER
FOUNDATION**

Deloitte.

**THE TIPPET
FOUNDATION**



**Rae
Christen
Jeffries**
MANAGEMENT LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT LAW

J.P. Bickell Foundation
Since 1953



and many individuals

**THANK
YOU**



Strategic Direction

The Board members and the Merit Executive Director are finalizing an 18-month operational plan to drive and sustain the growth of the program.

The Board has ratified the objective to increase revenue by 15%- with the intention of saving 5% annually. This would allow growth while also building assets to cover possible future shortfalls.

Areas of focus

Program Pillars

Bursaries for grade 11 and grade 12 high school students.

Alumni Support

- Mentorship
- Alumni career support programs

Fundraising

A fundraising goal of \$8-10M over 10 years achieved through corporate, foundation and individual donor appeals.

School Partners

GTA School Boards in Toronto, Durham, Halton, Peel, and York.

Target the neediest schools.

Adding one school board at a time.

Bursary Values

Bursary values will remain constant (\$500, \$1,000, \$2,000 and \$5,000) in the near term in order to maximize the number of bursaries distributed to worthy recipients

Operations

Merit operates on a management team model. The Board leads work with a committee of volunteers and an Operations Team of 2 full-time equivalent contractors (1 FTE, 2 PTE). The FTE count will increase with growth.

Action this Fall

Fundraising Events



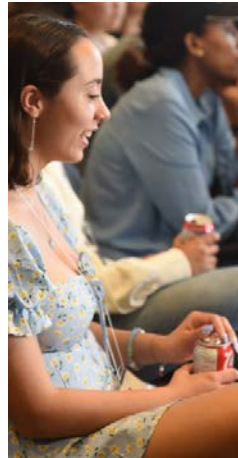
September Opportunity Road Ride

- Brian Smeenk's 2,300 km ride, Halifax to Toronto ending with an 80km homing coming ride with 26 riders
- Raised more than \$71,000

December Holiday Matching Campaign

- The goal is to raise \$100,000

Alumni Events



October at Deloitte

- Deloitte Impact Day

November Buddy Program

- Buddy Program Events at York, TMU and George Brown

December Alumni Networking

- Alumni Networking Event

School Outreach



October and beyond Introduction and reintroduction of the Merit program

- Face-to-face school introductions
- Social media connections and in-school posters

December Application Alert

- Applications open

Communication



November Student Awareness

- \$100K of media space donated by Media Experts
- "Kick-start Your Opportunity" awareness campaign

School outreach posters and information sent

December Donor Matching and Engagement Campaign



The Merit Program
kick-started
opportunities
for post-secondary education
for 315 high school students
in the GTA this fall.





We look forward
to awarding 325+ bursaries
to deserving recipients
in the spring of 2024.

Please consider donating to
our annual holiday matching
campaign to help make this
objective a reality.

Thank you.





Find out more
www.MeritAward.ca