

The Larry and Helen Kristjanson Story

The decision to set up a Bursary for students who have had a harder time in life extends back a generation for both Larry and Helen's families. Larry's family was very, very into education. He and his 7 siblings were all university educated, with 5 completing their PhD in Education. Their success stemmed from working hard, helping each and always looking out for each other, because the family certainly didn't have boundless money for university studies.

Helen's mother died of cancer when she was quite young and her father set up a memorial scholarship through the Winnipeg Foundation. This scholarship is awarded to students from Riverton, as that is the family's hometown. For decades Helen has been involved in selecting the scholarship recipient as well as handing it out. In her words, "It's been a very beautiful experience".

Upon retiring from the Canadian Wheat Board, Larry and Helen chose Gimli as their home. They had a long standing and positive friendship with Olli Narfason and knew that Olli was a founding member of the Westshore Community Foundation. Larry and Helen knew that partnering with Westshore would be a good decision and they are "delighted with the way it's working". The slightly tricky part about choosing to set up a Bursary with Westshore meant not leave everything to their five children. This was a short-lived conundrum. The five children are so supportive of the philosophy behind the choice to give: they embrace their parents' desire to help those who are truly in need of an opportunity. Another easy choice was setting up the Bursary now, rather than in their will. This way they get to enjoy the success stories of their chosen recipients! Thanks to feedback from Connie Magnusson-Schimnowski, another Westshore Board Member, Larry and Helen get to hear that Dallas Nedotiafko is doing extremely well in his studies. He's on the Dean's Honour Roll at University of Brandon, excelling in his 3rd year in the Faculty of Music. Helen was also excited to hear from Michele Couture that Erin Leath is working hard and achieving well in her first year of Education at University of Winnipeg, and looking forward to continuing on with her Degree. This bursary makes an enormous difference to youth, and that makes it the partnership with Westshore so worthwhile.

While Larry and Helen let the teachers at the Gimli High School select a variety of students who are eligible for the Bursary, they are always impressed by the top four recommendations and truly enjoy picking their annual recipient. Knowing that they help a student follow a dream that might otherwise be impossible is rewarding beyond all explanation.