

Jack's gift of hope from an uncle he never met



“Hope, like love, is a force that you can feel.”

Those are the inspiring words of an 18-year-old young man named Jack who knows the hope and love that comes with support from HOPE 4 Youth, including through a college scholarship that honors a man he never met but who is a big part of the reason Jack is in college today.

“Hope is something I’ve always had to bank on,” Jack said. “It provides me with motivation.”

Jack has often needed that motivation in a life that turned upside down when he was just starting school and continued to churn throughout his high school years.

When Jack was five years old, his parents divorced. Then, his mom spent time in jail. Later, he bounced between his parents’ homes and area schools. At one point, Jack and his mother lived, as he describes it, “in and out of homelessness.”

Despite all the odds, Jack remained an excellent student, bringing home report cards that listed mainly As and some Bs.

“Obstacles never stopped me,” Jack explained. “I continued to push through challenges.”

When HOPE 4 Youth met Jack, he was going to Champlin Park High School and living with a friend and her family. Our HOPE Homes team offered help through a stipend for his host family and personalized support for Jack.

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“Jack is a bright young man whose good grades and positive attitude defy all the struggles he’s faced,” HOPE Homes Specialist Brenda Pritchard said. “In addition to stabilizing his living arrangement, we wanted to help set him on a path to a better life after high school.”

To that end, Brenda helped Jack apply for a Don Ratfield Scholarship, created by HOPE 4 Youth donors Duane and Jodi Stark.

Uncle Don's support for education

The scholarship fund honors Don Ratfield, the uncle who, years ago, surprised Duane with the money he needed for college — enough for classes, books, tools and clothes.



Auntie Sharon and Uncle Don

“I remember being completely shocked,” Duane said. “I was overwhelmed by his incredible generosity.”

After Duane finished college and tried to repay the money, Uncle Don shocked Duane again. He told him that when the opportunity arises in the future, pay it forward.

That day came in 2015 when Duane and Jodi started the scholarship fund for youth experiencing homelessness, creating financial support for post-secondary education and other training opportunities.

“I could finally pay it forward,” Duane said. “My only regret was that Uncle Don passed away before I was able to establish the fund.”

The Ratfield Scholarship eliminates a common barrier for starting or completing an education and creates a stable future for young people with potential. People like Jack, who was awarded \$3,000 from the fund to use for expenses at a Minneapolis university.

“Students like Jack don't lack for smarts or motivation,” Brenda said. “They just need the resources that give access to an education and a whole new trajectory in life. This scholarship fund creates that access.”

For this part, Jack sees the scholarship as another reason to have hope.

“The idea that the future holds nothing but good allows me to push through each day,” Jack said. “What lies beyond is better than what has been left behind.”

Something tells us that Uncle Don would be proud of all Jack has already accomplished and excited about what he'll be able to do with a college degree.

“Uncle Don put a high value on education,” Duane said. “He was an amazing man.”

Give now to make a difference in 2022

If you're inspired by Jack, Uncle Don and the Starks to join our mission to provide pathways to end youth homelessness, please consider a tax-deductible donation to the [HOPE 4 Youth year-end fundraising campaign](#).

Your gift creates a warm and safe place for young people to get out of the winter cold at our [HOPE 4 Youth Drop-In Center](#). Caseworkers at the center team with youth to find stable housing, educational opportunities, jobs and more. Some young people find a home at HOPE Place, our transitional housing unit. Others, like Jack, get help through our HOPE Homes program.

The help we offer at HOPE 4 Youth is specific and personal because hope means something different to every young person in crisis.