



D'Amato: It takes a village to raise a child who helps others

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Dylan Duncan was physically abused as a child. He was taken from his family, and grew up in a foster home. At 19, he lives with developmental disabilities.

What picture are you seeing, now that you have these facts?

Someone who will need help all his life?

Or someone who freely gives it?

Earlier this week, Duncan was returning from a culinary arts course he is taking at Humber College. He got off the bus near the train station at Victoria and Ahrens streets in Kitchener.

He saw a man fall down in the road. The man tried to get up, but couldn't.

"I had to help him," said Duncan.

"I had 911 on the phone, I said, 'There's a man falling down. His face is turning purple and red.'"

The man's breathing was laboured. It sounded to Duncan as if he was choking. Duncan got a few passersby to help him carry the man off the road. He took off his coat and put it underneath the man, on the sidewalk.

Then he gave cardiopulmonary resuscitation, in which he had been trained just a few weeks earlier, at Humber. It was part of the requirement for the culinary course.

"I was just in shock, and nothing really mattered to me but saving this man," Duncan said.

After 60 compressions, the man's colour had returned and his breathing was better. The ambulance and police arrived. They told Duncan that he had saved the man's life.

I told Duncan that I admired his ability to know what to do when the need struck.

His answer was surprising.

"I come from a really strong family," he said.

He was talking about his Waterloo foster parents, Lois and Tom Keachie. Duncan was seven and his brothers were five and six when they came to live there.

"It was not safe for me and my brothers" to live with his birth parents, Duncan said.

Lois, who has raised 32 foster children, tried to give the Duncan boys as normal and secure a life as possible.

"I knew he was going to be a great kid, because the first thing he did when he came to my house was spoon-feed his brother," she said of Dylan.

"He was always the caregiver."

The Keachies took the boys to hockey, swimming and soccer, and taught them about volunteering. The boys sorted toys for needy children each Christmas, and gave out donated blankets to homeless people.

Duncan still lives with the Keachies. He has developmental disabilities, so he was connected with the agency Christian Horizons, which supports 2,000 adults with disabilities in Ontario and Saskatchewan.

"I have the hardest time reading and writing," he said. "I can't read big words. I can't remember names."

But he remembered how to do first aid, because he had just been taught that skill at Humber. He was at Humber thanks to a connection with Christian Horizons, which helped to develop the program he was in. He was able to consider the program because he had been loved and nurtured by Lois and Tom Keachie.

It isn't taking a single thing away from Duncan to say that a lot of caring people helped make him strong and knowledgeable enough to react the right way in a crisis.



Dylan Duncan performed CPR on a man having a heart attack in downtown Kitchener, saving his life.



Luisa D'Amato is a Waterloo Region Record columnist. She writes on issues affecting day-to-day life in the area. Email

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