

Forging a new future 'one person at a time'

By Ashley Prest

GROWING up with Asperger syndrome was a lonely journey, at times, for Rebecca Froese until she found her niche at Winnipeg Harvest.

Froese, who began as a volunteer at the food bank, was able to earn the City of Winnipeg safe food-handling certification through training at Winnipeg Harvest and now has a restaurant job.

Now, others can follow a similar path using services offered at a new training centre announced Wednesday by Winnipeg Harvest and the Asper Foundation. Located at Winnipeg Harvest, the Asper Learning and Friendship Village is blazing a trail for people who need help forging a future.

Offering life-skills training to clients to help them find a job, the centre is also a safe gathering place for food bank clients, at-risk youth, immigrants, refugees and low-income families.

"I didn't really have any way of interacting socially and coming here gave me a chance to adapt into a new community," said Froese, 26.

She was diagnosed as a teen with Asperger syndrome, a neurodevelopmental disorder that's characterized by difficulty in social interaction and communication.

Her uncle suggested she volunteer at Winnipeg Harvest, where she also took cooking classes and was then hired by Bistro 7 ¼.

"I feel like I have matured very much since I started here (in 2004)," said Froese, who continues to volunteer at the food bank. "I now have a

job that I absolutely love and there's nothing better than going to work feeling like you want to go to work."

David Asper, chairman of the Asper Foundation, said it is a proactive learning centre that will make a difference in people's lives.

"You can think of change in broad, sweeping terms but I think you have to be more realistic and think about it one person at a time," Asper said.

The new learning centre is being funded by a \$100,000 donation by the Asper Foundation, along with a three-year commitment of \$25,000 per year for operating costs.

"Harvest is grateful and humbled to work with the Asper Foundation on this important initiative," Winnipeg Harvest executive director David Northcott said. "(It) will help our clients become more self-sufficient."

It will provide individuals with training in areas such as food-handling, forklift operation, computer skills and employment search. It will also allow access to computers to file job applications.

"Self-sufficiency and independence are essential parts of human dignity and that's what this is all about," Asper said.

The announcement was made Wednesday to coincide with the anniversary of the day in 2003 that Israel Asper, David's father, announced his intention to establish the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the anniversary of Queen Elizabeth signing into law the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982.

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Walls come tumbling down

Demolition crews begin dismantling three buildings on the west side of Osborne Street, south of Confusion Corner Wednesday. The buildings are being demolished to make way for a \$10-million, five-storey, office/retail building to be called the Landmark Office Tower. Demolition is expected to take four to six weeks. Work on the new building is scheduled to start in late May or early June and take about a year to complete.

Grant victim