

Addolorata De Luca Leadership Scholarship founder focused on achieving Ultimate Goal of \$40,000

Cessidia De Biasio established fund in 2015 as a tribute to her maternal grandmother

By Michael Seguin
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Within minutes of meeting Cessidia De Biasio, everyone has the same question:

When does she have time to sleep?

De Biasio graduated from the University of Windsor in 2015 with a degree from the School of Social Work, before later embarking on an Honours Bachelor of Commerce from the Odette School of Business—which she completed earlier this year.

Aside from her substantial scholastic endeavours, De Biasio also volunteers her time with several charities, working with the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society and serving on the board of directors for Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Windsor-Essex.

Her efforts have not gone unrecognized.

De Biasio was awarded the 2017 ATHENA Scholarship, the Canada 150 Award of Distinction for Leadership from the Town of Amherstburg, and she was—perhaps redundantly—admitted into Leadership Windsor Essex's 40 Leaders Under 40. And, on top of an already lengthy list of accomplishments, De Biasio is the founder of the Addolorata De Luca Leadership Scholarship, a fund meant to provide financial aid to a first-or-second generation Canadian immigrant enrolled full-time at the University of Windsor.

"It's named after my grandmother, Addolorata De Luca," De Biasio explains. "I started the charity as a way to recognize her story, but it really represents the story of all immigrants and what they had to do to come to Canada."

"I try to pay it forward because university is so expensive. I applied for thousands of scholarships to help pay for it. I wanted to provide other students with a sense of financial relief and, in a sense, give an education to people who never got the opportunity or chance to have one—namely, our ancestors."

Ancestry is something that DeBiasio has never taken for granted.

After the death of her husband in Italy, De Biasio's maternal grandmother sought a better life for her family in Canada. Saving what money she could, DeBiasio's grandmother, then in her forties, made the week-long trip across the Atlantic with her five children. DeBiasio's mother was only six-months-old.

"They settled in Amherstburg on Texas Road, which was, back then, where all the Italians would go," states De Biasio.

"Nonna would work at the local cultural club washing dishes, or pick tomatoes—10 cents for a huge barrel. Anything to feed her family. She would work whatever job she could to give her kids a better life in Canada. My mom was the only one to go past high school."



Cessidia DeBiasio is pictured as a child with her Nonna, Addolorata De Luca, for which the charitable fund is named.



Photos courtesy of Cessidia DeBiasio

Cessidia De Biasio, left, is pictured with donor Natasha Feghali outside of the University of Windsor.

De Biasio was named after her maternal grandfather, Cessidio De Luca.

"My parents never let us forget where they came from, and what my parents and grandparents had to go through so that my siblings and I could have the lives we do today," De Biasio says. "And growing up in Windsor, it's such a multicultural community. You hear that story regardless of what someone's background is."

"Everyone knows someone or has a story where they're like, 'Oh yeah, my family also went through this,' or 'My family experienced something similar and had to sacrifice a lot, so that they could live the life that they have today.' So, that's where the inception of the scholarship comes from."

"My Nonna only had a Grade 5 education, but she came to Canada and was able to make a pretty good life for herself and her family. Same with my dad's parents. They had a Grade 3, Grade 5 education, and now I'm able to go to university and get the education they could only have dreamed of."

De Biasio created the Addolorata De Luca Leadership Scholarship in 2015, while only 21.

"One day I said, you know what, this is something I really want to do. So I spoke with the director of student awards and financial aid, Marian Doll, who's been an amazing support system."

She said, this is the process that you have to go through to create the endowment fund. I had to get all the legal work done, get the scholarship terms of references created, and start from the ground up. Really started with nothing."

The journey, she recalls, has not been a leisurely one.

"I've faced a lot of rejection!" De Biasio laughs. "I don't have a big name behind me. I'm not an established professional. There's other groups within the community that have a Rolodex of people they can just call up and say, 'Hey! Can you write me a \$12,000 cheque?'"

"I've definitely faced a lot of rejection, but it's taught me to persevere, which is what my grandparents had to do. And many others. So, it kind of gave me an insight, obviously on a very small scale, into what they had to go through."

"To face rejection and just keep pushing forward to get the end goal that you really want to achieve."

Fortunately, De Biasio is no stranger to achievement. The scholarship reached their first major milestone in November 2017, raising \$25,000 in donations.

When asked how it feels to have reached the charity's first major milestone, De Biasio lights up.

"It feels really good!" she states. "Because they told me from the beginning at the student awards and the alumni association that it's going to be a lot of hard

work. I'm the first and, as of now, only student at the time to create something like this. So they said it was definitely going to take a lot of work, which it has."

"It feels really nice to see this come to fruition. It only seems like a dream from faraway, but these two-and-a-half years have gone by so fast."

"But now I just want to focus on achieving our ultimate goal of \$40,000. Now, that's the next challenge."

De Biasio volunteers her own time to run the scholarship, without collecting a wage.

Although her commitment is staggering, what she finds truly inspiring is the generosity of the community.

"I've met a lot of great people, a lot of very inspiring individuals here in the (Windsor-Essex) community. It's really nice to have individuals who want to donate, who are very well-known in the community, but want to remain anonymous."

"Because I understand that, from the business point of view, you need to market yourself as a business and say, 'Okay, well this is how we're giving back and getting recognition for it.' But it's also really nice to see individuals who are still willing to help you, but don't want to publicize it. They just want to do it because they believe in the message of the charity, and they believe in the importance of what I'm doing, and what the charity's doing. It's creating more a sense of cohesiveness in our community."

Donations from the community

Upon reaching their ultimate goal of \$40,000, two different students will be able to receive financial aid from the Addolorata De Luca Leadership Scholarship each year.

"We accept any donation," De Biasio clarifies.

"Everyone receives a tax receipt for their donation. We're really looking for the community's help in getting our \$40,000 goal, which is only \$15,000 away. Any support is appreciated, whether it's an individual wanting to donate, or a company, or a foundation, or even if it's business wanting to do fundraisers on our behalf. We are definitely open and appreciative to any of that."

The first recipient of the Addolorata De Luca Leadership Scholarship will be administered in January 2019.

One hundred per cent of all donations go into the Addolorata De Luca Leadership endowment fund. The scholarship will remain in place for years, assisting not just today's generations, but generations to come.

To make a donation or for more information, please visit ADLScholarship.com