

Bursaries for students in the offing as Neighbourhood Network launches 2023 Give Back Awards

Are you a graduating high school student who has contributed a lot to the community?

Do you need a bit of money to help you on the next journey of your life?

Consider applying for a 2023 Give Back Award.

Applications are now being accepted for the annual Give Back Awards, an initiative of Neighbourhood Network, which provides \$1,000 cash prizes for up to 20 graduating students in Aurora, King, Newmarket, Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury and Georgina.

The Give Back Awards are unique in that they don't focus specifically on academic success, but rather demonstrated contributions and leadership within the school and into the wider community.

'It's been so encouraging over the last two years of the pandemic to see the creative ways that high school students are volunteering and giving back to their community,' said Neighbourhood Network Manager Erin Cerenzia in a statement. 'The Give Back Awards are all about celebrating these unique and positive contributions, and the inspirational ways that students help us build better communities together.'

But sometimes it's hard for us to talk about ourselves and the ways we give back. Ms. Cerenzia tells The Auroran that it's important for interested students to step up and tell their stories.

'Usually people who are giving back are not doing it for the recognition,' she says. 'We at Neighbourhood Network, especially when you think about the fact these recipients will be celebrated at National Volunteer Week, want to inspire people to get involved and become a volunteer. If you're hesitant to apply, if you're worried that 'it's not really me to brag about my volunteer experience,' I would reframe it and shift that narrative. I'd say, 'I could actually be inspiring someone,' whether it's a younger high school student, adult, a senior - you can inspire anyone to give back to your community. We definitely encourage you to tell your story.'

This story is important when Neighbourhood Network is reviewing applicants, as is an accompanying sponsorship letter from a leader of an organization or organizations at which applicants volunteered 'who can really speak to the great work you've done there.'

They typically receive in the area of 80 applicants each year.

'It makes it a real tough process for our adjudications team and that's why our score card is so key for us,' she says. '[Applicants should] be really clear in how you describe your volunteer contributions. You'll notice when you read the application you don't have to have volunteered at a dozen different organizations. You don't have to have a high number total volunteer hours. What we really care about is the impact volunteering has had on your life and therefore the community and neighbours around you.'

'Being really clear in how you tell that story of your volunteer contributions and commitment would be the best piece of advice I could give to applicants who are submitting a Give Back Awards application.'

Applications for the 2023 Give Back Award program will be accepted until Friday, March 24, at 4 p.m. Forms are available online at www.nnetwork.org/GiveBackAwards.

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