

Changing post-secondary environment drives increase in demand for local student awards

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oakville, Ont., March 17, 2026 - The Community Education Awards Hub has seen a surge in applications since it opened at the beginning of February, more than in previous years. More than 750 students have registered in 2026, 50% higher than at the same time in 2025.

The Awards Hub, hosted by the Oakville Community Foundation, is home to a number of scholarships, bursaries and education awards for students within Halton, offered by more than a dozen organizations and generous residents that all hold youth education in high importance. You can learn more [here](#).

In addition to higher costs of living and increases in academic program fees, the surge in applications can be correlated to the upcoming changes in the Ontario Student Assistance Program, or OSAP. The changes could mean that students will be taking on more debt throughout their post-secondary education, making scholarships, bursaries and education awards even more important.

These changes could also contribute to a growing rate of youth Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET), already at 1 in 13 Oakville youth between the ages of 15-24. You can learn more about Oakville's NEET rate in the OCF's 2025 report: [Are the Kids Alright?](#)

Michelle Collins, the Fundholder and Community Engagement Administrator with the Oakville Community Foundation, works closely on The Awards Hub and with the students, especially those who apply for the Oakville Youth Education Award. The Award is a one-time scholarship given to more than 20 students worth \$2,000 each and recognizes students who demonstrate more than academic achievement.

"The students who have received this award are accomplished in so many ways, not just academically, but the reality is they need financial assistance to realize their goals," says Michelle. "The Foundation is proud to make this investment in the future of Oakville's potential leaders and changemakers."

According to Michelle, many of the students are in precarious financial situations, likely higher than people are aware of, given Oakville's reputation as a wealthy community despite having the highest low-income rate of all municipalities in Halton at 8.6%. The financial burden of paying for school weighs heavily on the entire family, knowing this is the path to a better future.

Even with these challenges, in their applications, the students have very high expectations of themselves and are full of optimism for the future.

“It’s inspiring to think about what they’ll go on to accomplish,” says Michelle. “When you support a student’s education, you can also take a great deal of pride in knowing you helped to contribute to the next generation’s success.”

Student award funding is distributed to the student’s academic institution for their benefit, not directly to students. Those interested in supporting a student in their post-secondary education can contact giving@theocf.org to learn more or can make a donation directly to the [Oakville Youth Education Award](#).

-30-

Oakville Community Foundation

The Oakville Community Foundation is Oakville’s largest community of philanthropists with 400 Funds. The Foundation facilitates local philanthropy by investing donations to generate new money for our community and charities. We conduct local research to provide our diverse donors with knowledge and solutions to make an impact in the local community, both today and in the future. Thanks to the visionaries in our community who started The Foundation more than 30 years ago, The Foundation has granted more than \$75 million to support charities locally and beyond.

Media Contact

Taline McPhedran

Communications and Events Manager

taline@theocf.org