BECOME A CONTRIBUTOR

It takes just one.



ESTD 2026

THE FIRST RUNG

SCHOLARSHIP



Dear friend,

For seven years I've paid for one student's scholarship every year, out of my own pocket, in the town where I live and work. I've sat across the table from these kids and watched what happens when one adult simply believes in them.

I'm writing because I think you could be that person for a student in your own community.

This guide walks you through what The First Rung is, how a scholarship actually happens, and the three ways you can make one possible. It's simpler than you'd think. I promise it'll be one of the best things you ever put your name on.

With warm regards,

Gia Lucchetta
FOUNDER, THE FIRST RUNG

Every community knows this student

they're there for their community regardless of what they're going through

They work hard but it may not show academically. They take on responsibilities beyond their years, and their report card doesn't come close to telling their story. Life asked more of them than the honour roll ever could.

At graduation, the usual scholarships go to the kids who had more resources and generally better circumstances growing up. Our recipients clap from the crowd and figure that kind of help was never meant for someone like them.

Until your donation changes their life - and they have no idea.

Who receives the scholarship

Students don't apply. Their teachers, principals and guidance counsellors nominate them, and the school chooses. **A nominee:**

- Is heading to full-time post-secondary education. College, university, polytechnic, apprenticeship, trades: it makes no difference to us.
- Has kept going through real hardship.
- Is committed to learning, but isn't necessarily on the honour roll.
- Supports and encourages the people around them.
- Might not be able to continue their education at all without financial help.
- Keeps a B average each year to keep receiving the award.

Ask any teacher in your town who we're talking about. They won't have to think for long.

$25,000

for one local student's post-secondary education, disbursed over four years.



We pick character over grades: the young people who give back to their community, and who've had to climb a lot farther than most just to reach the starting line.

The students at the top of the class already have plenty of people cheering for them. We're looking further down the ladder, for the student who just needs a hand onto that first rung.

The first rung is the hardest step. It's the one between "I can't" and "I'm on my way."

Once a student is on it, they do the climbing themselves and they can choose to take advantage of our alumni and mentor networks.

How you can participate

Sponsor the student yourself, collaborate with a group of peers, or even rally your network.

Full ride

You fund the whole $25,000 yourself.
The scholarship can be presented in your name.

Partner up

You split it with colleagues or business partners, say five people at $5,000 each. The scholarship carries the group's name - a "chapter" based on your location.

Fundraise

You raise the $25,000 over the school year, July to May, with your own campaign - we can provide support on this end. Marketing meets philanthropy.

How a scholarship happens

1 You choose a school. Usually the high school in your own community.

2 You meet the principal. Bring this guide and the nomination checklist, and we'll help you with the conversation.

3 The school says yes, and names a contact who will run nominations.

4 Teachers nominate. Students never apply, and they're never told they're being considered. They keep doing their thing, because that's who they are regardless.

5 The school chooses the recipient, and tells you and The First Rung who they are.

6 The award is a surprise. At the graduation ceremony, The First Rung presents it on stage, with the trophy in the room.

7 You meet the student. After the ceremony, in a private room, you meet the student and their family, and we explain what the award really is.

8 Tuition gets paid. The school board confirms enrolment and pays the student's tuition directly, every year for four years.

How your funds travel

Always between some form of regulatory body. Your gift goes to the local school board, which issues your charitable tax receipt and pays the student's tuition straight to their school.

Your gift — **The school board** — **Tuition, paid directly**

When a few or more people give together, their gifts are pooled toward one scholarship and presented to the school board in June.

We'll ask you two things, once: do you want your name used publicly (and in what capacity), and can we email you? If you'd rather give anonymously, we are happy to accommodate.



You can also opt in to gift your recipient a frosh survival kit for an extra, separate fee that does not take away from their tuition funds.

Some perks for your gift



At the ceremony, we name you from the stage, and you're photographed handing over the award.

Your name is on the certificate your student keeps for the rest of their life.

It's on the trophy too, on an engraved name plate that stays in the school's display case.

On our website, you're listed on your community's chapter page searchable by town.

Every issue of our newsletter carries a Donor Spotlight.

At the end of the year, we tell you how your student is doing.

Alumni Network & Mentorship



The scholarship pays for school. What keeps a student going is having people in their corner.

Our alumni network connects recipients with each other and with mentors who've been where they're going. Mentoring is always the student's call: if your student asks, you're welcome to be one of those people.

Years from now, a lot of these students will be the ones reaching back down the ladder for the next student. That's the whole idea.

Where the first rung started



Gia Lucchetta has sold homes in Guelph since 1988. In 2020 she started paying for one local student's scholarship every year with her own money. Seven years and $175,000 later, she's still doing it.

She meets every one of them. One recipient, who got out of a life of violence and is now studying pre-medicine, looked her in the eye and said:

> "I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for you."

Now she wants other towns to have one too. You don't need a big organization to change a student's life. You need one person who decides to.

Where TFR is so far

7	$175,000	1
YEARS	AWARDED	STUDENT EVERY YEAR SINCE 2020

Ready to change a life for the better?

Get in contact with us to secure next steps.

Gia Lucchetta, Founder

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