

Investing in Tomorrow: Community Foundation Ignites Education Success with 2026 Student Awards

In every community, there are young people filled with ambition, talent, and determination ready to pursue careers in healthcare, education, skilled trades, business, the arts, and beyond. Yet for many students, the path to post-secondary education is shaped not only by dreams, but also by financial realities.

For decades, the Thunder Bay Community Foundation has worked to ease that burden. Through its annual Student Awards, the Foundation provides meaningful financial support to eligible students across the District of Thunder Bay. In 2026, more than \$200,000 will be available to graduating high school and post-secondary students ensuring that finances do not stand in the way of their potential.

At the heart of the program are two types of support: scholarships and bursaries. While both offer funding assistance, they serve students in different yet equally important ways.

A scholarship is awarded based primarily on academic merit. It recognizes excellence demonstrated through strong academic performance, leadership, volunteerism, athletics, or other notable achievements. A bursary, on the other hand, is awarded based on financial need. It supports students who show determination but face monetary strain that could otherwise limit their ability to pursue higher education.

Despite these differences, the purpose remains the same: both invest in students during one of the most pivotal and financially demanding stages of life. Together, they create a more equitable pathway to education - one that acknowledges both achievement and circumstance.

For Abigail Heron, recipient of the Helen L. Dewar Scholarship in 2025, receiving the award from the Thunder Bay Community Foundation marked a defining moment in her educational journey.

“When I received the email confirming I had won the scholarship, I leapt out of my chair in the middle of French class,” she recalled. “It was total disbelief and a surge of excitement. I was so happy my contributions and accomplishments in the Thunder Bay community were being formally recognized, but my immediate thought was, of course, I can’t wait to tell my mom!”

Now pursuing Honours Bachelor of Science in Physical and Mathematical Sciences at the University of Toronto, Abigail says the award provided more than recognition, “The scholarship granted me peace of mind and financial freedom conducive to my academic flourishing.”

She shared that the summer before starting university, she worked two jobs to prepare for upcoming expenses. Having experienced firsthand the demands of balancing employment and academics, she understands the weight many students carry, “No matter how academically inclined you are, spreading yourself too thin over university and a job makes it difficult to do your absolute best in school—I should know; I worked exhaustively all throughout eleventh grade, so it certainly helped to have a lump-sum cushion in my back pocket.”

Looking at where she is today, Abigail expressed heartfelt appreciation for the Foundation and its donors. “The people behind the Foundation have the incredible foresight and

understanding that investing in our youth is the most surefire way to seriously invest in our future as a whole. Overall, I have nothing but the greatest thanks for all the incredible donors. They facilitate tangible, positive change in the world.”

Hearing a student’s success story once more, Athena Kreiner, CEO of the Foundation, explained, “In situations like this, a scholarship does more than reward performance. It eases financial pressure, allowing students to focus more fully on their studies, participate in campus life, and thrive without the constant weight of cost-related stress.”

The Foundation also recognizes that student success is not one-dimensional. While some students benefit from recognition of excellence, others require relief from financial challenges which is why bursaries are an essential part of the student awards.

“Pursuing post-secondary education can feel overwhelming when financial pressures are part of the equation,” Athena continued. “Our bursaries exist to remind students that they are not alone. Seeking support is a proactive step toward success. We want every student to know that if finances are the barrier, this community stands ready to help.”

Last year, a total of 51 students received awards. For these recipients, support can mean the difference between postponing studies and enrolling with confidence. Scholarships and bursaries alike can reduce reliance on part-time work, lower student debt, and relieve stress that might otherwise hinder academic performance.



Abigail Heron, 2025 Helen L. Dewar Scholarship recipient with Maria Cabral, Student Award Evaluator.

Athena further expressed her deepest gratitude to the donors, “The Thunder Bay Community Foundation’s Student Awards are made possible through the generosity of donors who believe deeply in education and in the promise of the District’s youth.”

This year, a total of 30 different awards are available, each with its own eligibility criteria to support students from diverse academic paths and circumstances. Students are encouraged to review the available opportunities and apply before the March 31, 2026 deadline. For more information, visit www.tbcf.org/scholarships-bursaries.


\$200,000+

AVAILABLE IN STUDENT AWARDS

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Visit www.tbcf.org/scholarships-bursaries for more information.