

Winning Essays

Grain and General Services Union

Scholarship and Bursary recipients



Congratulations to our 2011 scholarship and bursary recipients* who were chosen to receive \$2,000 from GSU's scholarship program.

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* Grain and General Services Union scholarship recipients are selected by GSU's scholarship committee.

* GSU's First Nations University of Canada bursary recipient is chosen by the FNUC scholarship administration.



Grain and General Services Union's
First Nations University of Canada bursary



Audrey Armstrong

Audrey Armstrong is from the Thunderchild First Nation. She is a 29 year-old single mother to three boys. I come from a family of 6 children 3 boys and 3 girls and my mom was a single parent for most of my life as well. Despite how difficult life may get, giving up is not an option. For some reason I am a very determined individual and I am very determined for my boys to have the best life that I can possibly give them on my own. I maintain a really good average and great attendance in school and I keep all my priorities in order. Overall, everything that I am working for is for a better life for my boys and to teach them that in order to succeed in life you must work hard to achieve your goals and dreams.

Audrey is enrolled in the Bachelor of Indian Social Work program at the First Nations University Saskatoon Campus. She is a second year student enrolled in full-time courses.



Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient



Ellen Clemence

Ellen Clemence is currently a second year biology student at the University of Victoria.

Ellen was born and raised in Regina, Sask. She later moved to Abbotsford, BC, where she attended WJ Mouat Secondary School and graduated with honours before moving to Victoria to attend university.

Ellen's father, Ken Clemence, is a GSU sub-local 1.1 member working for Viterra in Balgonie.

"Thank you to GSU for awarding me a scholarship and supporting my family over the years."

Enhancing the Quality of Life

Having a father that is a union member has impacted our household by creating a greater quality of living. The Grain and General Services Union enhances the lives of many through Collective Bargaining by negotiating guaranteed work hours/shifts, paid vacations, along with health and dental benefits. Without these great contributions my life and many other lives would not be what they are today.

If my father was not in a union, things would have been different. Having a set amount of working hours means having a steady income. This steady income not only improves the family budget but also provides much needed stability. If I had not grown up with a union member in our household, I would have gone to a babysitter after school, creating an expense that would have greatly impacted the way my family lived. However, because of the focus on family values and shift flexibility, my father was able to be home for me when I needed him. By having a set amount of work hours and a guaranteed overtime pay schedule, unions provide their members with the opportunity to work, support, as well as be there for their families when they are needed, impacting their households for the better.

Longer paid vacations are a benefit that makes working for a union excellent for families. Taking family vacations has always been something I hold close to my heart. The memories created and the bonding time had, is something I wouldn't change for the world. My father had the opportunity to take days off work so he could spend quality time with me and we could go on adventures to different places. If my father was not a member of a union, those precious memories may never have happened.

Because of union negotiations, members have excellent health and dental benefits, which not only are a benefit to the members themselves, but also to their families. These benefits are a blessing, for without them, I would not have been able to get braces to straighten my teeth due to the cost, nor been able to afford the medication that I need in order to live out a normal life. Having a father that is in a union has given me all these things making my life better overall and making my life what it is today. Living in a unionized household also gave my whole family expanded health and dental benefits making their lives better.

Living with a union member in my household has greatly impacted my life through steady work hours and income, helping to create everlasting memories by enhanced paid vacations, and aiding me and my family with health and dental benefits, all for a greater life. Without the impact of a union member living in my household, life would not be as good as it is today. Knowing and understanding the importance of a union and the positive impacts they have on work and home life is a lesson and value that I will carry forward to my own future employment. Not only am I thankful, but I am also so proud to have a father that is a key member in the Grains and General Services Union.



Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient



Sarah Evans

Sarah Evans graduated in the fall of 2011 in Kelvington, Sask, and is currently attending school at St. Peters College in Muenster, Sask.

Sarah is taking Arts and Science classes and eventually hopes to be an elementary school teacher and specialize in special needs children. She is planning to study for two years at St. Peters before transferring to the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon where she will further her schooling to pursue her goals.

Sarah's father, Glen Evans, is a GSU member in sub-local 1.14 working for Viterra in Kelvington.

"Thank you for choosing me for a GSU scholarship!"

My name is Sarah Brai Evans and I am an 18-year-old recent graduate of Kelvington High School.

My father worked away from home for many years while I was growing up until he was given the opportunity to work in our home town with Viterra, formally Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. He began as a seasonal employee in 2000 with many dedicated hours and an accumulation of seniority he became a facility assistant at Viterra Market Center. I myself became a groundskeeper at Viterra cutting grass as one of my summer jobs. This helped me to pay for my lifeguarding and teaching certificate which has enabled me to be employed the last summers.

