

# Head Start

*Byrne Bursary helps students kick-start post-secondary schooling*



*Michelle Haifa is seen here inside the Jackman Centre for Dramatic Art at the University of Windsor, where she earned an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama in 2011.*

(Windsor, Ontario, Jan. 13, 2016) – When Michelle Haifa’s father died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 44, just two months shy of her high school graduation, she felt the need to step up as the oldest sibling in her family. But that wasn’t easy.

“It was a very stressful time,” said Haifa, who graduated in 2007 from Cardinal Carter Catholic Secondary School in Leamington. “My mom wanted to take care of me like she always has, but I needed to be more independent.”

On graduation day, when she was going up to accept her diploma, she was surprised to learn that she was the recipient of a scholarship from the Byrne Bursary Foundation, a local

organization that awards university or college bursaries to graduating high school students who are financially challenged due to the loss of a parent.

Haifa said the bursary helped cover a significant portion of her first semester's tuition when she entered the drama program at the University of Windsor, relieving a great burden at an extremely difficult time in her life, and providing her with a tremendous start to her post secondary education.

"It was so hard for me to focus, heading in to that part of my life, so it really helped me move forward," she said of the bursary. "It meant a lot to me emotionally that there were people out there willing to help out someone in my kind of situation."

The foundation was established by the six sons of Hank Byrne, a local autoworker who died unexpectedly in 2001. His own father died tragically when he was run over by a coal truck on Christmas Eve when Hank was only 12. Due to the family's financial constraints, Hank never had the opportunity to fully complete his formal education.

"Education was always a priority for my parents, and they took good care of us, so we wanted to establish something that would honour their commitment to lifelong learning," said Rick Byrne, one of Hank's sons. "We never thought the need would be so great, and we're really proud of the number of people we've helped so far."

To date the foundation has awarded 16 bursaries to WECDSB students, totaling more than \$36,000. Many bursary recipients provide the founders with progress updates and express how important the bursary was as they began their post-secondary education.

Haifa, for instance, graduated from university in 2011, and then earned a Bachelor of Education degree in 2012. She's currently working part-time as a bank teller, but was recently offered a job at a new private school.

"Those kinds of success stories are music to our ears," said Rick. "Giving people the head start they need is what we're all about."

**The Byrne Bursary Foundation will hold a fund raiser on Jan. 22 at the Fogolar Furlan Club called the *Summer in January Fun-Raiser*. Tickets are \$50 each. There are plenty of door prizes, and raffles, as well as a cash bar and music by local favourites Bigg Wiggle.**

**For more information on obtaining tickets or to make a donation, send a message to [byrnebursary@gmail.com](mailto:byrnebursary@gmail.com).**