

EPIC ACHIEVEMENTS

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Volunteer Services Manager Tyler Engel says David (left) has had a positive impact on everyone he works with at Winnipeg Harvest.

Award Pays Tribute To Community Hero

By Jim Timlick

With the exception of family, there are few things David feels more passionately about than his work with Winnipeg Harvest and his favourite football team.

Those two passions came together when David was honoured during a special pre-game ceremony at Investors Group Field prior to the June 1

game between the hometown Winnipeg Blue Bombers and visiting Edmonton Eskimos.

David was presented with an IBAM Community Hero Award by the football club to recognize his years of service as a volunteer with the local food bank. The award pays tribute to individuals who have made a positive impact on their community.

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Shocked, Surprised To Receive Award

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“I was shocked. It was a surprise,” David says about when he first learned he was to receive the award.

“I was really pleased. My wife (Tricia) and my family were really pleased too. It made me feel really good inside.”

In conjunction with the award, David was presented with a Bombers jersey, tickets to the game for him and his friends and was recognized on the field prior to the game including a tribute on the stadium’s Jumbotron. He even got to meet Bombers President and CEO Wade Miller and joke around with mascots Buzz and Boomer.

What made the recognition even more special was the fact David is a lifelong Bombers fan and one of the team’s most ardent supporters.

“It made it extra special coming from the Blue Bombers,” David says, admitting he felt a flood of emotions as he headed down to the field for the award presentation.

“I was nervous. I didn’t know what to expect going down to the field. (Bombers staff) told me to just relax and enjoy myself. Everybody told me how proud they were of me. The people from Harvest told me they were pleased for me too.”

David was nominated for the award by Winnipeg Harvest and Volunteer Services Manager Tyler Engel. Engel says David was truly deserving of the honour.

“David has done some amazing work here. He’s here like clockwork each week and he’s busy the whole time he’s here,” says Engel, adding David was also honoured by Harvest this past spring for his more than 2,700 hours of service on behalf of the organization.

“The other thing with David is that he keeps



David displays the IBAM Community Hero Award he received earlier this season from the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

everyone’s spirits up around here. He’s always joking around with everyone. He adds so much to the positive atmosphere here at Harvest. He’s always in a good mood and everyone just responds to him.”

David, who is supported through Epic Opportunities’ Supported Independent Living (SIL) program, has been involved with Winnipeg Harvest for nearly a decade. He works at the food bank’s Winnipeg Avenue warehouse three or four times a week, sorting items in its storeroom and helping on its fleet of trucks with deliveries and pick-ups.

While the work itself is rewarding, David says the best part of his involvement with Winnipeg Harvest is the opportunities it’s given him to forge relationships with people.

“I enjoy the people I work with, which is definitely a draw. That’s why I stay there. And I can’t just sit at home all day sitting on the computer. I don’t have the patience for it,” he says, laughing.

“One of the best parts is when I’m bringing food to people and they smile and say thank you. That’s when I feel happy. It opens up my heart. On those days I’m always smiling when I come home and in a good mood.”

New Service To Help Meet Evolving Needs

By Jim Timlick

Epic Opportunities will soon offer a new model of service to the people we serve and their families.

Beginning next spring, Epic Opportunities will begin offering a home share program as part of the services we offer to people with intellectual disabilities and their families. The home share service will be in addition to existing services already offered through our Epic Everyday, Epic at Work, Epic Everyday and Epic Transition services.

The idea of home sharing has been around for some time, but is a relatively new concept when it comes to community living here in Manitoba. Essentially, it sees families or individuals sharing their home on an everyday basis with an adult living with a disability who wants to live in an independent, community-based setting.

Service Development Coordinator Jennifer Welsh and Senior Manager Carleigh McKay say Epic Opportunities began investigating the possibility of offering a home share model earlier this year after its primary funding partner, Community Living disABILITY Service (CLDS), began promoting the concept.

“It’s about us evolving to meet the needs of the people we serve,” McKay says.

