



RTOERO awards \$60,000 in scholarships to support well-being of seniors, communities

Toronto, May 31, 2023 – Twenty post-secondary students are preparing to make a positive impact on their communities with the support of the [RTOERO scholarship program](#).

Since 1968, [RTOERO](#) has been a voice for teachers, school and board administrators, educational support staff and college and university faculty in their retirement. The organization’s mission is to improve the lives of its members and seniors. This year, RTOERO awarded scholarships valued at \$3,000 each to 20 college and university students. They are enrolled in programs that lead to careers in seniors health and well-being, education or environmental stewardship, or that reflect a strong commitment to diversity, equity and/or inclusion.

“We want to see a better future for all generations. One way we can contribute is by supporting students who are dedicated to making a difference,” says Martha Foster, Chair, Board of Directors, RTOERO.

This year’s recipients are studying in programs that focus on, among others, health science, social work, nursing, nutrition, occupational therapy, neuroscience, education and public health. “Their passion around their areas of interest promises to serve their communities well,” Foster says.

RTOERO members are encouraged to recommend students in their lives (from their family or community) for the annual scholarships. Over the past 17 years, RTOERO has awarded scholarships totaling over \$550,000.

The full list of the 2023 scholarship recipients:

Student	Program	Interests/goals
Emma Gelinas Iroquois Falls, Ontario Nominated from District 5 Cochrane & Temiskaming	BA Health Sciences Western University	Emma’s current studies focus on health and aging. Her long-term goal is to become a dentist practicing in remote Indigenous communities. Growing up in a rural and remote community allowed her to understand both the challenges in these areas and the importance of providing culturally safe health care resources.
Rebecca Zynomirski Terrace, B.C. Nominated from District 8 London Middlesex	BEd Education University of Northern British Columbia	Rebecca’s short-term goals are to be a primary educator in lower socio-economic communities. She’s interested in neutralizing the effects of poverty by implementing strong literacy and numeracy programs, and creating safe and inclusive classroom. Her long-term career goals are to do a Master of Education and work in administration to make changes in the system. She’d like to see more resources and programs in rural and Indigenous communities, and more Indigenous voices coming through a place-based curriculum.
Georgia Graham Georgian Bluffs, Ontario Nominated from District 10 Bruce Grey & Dufferin	BSc Applied Human Nutrition University of Guelph	Georgia aims to be a registered dietician and a certified diabetes educator. She is passionate about the ways the right diet can improve your health, energy and mood. Apart from her studies, Georgia has done volunteering and fundraising for food banks and to assist people who are homeless.

<p>Elena Koning Bloomfield, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 19 Hastings & Prince Edward</p>	<p>PhD Clinical Neuroscience Queen's University</p>	<p>Elena has always been fascinated by the nervous system and how it influences our thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Psychiatry gained her attention due to the subjective nature of diagnoses, which are based on symptoms that frequently overlap between conditions. Her PhD focuses on exploring sub-characterizations of these conditions, with a goal of targeting interventions that address the root of each condition, not simply the symptoms. Elena wants to work in psychiatric clinical research to advance seniors' mental health care and help combat the suffering caused by mental illnesses like bipolar disorder.</p>
<p>Shana Marum-Harper Markham, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 23 North York</p>	<p>BSW Social Work Toronto Metropolitan University</p>	<p>Shana says that her undergraduate degree will provide additional educational opportunities, and further her goal to attend law school and eventually practice within the international law field. Her commitment is to focus on championing women's rights in underdeveloped countries, fighting for opportunities that were not afforded to women like her mother and grandmother, who immigrated to Canada to from places with oppressive political structures and ideologies.</p>
<p>Alexander McMorine Kanata, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 27 Ottawa-Carleton</p>	<p>Masters of Divinity Acadia University</p>	<p>Alexander wants to become a church pastor. He sees much spiritual need in our society. People are asking questions about purpose, ethics, justice and fairness. Alexander believes the church should be a place where people can ask and find answers to those questions. He's also driven to pursue this career to help meet other societal challenges, from food to housing to health. He feels churches should be part of meeting those needs.</p>
<p>Sophia Bair-Marshall Nepean, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 27 Ottawa-Carleton</p>	<p>LLB Law Trinity College Dublin</p>	<p>Sophia wants to work in human rights law and/or immigration law, which she believes are intrinsically intertwined. Her undergraduate degree in International Development and Globalization broadened her understanding of how to be a positive actor in the quest for global equity. Sophia says that everyone should have a right to live in a safe place with the people they love, and that she'd like to help as many people as possible live that reality.</p>
<p>Maria Sara Florez Gatineau, Quebec</p> <p>Nominated from District 27 Ottawa-Carleton</p>	<p>BSc (Hons) Health Science Food Science Carleton University</p>	<p>Maria's interdisciplinary degree combines pure sciences, research methods, social sciences and biomedical sciences. The holistic curriculum is essential to her goal of becoming a socially conscious doctor. She says certain populations – like women, Indigenous people, people of colour and chronic pain sufferers – aren't always taken as seriously by their medical care providers. That can result in medical trauma and distrust from those communities. As a future family physician, Maria wants to advocate for those patients and help them achieve positive health outcomes.</p>