"What is the impact of having a unionized worker in my household?" I would like to answer this question by first saying it allowed my father to remain working in our community and be a visible part of my upbringing. GSU, Grain and General Services Union have had a tremendous impact on our family personally. As a dependent of a union employee I realize the substantial financial securities which have benefitted our family of six. With the ever increasing cost of living my health and my family's health has never been a monetary issue. As a young adult I have come to realize the cost of prescription medications, dental bills, and optical expenses to name a few. The fact that we live in a rural Saskatchewan farming community, traveling expenses alone accumulate quickly when the nearest specialist could be anywhere from 50km to 220kms away. At least we have some satisfaction knowing that our fuel expense is somehow subsidized by the GSU's strong medical and extended health care plan.

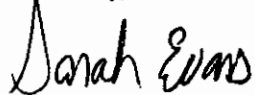
I believe I have become more politically aware because I have two unionized workers in my household. My mother is a member of the SGEU health sector, and I have realized many rights and benefits that unions have to offer through many family discussions over the years. As a student, the recent strike action of our teachers helped me to realize through family discussions that there are many underlying issues in unions which help support the common workers of our province. I use this as an example of how I was affected very personally and how one action affects others. With these discussions I realized the right to strike is ever so important. Although never wanted by an employee it is necessary when employer and employee talks cease. It is a right to be heard when others aren't listening. However wage increase seems to be the major issue the media portrays and again with increasing cost of living in our province this is but one small issue in the scheme of things.

What about job security, cut backs, seniority, layoffs, and pension plans. Without strong unions such as GSU supporting other unions of our province what will I have in my future? Work more get less? Will I be able to play a substantial ^{role} in raising my children? What about my education and health of my children? Bill C-45 was legislated through the provincial government which deems that certain designated workers of our provincial work force are unable to strike; is this

where our province is headed? I hope not. Unions have allowed my mother to stay home with myself and my three sisters though maternity leaves and more recently allowed fathers to do the same. There are more financial options for a dual working family; overtime wages ~~for~~ for dedicated employees, and vacation pay, sick time, and family leave credits. All of these are due to union representatives working together to make sure the language of our contracts is effective, fair and binding for the rights of all employees, not just a select few.

These are all the reasons why I have been impacted in my life with a unionized worker in my household. GSU has not only benefitted one member of my family but rather my whole family. If I were to be a successful candidate of this generous scholarship it would be used wisely towards my future career as an elementary school teacher for special needs children. SGU stands for strength through membership. I believe it is also strength for families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Evans



Grain and General Services Union's scholarship recipient



Jill Heidecker

Jill grew up on a farm near Middle Lake, Sask. After graduating from Middle Lake high school in 2010, she attended her first year of Arts and Science at St. Peter's College in Muenster, Sask.

Jill is now in her second year of Arts and Science at St. Peters and in February she will apply to the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Jill is working toward her goal of becoming an elementary/middle years teacher.

Jill became a GSU member when she was employed as summer-student at Viterra head office in Regina.

"Thank you to the GSU for the scholarship, it is greatly appreciated."

The Impact of Having a Unionized Worker in Your Household

Hello there, my name is Jill Heidecker and I am currently employed at Viterra as a summer student. In 2010-2011 I attended my first year of Arts and Science at St. Peters College (affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan), SK. This will be my second year in 2011-2012 attending St. Peters College. I am working towards my Bachelor of Education Degree.

I believe the impact of a unionized worker is a very positive one for the entire family. The main reason I think is because of the impact the staff benefits that are made accessible to the employee, but it doesn't stop there – it helps the entire household, not just the staff member. You have the opportunity to build a career and have job security for the rest of your life, which most people are striving for.

Generous health benefits, dental plans, and sick leave all provide reassurance for the average family. Job seniority is a great security provided for the longer term employee. When new opportunities arise – new jobs comes up or positions, the seniority that you have, counts a great deal. If you have the opportunity to obtain a union position when you're 20 or so, you can build up a great deal of seniority by the time your 40. This provides the possible chance at early retirement – which is a definite incentive for employees.

Paying good union wages helps reduce wage inequality amongst employees whereas in non-union jobs there is different wages for everyone, creating tension and unfairness. There is more stability and consistency with wages paid to a unionized employee. If your family moves to a new town or city, a unionized worker will earn the same as a co-worker in that area. This seems to be a great way to treat people – and keep employees working hard and happy.

