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Achieving a Dream

Guardian Scholars . . . More Than a Scholarship- It's a Family

GRAND JUNCTION (May 15, 2011) - "We are the CEOs of our lives. Take control of your life, make necessary changes, and capitalize on the positive gifts of your life." Ron Davis (Guardian Scholar founder) advises the Guardian Scholars.

The Guardian Scholars, a program of The Youth Foundation, has achieved national recognition because it has helped disadvantaged youth with financial leverage graduate from college. These students come from challenging backgrounds and lack the financial resources and emotional support for college. The Guardian Scholars face significant psychological, emotional, displacement and financial challenges. They are provided the financial resources to attend college and most importantly loving care from college advisors, the Youth Foundation, donors, and caring mentors.

This year two Guardian Scholars walked across the stage of their corresponding college, enthusiastic to accept their diploma. Erik Garcia, graduated from Mesa State College, and Karen Mendoza graduated from University of Colorado at Boulder respectively. "The Guardian Scholarship is an investment in success, it's an investment in opportunity, but more than that it's an investment in what is good about our future," describes Susie Davis, director of The Youth Foundation, of the Guardian Scholars program.

All college students face obstacles and distractions, from time management, to balancing social life, with independence and academic rigor. For Erik Garcia, these obstacles became more evident as he was raising a family, playing for the club soccer team, and a member of La Raza, a Hispanic club at Mesa State College. Erik was able to overcome these obstacles by getting support and help from Mesa State College staff, The Youth Foundation and his close-knit family and friends.

"I feel very fortunate to be part of the Guardian Scholars. My goal was always to go to college and I knew it would be hard to afford it. The Youth Foundation helped me to succeed in college, not only financially, but I tried harder in school because I didn't want

to let them down. I had someone to count on if anything unexpected came up, and I did face some unexpected situations. Fran, the Mesa State Guardian Scholars mentor was very helpful, always full of great advice and support. I am thankful to everyone who has helped me along the way. I remember the first time I met with Ron Davis, Guardian Scholars founder, and his wife, Lucy. From that time, I knew there were people with good heart in this valley willing to help young adults get educated,” explained Erik about his college experience.

“Now I want to be able to support my family like they supported me, and help my wife get her teaching degree. I want to take the best job opportunity and in the future help young adults obtain their own education. I learned hard work pays off, and I want other youth to know that as well,” Erik added about his future plans.

Karen, who graduated from University of Colorado at Boulder, is also grateful to The Youth Foundation. She was the first one in her family to graduate from college. Being the oldest of four girls, she always had to set a good example for her younger sisters.

“I feel really fortunate to be a Guardian Scholar, I am happy to be part of such a great group of individuals. Being part of the Guardian Scholars provided me with a family who supported and guided me in accomplishing my dreams. They provided me with the knowledge I lacked. My diploma is not only mine but theirs as well because they were with me in every step I took. They provided me with educational as well as emotional help. Their exposure to different aspects of school and life allowed me to navigate college more easily,” Karen expressed her feelings towards Guardian Scholars Program.

Karen stated how she feels about graduating “I feel really proud of myself because a college degree means a lot to me. I worked hard and did not want to disappoint those who believed in me. I know I have a chance for a better life and it is all because of the Guardian Scholars. I am extremely excited to put my knowledge to work and to reach even higher accomplishments.”

“In the future, I plan to take the CPA exam and become a successful accountant and real estate broker. I would like to eventually work for a nonprofit organization and give back to my community in any way I can.”

A recent Guardian Scholar graduate, Josie John, reflects back to when she was just embarking on her own college experience, “During my first year at Columbia University, I doubted myself and my right to be there on a daily basis; I said “I can't," but my Guardian Scholar family helped me realize that I could-- and I did. I graduated from Columbia in May of 2010 and have been working at the National Basketball Association in NYC ever since.” Josie faced obstacles in life, but the Guardian Scholars provided her with emotional and psychological stability as well with financial resources to attend college. This opportunity helped her accomplish her goals.

Josie also advises the new Guardian Scholars, “I don't be afraid of failure, never hesitate to ask for help, always believe in yourself, and finally, make sure that the people who have positively impacted your lives know just how important they are.”

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Statistics from the Federal Bureau of Labor show that more than half of new jobs in the U.S. will require more than a high school diploma. In today's rapidly changing global economy, it's clear that tomorrow's jobs and the opportunity for individual advancement and stability that those jobs represent will require college – level skills. According to Melinda Gates, co-founder of the Gates Foundation, “. . . completing high school ready for college is a key transition point in the path out of poverty. If students fail to earn a postsecondary education credential, it's likely they will be poor.”

Before students can begin to earn the high quality college degrees that are vital to our nation's future, many need additional resources to improve their effectiveness that will guide them toward success.

Modeled after the successful Guardian Scholars program started by Ron Davis in Orange County California in 1997, The Youth Foundation Guardian Scholars are equipped with the educational and interpersonal skills necessary to become self-supporting, competent adults. Success is dependent on a team effort that combines participating colleges, donors, mentors and the determination of the student to create success. The Guardian Scholars model maximizes state and federal financial aid, foundation financial support and many warm hearts providing an emotional safety net. "My experience is that the success of efforts to help people is directly tied to the commitment and passion of the people trying to do the helping. The Guardian Scholars has proven very successful because of the Davis' and their ability to share their vision and their passion for helping kids that truly need the help. I love working with them as there is only one agenda, getting these kids educated," said Tim Foster, President of Mesa State College.