<p>Gabriel Benrubi Markham, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 28 Region of Durham</p>	<p>Bachelor of Public Health Health Studies University of Waterloo</p>	<p>Gabriel's co-op program focuses on gerontology and health practices to support Canada's aging population. He'd like to pursue a Master of Applied Gerontology following his undergraduate studies, and eventually work as a health educator for a social services agency.</p>
<p>Grace Gong Mississauga, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 32 Prescott-Russell</p>	<p>BSc Computer Science Western University</p>	<p>At Western, Grace is founder and president of two clubs. She started Western Women in Computer Science to enable women – especially those who are marginalized – to find a safe space. The club has hosted workshops in everything from interview preparation to project management. Her Western Google Developer Student Club operates similarly, to make technical education more inclusive and accessible. Grace hopes her story is a reminder to young women and other underrepresented individuals that all aspects of their identity are what make them unique.</p>
<p>Elona Dahary Richmond Hill, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 34 York Region</p>	<p>Diploma Practical Nursing George Brown College</p>	<p>Elona's goal as a nursing student is to improve quality of life and lessen suffering, something she's determined to continue in her career caring for the senior population. Her mission is to encourage seniors to use preventative techniques, assess for early signs of disease and improve their well-being through daily physical activity, healthy eating plans, social interaction and accessibility to screening centres.</p>
<p>Megan Cordi Vaughan, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 34 York Region</p>	<p>BA Kinesiology University of Waterloo</p>	<p>Megan would love to work in a physiotherapy rehabilitation clinic, helping seniors to recover after injuries or prevent future ones. She intends to pursue a Master of Physiotherapy following her undergraduate studies. She has volunteered for her university Centre for Community, Clinical and Applied Research Excellence, where students support physical activity for seniors.</p>
<p>Emily Gomes-Szoke Richmond Hill, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 34 York Region</p>	<p>BSc (Hons) Biology, Physiology McMaster University</p>	<p>After her undergraduate studies, Emily wants to pursue medicine. She'd like to work in remote communities where there is limited access to medical services, such as in northern Canada. Emily wants to be part of dismantling the structural inequities that create barriers to care. She has volunteered for a food bank, Canadian Blood Services and a research project that promotes culturally appropriate nutrition and physical activity for immigrants/refugees.</p>
<p>Laura Ireland Zephyr, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 34 York Region</p>	<p>MSc Occupational Therapy University of Toronto</p>	<p>Laura looks forward to opportunities as an occupational therapist to help everyone from children with sensory strategies to seniors with aging in place. She has volunteered at a pediatric occupational therapy clinic, with an outreach program for seniors, for the Canadian Mental Health Association and for a foundation that helps youth to manage anxiety.</p>

<p>Jasmine Wright London, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 36 Peterborough</p>	<p>BSc (Hons) Neuroscience Western University</p>	<p>After her undergraduate degree, Jasmine wants to attend medical school and become a neurologist or geriatrician. She chose to study neuroscience to develop a better understanding of the scientific principles behind neurological disorders such as Alzheimer’s disease, which her grandfather battled. Currently, she volunteers for the Alzheimer’s Society and organizes blood donation drives at university.</p>
<p>Grace Hiltz Chatham, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 38 Lambton</p>	<p>MScOT Occupational Therapy Western University</p>	<p>Grace sees a disconnect between clinical research and how it’s applied firsthand in gerontology. She aspires to close this gap by working as an occupational therapist within long-term care and community settings, and becoming certified in the Assistive Device Program to support mobility and aging in place.</p>
<p>Kayley Head Mississauga, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 39 Peel</p>	<p>MSc Integrative Biology University of Guelph</p>	<p>Kayley’s expertise in molecular ecology will help her to monitor the habitat occupancy of endangered and invasive aquatic species using environmental DNA. This biomonitoring technique can detect the presence of species through collecting, extracting and amplifying DNA from a water sample, without the need to capture or sample target organisms. Her work will support the recovery of endangered aquatic species populations, helping to conserve the biodiversity of freshwater ecosystems.</p>
<p>Nicole Fradette Whitehorse, Yukon</p> <p>Nominated from District 42 Mainland British Columbia</p>	<p>Master of Nursing Nurse Practitioner Athabasca University</p>	<p>Nicole has worked for 17 years as a registered nurse, and currently devotes much of her time to supporting seniors with chronic conditions. After completing her degree, she’ll be able to develop a nurse practitioner position within outpatient services at Whitehorse General Hospital, and provide primary care services to Yukon seniors and others in remote communities.</p>
<p>Claire Smith Toronto, Ontario</p> <p>Nominated from District 42 Mainland British Columbia</p>	<p>Master of Nursing Nurse Practitioner University of Toronto</p>	<p>Claire has served a cardiovascular ICU nurse and trauma nurse. Upon graduating as a nurse practitioner, she plans to work in primary care. She hopes to promote holistic health for seniors by teaching and encouraging healthy living (nutritious diet, active lifestyle), while preventing illness and treating co-morbidities with thorough medical care.</p>
<p>Jeanine Wasik New Westminster, B.C.</p> <p>Nominated from District 42 Mainland British Columbia</p>	<p>Med Educational Leadership Vancouver Island University</p>	<p>Jeanine is studying the ways to support both students in their social-emotional skill development, and educators in their professional development. She views the children in her classroom as our future leaders, global citizens, collaborative problem-solvers, innovators and change-makers. Jeanine is committed to nurturing their compassion, igniting their curiosity and fostering their capacity to work together.</p>

RTOERO is a bilingual trusted voice on healthy, active living in the retirement journey for the broader education community. With 83,000+ members in 51 districts across Canada, we are the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education retirees. We welcome members who work in or are retired from the early years, schools and school boards, post-secondary and any other capacity in education. We believe in a better future, together!

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