There is such a bonus to a union job with great benefits vs. a non union job and no benefits. The dental plans, medical coverage, and paid sick leave impact not only the employee, but whoever the employee is supporting in their own household. Teamwork counts for a great deal at work because overall fairness and equality are emphasized throughout the job. When you

work hard, you are rewarded. Not only is teamwork a reoccurring theme at the office, but you take the concept of teamwork and apply it to your household and instill the importance of it to your family members.

Fairness and equality are two of the vital concepts that have been emphasized in Canada, and with the help of the Grain Services Union, it makes a step towards overall equality. The importance of having a union in place provides employees with more than just satisfaction – it expands further than just immediate employees but makes home life easier for the workers. Although benefits play a huge role in why employees are happy, when you have a career and job that you love with extra bonus's, that happiness carries over from your work and makes your household a more secure place to live and be a part of.

I have such an appreciation for being a part of a union because it taught me that when you work hard, good things are made accessible towards you AND your family. Dental and health care seem like such simple issues to deal with, but employees without unionized jobs realize how expensive it can be and the burden that it places on themselves to support an entire family with a mediocre wage. This makes those with unionized jobs much more appreciative for what they have.

I have the opportunity to not only be in a union myself, but my parents are as well. This pushes me to be grateful towards the union and work places that entitle us to such liberties. We are appreciative of our jobs, employers and the union that we are in. If there is one thing that being a unionized worker has taught me and the impact it has had on my household, it would be to never take anything for granted, because having fantastic job benefits isn't a guarantee or a right, it's a privilege.

Thank-You.



Grain and General Services Union's scholarship recipient



Larissa Snider

Larissa Snider is from Eldersley, Sask., and attended Tisdale Middle and Secondary School in her high school years.

Currently, Larissa is a second-year student attending the University of Saskatchewan. She is majoring in International Development Studies, with minors in both Political Studies and French.

Larissa's future goal is to obtain a position in some organization as a humanitarian aid worker or work for the government. She plans to use the money from the GSU scholarship to pay for her tuition at the University of Saskatchewan.

Larissa's father, Les Snider, is a member GSU sub-local 1.13. He works for Viterra in Tisdale.

"Thank you again for choosing me to be awarded the GSU scholarship. I will put it to great use!"

A Way OF Life

Unions have been, and continue to be, an important part of industrialized societies, such as Canada. Unions not only aid their members, but they are also beneficial to those members' families for a number of reasons- direct, as well as indirect.

I am fortunate to have two members, a mother and father, who are each unionized within their occupations. The fact that both of my parents are members of unions helps our family remain financially secure due to the unions' abilities to negotiate fair wages on their members' behalves. My family does not need to worry as much about unemployment or decreases in salaries because of their union memberships. Also, in a society where women are still often paid less than their male counterparts, my mother can be reassured that her union will ensure her a fair and equal wage to others in the same occupation. I can always be assured that my parents are being treated fairly within their occupations because I know that there is a group of people who will always be there, ready to support them and their needs.

A more direct impact of having unionized workers in my household are the health benefits my parents receive. My family and I do not need to worry too much about the costs of medications, dental work, eye care, along with other medical procedures because their unions have negotiated health plans on their behalves. This is especially beneficial to me, a university student, as my parents' health plans will cover me until I obtain my bachelor degree and can afford my own health care or am lucky enough to find a career in which I will be unionized and receive health insurance. My family's health benefits plan saves me quite a bit of money each semester as I attend school. The health plans my parents have received due to their being in unions gives me peace-of-mind knowing that I will be covered if something should ever happen to me or my family.

Having unionized workers in my household is something I do not take for granted. I see the trouble in the world today and I am thankful for the security my family and I are able to feel. I can continue on with my education knowing that my parents will be able to help me due to their job security and health plans, if need be. I can also live with less stress because I know that if a family member or myself were to fall ill, they or I would be taken care of financially due to my parents' being parts of unions which fight for their, as well as their family's, well-being.

Larissa Snider



Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient



Dustin Thiel

Dustin became a member of the GSU while working on three separate four-month work terms at the Viterra Head Office. He is 25 years old and studying at the Paul J. Hill School of Business at the University of Regina.

Dustin plans to graduate from university in 2012 with a Bachelor of Business Administrations majoring in Accounting. Following his graduation, Dustin plans to pursue my Certified Management Accountant (CMA) designation.

Dustin is a GSU member in local 2. His father, Kevin Thiel, is also a GSU member.

"I would like to thank the GSU for awarding me with this scholarship. It means a great deal to me and will go a long way in helping pay for my final year of tuition."

Dustin Thiel

Grain and General Services Union Scholarship Committee

July 13, 2011

What is the impact of having a unionized worker in your household?

