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MEDIA RELEASE

Laurier launches tuition bursary for current and former youth in care

WATERLOO - Wilfrid Laurier University is reducing barriers to university education for individuals who are currently or were formerly in the foster care system through the creation of the [Learners from Care Tuition Bursary program](#), which will ensure tuition fees are covered for up to 20 students in its first year.

As part of the pilot program, which begins in fall 2021, interested students can also be matched with a staff member from either the Dean of Students office or Teaching and Learning Services, who will support them throughout their degree and help them access resources, as needed, such as educational supports, academic advising and funding opportunities.

"We are thrilled to be joining the growing list of universities and colleges in Canada that are making post-secondary education more accessible for current and former youth in care," said Mary Wilson, vice-provost of teaching and learning at Laurier. "People raised in care face many barriers to education. We want to do our part to make sure they have the opportunity to come to Laurier and succeed in their studies."

Laurier developed the program in close consultation with the [Child Welfare Political Action Committee Canada](#), which has been advocating for tuition support programs in post-secondary institutions across the country. Thanks to their work, an additional 14 universities and colleges in Canada now offer financial assistance programs for students raised in care.

"Post-secondary studies gave me hope and a future after foster care," said Jane Kovarikova, founder of the Child Welfare PAC, former Crown ward and current doctoral candidate at Western University. "I'm so proud of Wilfrid Laurier University for making it possible for current and former foster kids to achieve their goals."

The Learners from Care Tuition Bursary program is accepting applications from current and incoming Laurier undergraduate students who are currently or were formerly in the foster care system for at least one year. The program is open to both mature students and those who've recently graduated high school. Priority will be given to incoming first-year students pursuing their first degree. The bursary will be renewable as long as students continue their studies at Laurier.

"Everyone deserves access to education," said Ivan Joseph, vice-president of student affairs at Laurier. "We have a responsibility to reduce the financial barriers for learners in care, but also to ensure they feel welcomed and supported while they're here."

The bursary program is an extension of the many services Laurier already provides for former youth in care, including meetings with the Dean of Students offices and Teaching and Learning Services to provide support, guidance and connections with other on-campus resources.

Current and former youth in care can find out more about the Learners from Care Tuition Bursary, including eligibility requirements, on the [bursary's website](#).

CONTACTS:

To arrange an interview with a Laurier alumna and former youth in care, please reach out to Claire Bruner-Prime, Communications and Media Relations Officer, at cprime@wlu.ca.

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Quick Facts:

- Child Welfare PAC Canada is working with any post-secondary partners in Canada who wish to increase social mobility for people raised in foster care
 - This work was inspired by the [Vancouver Island University tuition waiver program](#) (no age limits) for people who were raised in care in B.C.
 - Finances are a significant, but not only, barrier to post-secondary studies faced by people raised in care
 - Post-secondary studies level the playing field for this group
 - So far, Child Welfare PAC has worked with 14 institutions in 5 provinces to create 180+ places that address financial barriers to post-secondary education
 - [Click here for participating schools](#)
 - **The end goal is similar opportunities at all post-secondary schools coast-to-coast**
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[About Child Welfare PAC Canada](#)

The Child Welfare PAC is a federal not-for-profit that represents the interests of children raised by the government. The advisory committee consists of professionals from academia, law, business, advocacy & public service who have lived experience in child protection systems. See complete advocacy agenda here: childwelfarepac.com.



Child rights advocate, Jane Kovarikova, grew up in foster care since the age of six and began living on her own at age 16. She graduated with a BA (Hon) in Psychology at Laurentian University and a MSc in Human Rights from the London School of Economics. As a political staffer at the Ontario Legislative Assembly, she was instrumental in developing legislation that is reducing youth homelessness today. Influenced by these earlier experiences, Kovarikova founded the Child Welfare PAC Canada in 2017. This not-for-profit focuses on systemic changes that support youth success after being raised in state care. Currently, Kovarikova serves as the Board Chair of Simcoe-Muskoka Family Connexions, a regional child protection agency, and on the Ontario Premier's Council for Equality of Opportunity. She is also a PhD Candidate and Lecturer at Western University in the Department of Political Science.



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