As part of the home share concept, an individual or couple open their home to a person living with a physical or intellectual disability and serve as that person’s caregiver. In return, the caregivers receive a monthly caregiver benefit through Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) as well as a per diem to cover additional costs such as transportation.

Welsh says home sharing is about more than just providing a place for someone to live. It’s also about creating mutually beneficial relationships that offer both people served by Epic Opportunities and prospective caregivers an opportunity to grow and learn from each other.

McKay wholeheartedly agrees.

“There is so much to be gained from these kinds



Coordinator Jennifer Welsh (left) and Manager Carleigh McKay are overseeing development of a Home Share service.

of relationships,” she says. “You can both grow together. What an amazing opportunity for the people we serve and for individuals who want to embark on this journey with them.”

Epic Opportunities will soon begin recruiting prospective caregivers to join its home share program.

Welsh says there will be a number of checks and balances in place to ensure that potential caregivers are properly vetted and are a suitable match for people served by Epic Opportunities. That will include a criminal records check, a personal inspection of each home by agency staff and a Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (S.A.F.E) evaluation of a home’s physical and social environment. In addition, each caregiver will be required to participate in training sessions provided by Epic Opportunities on a variety of subjects including positive behavioral supports, non-violent crisis intervention and the ethics of touch.

Welsh stresses the new service isn’t intended to replace any of the existing services already offered by Epic Opportunities, but rather complement them as part of a person-centred approach to serving people and their families.

For more information about Epic Opportunities’ Home Share service contact Service Development Coordinator Jennifer Welsh at 204-953-3514 or jenniferw@epicmb.ca.

Strengthening Community Connections

By Jim Timlick

Epic Opportunities recently took part in a Government of Canada initiative that helps students gain hands-on experience while assisting not-for-profit organizations and other community institutions.

For the third year in a row, Epic Opportunities participated in the federally-funded Canada Summer Jobs program. The program provides wage subsidies to employers to create employment opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students. The objective of the program is to provide students with hands-on work experience while supporting organizations that provide important community services.

Thanks to the Canada Summer Jobs grant it received, Epic Opportunities was able to hire Cam Eason this summer to fill the role of Community Outcomes Assistant as part of its Human Resources team. Eason is currently studying Creative Communications at Red River College.

HR Generalist Chantal Dionne says participating in the Canada Summer Jobs program has been a win-win situation for both Epic Opportunities and the community. It helps the organization to better connect with the community it serves while giving students an opportunity to gain experience in their chosen field



Cam Eason (right) met with MP Robert-Falcon Ouellette as part of his job as Community Outcomes Assistant.

of work.

Equally important, Dionne says, is the fact that it's an opportunity for Epic Opportunities to help increase awareness of the important work the organization does.

"It helps students who have not had any experience in the disability support field to really gain an understanding of what we do here, make a connection with the people we serve and talk with people in the community about the work we do," she says.

As part of his duties, Eason assisted Epic Opportunities' Human Resources team with a variety of tasks including helping organize a series of activities in recognition of Direct Support Professionals Week, planning the organization's annual holiday gala

and service awards and pre-screening prospective employees. He also represented the organization at number of public events, including a July 30 meet-and-greet with federal MP Robert-Falcon Ouellette, and played a key role in encouraging local businesses to donate prizes for the annual An Evening With Epic fundraiser slated for Thurs., Nov. 1 at the Victoria Inn.

"My experience at Epic has benefitted me in so many ways," says Eason, adding how much he appreciates the creative freedom he was allowed by Epic Opportunities staff. "I learned a lot in terms of time management and how to apply the skills I learned in school on a daily basis. It also helped me with face-to-face communications on a business level.

"It's such a comfortable workplace to be part of. It's a great office culture. It was very welcoming. As a student I couldn't have asked for anything more."

Eason so impressed everyone this summer that he was asked to continue assisting with preparations for An Evening With Epic on a weekly basis until November.

"He's a very quick learner and understood right away what we do as an organization," Dionne says. "He's a real go-getter. He has a real charisma and is naturally able to connect with people. He really excelled for us this summer."