Since the first trade union was formed in the early 19th century, millions of families have been affected by having a unionized worker in the household. I have been directly affected by a unionized employee in the household. My father has been part of the Grain and General Services Union for nearly 30 years. Over the years, my father's association with the GSU has been extremely beneficial to our family. After consulting with someone who has been part of the GSU since the day he entered the work force, I came to the conclusion there were three main keys to the GSU's effect on our household.

Due to his association with the GSU, my father was able to provide a steady pay cheque for our family. As a child, I never once had to worry about my father not being able to provide the essentials to his young family. My father was also able to provide the funds necessary for us to take part in any sporting activities we wanted and, in large part due to the GSU imposed standard 40 hour work week, my father was also able to dedicate many hours of his spare time to coach all his children through minor sports. Through all my travels as a young competitive athlete, my dad was not only one of my biggest fans but also the best coach I have ever had.

Job security, which also ties into my previous topic of receiving a steady pay cheque, is also a very important aspect of the union/household relationship. Having a secure job allowed my parents to plan their future with confidence. This included everything from planning the growth of their family to committing to large purchases such as a vehicle or house. Without job security, my parents would not have been able to settle into the house that my family has called "home" for the past 8 years.

At some point in time every family has encountered some type of health expenses. Whether those expenses are medical, dental or optical in nature, such expenses can become quite large and possibly insurmountable. Due to the benefits that the GSU has bargained into effect, my family never had to worry about expensive medical bills. Health benefits allow a provider to

ensure that their family has everything they need to be as healthy as possible. Whether it be something as simple as an eye check up or as complicated and painful as a root canal, my family always knew that it was covered.

Throughout the duration of this essay I have touched on my own personal experience with a GSU members affect on our household. The GSU has always had a positive effect on my life. Not only has my father been a member of the GSU for my entire life but I also have been part of the GSU for nearly three years if you count all my time of service consecutively. This direct personal participation in GSU has only cemented my opinion of the GSU being a great union to be a part of. I plan to convocate from the U of R following the 2012 Spring/Summer semester and I hope to be lucky enough to land a job and become a permanent member of Local 2 – Viterra (Head Office). If a job in the GSU's Local 2 – Viterra (Head Office) is not in the cards, I sincerely hope that I can find a job with a union as well respected as the GSU.



Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient



Lindsey Varga

Lindsey Varga was born and raised in Yorkton, Sask. She attended Sacred Heart High School and graduated in 2004.

After graduation, Lindsey worked for a year before returning to school to pursue a degree in Social Work. She returned to school in the fall of 2010 to take the SIAST Business Certificate at the Parkland College in Yorkton.

In autumn 2011 Lindsey began working towards her accounting diploma and she hopes to eventually achieve her certified general accountant designation.

Lindsey's father, Rod Varga, is a GSU local 4 member working for Grain Millers in Yorkton.

"Thank you very much to the Grain & General Services Union for the generous scholarship. I can't express how much I appreciate the financial assistance as it will help me to achieve my academic and career goals."

“What is the impact of having a unionized worker in your household?”

By: Lindsey Varga

Growing up I remember many nights when my dad was walking out the door at night to go to his union meeting. To be honest, I never thought much of it at the time but now that I've grown up a bit, I understand the importance of those meetings he was attending. He was going to join others with the shared opinions and needs; to join together to have one strong unified voice to be heard.

Being a member of a union, my dad had input on wages, time off, hours worked, and benefits, but he also had some built in job security. Knowing that there was specific protocol to follow regarding seniority and working conditions and also having someone to help with grievances should any problems arise is a positive benefit of a union. Having better working conditions and job security can do wonders on stress levels. My dad was less stressed at work which made him happier when he was at home. And because he was a member of a union, my dad was able to take more vacation days so he could spend more time at home with the family.

The union also provided our family with a good benefits and dental plan. I know this was especially important for us because at a young age I developed asthma and allergies which required medical attention. I also had quite a few cavities as a kid which cost my parents quite a bit of money, something which I am not very proud of now. Had we not had a good health and dental plan, the financial burden on my parents would have been very stressful and perhaps we wouldn't have been able to afford all the other indulgences in life. By having affordable health care costs, my parents had the money to put myself and my brother in after school activities and minor sports leagues.

Growing up with my dad in a union also influenced my views on unions. While some see unions as a bother and a bad idea, I grew up with a positive view of unions. I am not leery of

finding employment at a unionized environment as I know all the wonderful things a union can do for an employee. In fact, I just became a member of my very first union at my current job and it has done nothing but strengthened my positive feelings towards unions.