

Recipient Profile

Resilience Award Winner Sophia Zamick

The Westwood alumna overcame family struggles to graduate with her class

by Michelle Lancaster

Sophia Zamick knows a thing or two about getting through rough times. The Westwood Collegiate alumna is in her second year at the University of Winnipeg and pursuing studies in psychology. But it wasn't always clear to her that she would persevere in her academic journey.

A Time of Difficulty

The Class of '23 graduate had the burden of completing her Grade 12 school year while coping with some adversity at home. Sophia says she was "living with a family member that was unstable mentally," and describes her home life in general at the time as "unstable."

Focusing on the next test or assignment can be difficult when there is trouble at home. But Sophia credits both her family and staff members at Westwood for providing her with needed support throughout the year. "In times of adversity, it is important to never give up hope, persevere, and work hard so you can reach your goals," she says.

Support from Staff

Westwood teacher Gary Fewer has known Sophia since she was in Grade 9 and saw signs of the "pervasive and very complex" adversity at home. "This led to some good days and some bad days—and some very bad days," he explains.

But Gary says hard work and persistence helped her succeed in the classroom. "At first in Grade 9 the impact of this ongoing struggle led to Sophia being inward and shy. By Grade 12 she was a smiling, positive, confident self-advocate."

The Long Walk

On June 28, 2023, Sophia walked across the stage of the Centennial Concert Hall in cap and gown to receive her high school diploma. She was one of over 150 fellow graduates that attended the Westwood Convocation that year.

Recognizing her notable struggle, school staff members nominated and selected Sophia for a Resilience Award. The honour recognizes a student who demonstrates a positive attitude towards learning and shows perseverance, persistence, and growth despite challenge to successfully graduate—whether that be physical, emotional, or a life event.

The award was first established in 2022, and goes to deserving student(s) from each of St. James-Assiniboia School Division's (SJASD) five high schools each year. Sophia received \$500. "I feel grateful and honoured to have received this award and I remember feeling proud that I had accomplished this," explains Sophia.

"I really do think awards like this make more of a difference for the mentality of the winners than any financial benefit," explains Gary. "We always say that just because all the students cross the stage together does not mean that they all accomplished the same thing. This reward recognizes this."

Turning Adversity into Strength

The post-secondary student and part-time worker says receiving the award helped to encourage her to pursue her education and career goals. She'd like to complete her education in psychology and use her difficult experiences to help children and families that need support. "I'm hoping to become a psychologist some day so I can help others through challenges that they may have faced in their lives," she explains.

Sophia is one of about 650 SJASD students to graduate in 2023. Since inception, over \$7,500 has been awarded to 20 students through the Resilience Award across the Division.



The Long Walk. Sophia joined over 150 of her fellow Westwood Collegiate alumni on June 28, 2023, to cross the stage to receive her high school diploma at the Centennial Concert Hall. (From left): Sophia Zamick with then Westwood Principal Kevin Dueck.