



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

OPPORTUNITY FUND GIVES STUDENTS CHANCE TO 'EARN & LEARN'

Generous donations totaling \$1.76-million make university possible for students from under-represented communities

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WINNIPEG, MB – With generous support from the federal and provincial governments and the private sector, **The University of Winnipeg** today launched the **Opportunity Fund** – an innovative student support program aimed at closing the “graduation gap” for hundreds of students traditionally under-represented at university.

The “earn as you learn” approach is unique for a university in Canada, designed to assist Aboriginal children, young people from war-affected nations and refugee populations, and students from inner-city neighbourhoods – obtain financial help and encouragement to be successful in school. The Opportunity Fund is a **comprehensive, three-part program**, including **fast-track bursaries, micro-financing, and tuition credits**, that assists children as early as Grade 4 and extends all the way to adult learners.

The successful fast-track bursary program has already provided financial help to more than 100 young adults this past academic year including **Muuxi Adam** and **Danielle Jenner**.

Muuxi Adam arrived in Winnipeg as a teenage refugee from Somalia, struggling to overcome the effects of working 16-hour days without pay in a garage fixing cars. He received a \$1,200 bursary through the Opportunity Fund to attend UWinnipeg and is now a promising filmmaker interested in international development, creating work on topics such as gangs and HIV-AIDS.

“It is really hard to get a good job to pay for school as a young immigrant,” Muuxi said. “We face multiple barriers, and the bursary has made a big difference to me.”

Métis student Danielle Jenner just completed two courses at UWinnipeg with the help of an Opportunity Fund bursary.

“I was a drug addict living on the streets,” says the 19 year-old. “I hated myself. Now what I want to do more than anything else is become a social worker. This bursary gives people a chance to go to school, and to feel better about themselves.”

The **Government of Canada's contribution of \$746,000** over three years will allow The University of Winnipeg to continue to work in the inner city, and with Aboriginal and new Canadian communities to promote post-secondary education, the Government of Canada's Education Savings Grant program and Canada Learning Bond, the University's Opportunity Fund and financial literacy.

“The Government of Canada recognizes that access to post-secondary education and building a highly skilled workforce is essential to securing future opportunities for young Canadians, particularly Aboriginal and immigrant youth. This project will enable the University to reach students from modest financial backgrounds, and will encourage Aboriginal and New Canadian families to save for post-secondary education”, said **the Honourable Vic Toews, President of the Treasury Board, on behalf of the Honourable Monte Solberg, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development**.

Funding for the on-going bursary program and the tuition credit project is possible due to generous support from government and donors, including the following new gifts to 'A World of Opportunity' Capital Campaign's Opportunity Fund:

- **\$500,000 – Province of Manitoba**
- **\$150,000 – BMO Financial Group**
- **\$150,000 – TD Bank Financial Group**
- **\$150,000 – Scotiabank**
- **\$100,000 – McLean Budden Limited**

"As is evident in several government initiatives such as the expansion of ACCESS program funding, the Manitoba government is committed to widening the range of learners at our post secondary institutions. We are confident that our investment in the Opportunity Fund will further encourage disadvantaged youth to pursue their academic interests and make long-term plans that include post-secondary education," said the **Honourable Diane McGifford, Manitoba Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy**. "The fund is structured to provide early, frequent intervention and investment. By alleviating various financial and social barriers, it will inspire students to follow their dreams, proving that a university education is within their reach."

"We know that one of the most critical challenges facing us as a community is the gap that exists between young people who are able to obtain a post-secondary education and those, through no fault of their own, who are not," said **Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, President & Vice-Chancellor, UWinnipeg**. "Last year we initiated the President's Access Task Force and as a direct result of that, we created the Opportunity Fund to put our goal of providing accessible education into action. With today's announcements from our partners, collectively we are nurturing the hopes of hundreds of children and youth, who should be encouraged to dream big."

Currently, UWinnipeg's Innovative Learning Centre works with inner-city school children and offers programs such as the *Eco-Kids* and *EnviroTechs*. Starting in September 2008, dozens of these children and youth will begin **earning tuition credits** to encourage them to complete high school, thus closing the graduation gap and providing them with the support to obtain a post-secondary education at UWinnipeg.

Students from Grades 9 through 12 will earn \$500-\$750 for each school year completed. Students from Grades 4 to 8 can earn up to \$200 per year. When, for example, students successfully complete high school, they have the potential to earn up to \$4,000 towards their UWinnipeg education.

"I believe it will make a huge difference for our children to know that we recognize their potential and care enough about them to secure them a spot for higher education," said **Anastasia Yereniuk, Principal at Strathcona School**. "The fact that money would be available for them to continue their educational journey is sure to make the transition seamless."

The **Opportunity Fund Tuition Credit Account program** is coordinated through UWinnipeg's Innovative Learning Centre. Contact: tuitioncredits@uwinnipeg.ca.

The **Opportunity Fund Bursary program** is coordinated through UWinnipeg's Financial Awards office. Contact: awards@uwinnipeg.ca.

Earlier this month, the **Opportunity Fund micro-financing program** became operational, offering start-up loans and mentoring to young entrepreneurs with a solid business plan. The Opportunity Fund micro-financing program is coordinated through UWinnipeg's Faculty of Business & Economics. Contact: businessandeconomics@uwinnipeg.ca.

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The University of Winnipeg is one of Canada's leading post-secondary institutions. Consistently ranked in the Top-10 in the country on an annual basis by both *Maclean's Magazine* and *The Globe & Mail* newspaper, the University of Winnipeg is a leader in academic excellence, Aboriginal education, environmental studies & sustainability, and theatre & the arts. The University of Winnipeg is committed to improving access to post-secondary education for all individuals, especially those people from non-traditional communities. Find out more by visiting www.uwinnipeg.ca.

Established by The University of Winnipeg in 2003, The University of Winnipeg Foundation is the University's private fundraising arm, dedicated to helping achieve the vision and mission of The University of Winnipeg. For information about 'A World of Opportunity' Capital Campaign, visit www.uwinnipegcampaign.ca.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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