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‘There’s still work that needs to be done:’ Dartmouth teen wins human rights scholarship



Allyssa Walsh, 18, was the winner of a national scholarship from Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies. -Jeff Harper/Metro

By Haley Ryan

Metro News

By helping young people break down the stigma around mental illness, a Dartmouth teen has gotten a helping hand towards university.

Allyssa Walsh, 18, is one of seven young people (and the only Nova Scotian) to land a Wiesenthal Scholarship for Human Rights Leadership worth \$3,600 that will go towards her tuition at Dalhousie University this fall.

“I don’t think I was really expecting it at all. It is a national scholarship,” Walsh said Monday.

“It was definitely an overwhelming feeling to think like ‘I actually did this, and my work is valued,’ so that was really exciting.”

The scholarship is offered by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC) in Toronto, a non-profit committed to countering racism and anti-Semitism by promoting tolerance and social justice.

Students from across the country applied for the scholarship by writing an essay on how their work in the community promotes tolerance, an FSWC spokesman said.

The scholarship is “definitely a big help” financially, Walsh said, because she had been worried about how to afford fees for her political science and history undergrad since she wasn’t able to get a student loan or line of credit.

“It came down to the point where I wasn’t even sure if I’d be able to go next year,” she said.

For the past two and a half years, Walsh said she’s been involved with Youth Against Stigma, who are focused on breaking down any misconceptions around mental illness by hosting events like coffee houses where people share their experiences and artwork at the Just Us! on Spring Garden Road.

The events are the third Friday of every month, but the group has also worked alongside Dr. Stan Kutcher analyzing documents used by people having mental health issues to make sure they were “youth-friendly” and accessible.

Walsh said children as well as elderly people attend the coffee house events, where the public space helps the group reach those who might not otherwise think about mental health.

Many think since we live in Canada in the 21st century everyone is very aware and accepting of mental-health issues – but that’s not the case, and many are still ashamed to reach out for help, Walsh said.

“By finding a message such as ... tolerance in general, you’re showing people that there’s still work that needs to be done,” Walsh said.

“I want to be a part of that solution.”