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Perspectives from The Guardian Scholars
Making Dreams Come True
More Than a Scholarship - It's a Family

GRAND JUNCTION (May 5, 2010) – “You DID it!” the congratulatory words were accompanied by a high five and quick hug from Fran Morales. “NO,” asserted Guardian Scholar Mandy, with her algebra test in hand, “WE did it! *WE did it!*”

Students who step through the doors of college and give it their all deserve every chance to succeed. At Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Fran Morales, the college-mom, mentor, advisor, guide and confidante for The Youth Foundation’s Guardian Scholar students is providing that chance. Mandy who graduated from Mesa State last month attributes the supportive environment that Fran Morales provides, and the constant confidence in Mandy’s potential that has been instilled from the Guardian Scholars program, as the driving forces in getting her through college. She admits that she’s experienced some “tooth and nail moments,” however, she continues to remind herself that others have invested in her abilities and she will not let them (Ron and Lucy Davis-Guardian Scholars founders) down.

The Guardian Scholars Program is a comprehensive model that has achieved national recognition because of its graduation success rate for disadvantaged youth and its financial leverage. These students come from challenging backgrounds and lack the financial resources and emotional support for college. The Guardian Scholars have already overcome significant psychological, emotional, displacement and financial challenges, many of which are also emancipated foster youth. The Guardian Scholars are provided the financial resources to attend college and most importantly tender loving care from college advisors, the Youth Foundation, donors and caring mentors.

Last month four Guardian Scholars walked across the stages of their respective colleges donning caps and gowns eager to accept their hard earned diploma. Mandy, Joe, and TJ are graduating from Mesa State College and represent the first class of Youth Foundation Guardian Scholars to graduate from Mesa State College. Across the country another Youth Foundation Guardian Scholar, Josie will accept her diploma from Columbia University in New York. “These are remarkably accomplished young people. Their motivation and commitment is unparalleled and I have no doubt in my mind that

they will go on to do amazing things in their lives and for their communities. This class of Guardian Scholars sets the bar high for our future graduates; we could not be more proud of them,” says an emotional Susie Davis, Director of the Youth Foundation.

Strategies that Guardian Scholars are using to be successful transcend to any college student working to achieve the dream of a college degree. Roommates, laundry, tv and other home distractions prevented Mandy from getting her studies completed within her college home, so she spent a great deal of time in the quiet solitude of the college library. Meeting with her professors and taking the time to understand their expectations has also helped Mandy be successful through college life.

“Surrounding yourself with people who want you to succeed can be the encouragement that is needed at just the right time, and of course, professors want you to succeed. I have put myself out there and I have reaped the benefits of a successful college experience. I can’t wait to have that hard earned diploma in my hands, and I’m eager to use the knowledge I’ve gained in my career. I would suggest to an incoming college student to also look for internship opportunities, as it provides confirmation of your interest and keeps you motivated through the rigors of college,” explained Mandy.

TJ who also graduated last month from Mesa State, said the accessibility of his professors has been incredibly beneficial. “It helps to learn about your professor, and understand their expectations. College is a new territory for me and my family and Fran has been such a good mentor to me. She listens, she reminds us that we already know what’s right, but will help to weigh options when what is right isn’t so clear; she’ll give you blunt advice when you need it, whether you want to hear it or not, and she’ll give you a solid slug to the arm, just to show you she cares. Fran has always been there to keep us in line, and she has been a great mentor in helping me be successful in college. “

Eric, who is studying construction management at Mesa State attributes the Guardian Scholars program to his success. “I have this scholarship; I show that I value the investment by working really hard in school. Sure, on occasion I procrastinate, and then I can’t sleep because I am stressed about completing the work, so mostly I just get it taken care of – I owe it to Guardian Scholars. Advise to students entering college? Just show up! Don’t miss classes, our professors have so much to offer, they seem to really understand the big picture of life – take advantage of everything they know. I have friends who are not in college and they look up to me –I don’t want to let them down; they remind me I may be hiring them one day!”

Achieving the Dream

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.