Westreich Scholarship Outcomes Report
WESTREICH SCHOLARSHIP OUTCOMES REPORT 2019

WHY READING MATTERS
We envision a world where everyone is connected to the power of reading and the innumerable ways that it enriches our lives. We also know that empowering experiences turn individuals into agents of change and advocates for their own education, and that when everyone can read, whole communities thrive! At Words Alive, we believe that the world we envision is made possible through the simple, essential and effective act of reading together.

EMPOWERING SCHOLARS IN THEIR NEXT CHAPTER
In the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship, we launch life-long learners into their next chapter by providing individualized support as they pursue their higher education and vocational goals. Scholars are past participants of the Words Alive Adolescent Book Group Program and recent graduates of San Diego County Office of Education Juvenile Court and Community Schools. Supporting their transition to higher-ed is the logical next step to ensuring positive life outcomes, a living wage, and the lasting opportunities for success that a college education can provide.

OUR PROGRAM METHOD & PROCESS CONDITIONS
During the 2017-18 program year, we conducted a six-month, in-depth outcomes and process evaluation of the Westreich Scholarship Program with the help of Dialogues in Action. That evaluation showed that scholarship funds help remove immediate financial barriers to attending school—helping scholars stay focused on success in school—but it is in pairing that financial award with the personal growth and skillsets to address the challenges of their lives that launches them to a new level of what’s possible. For that reason, the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship focuses on three interconnected pillars of support for each scholar.

For participating scholars, the program

- Awards financial gifts that can be used for expenses such as rent, utilities, food, basic toiletries, public transportation, and childcare.
- Pairs scholars with a mentor who provides individualized support, assistance in accessing academic and community resources, modeling relationship-building skills, and often, a friendly shoulder to lean on.
- Offers personal and professional development workshops on topics including financial literacy, interview skills, time management and self-care.

The Dialogues in Action evaluation also helped identify key opportunities to improve program process to support scholar success. Example changes implemented in 2018-19 program year included:

- Increasing the minimum size of scholarship to $2,000
- Improved mentorship features, such as a mentorship log and incentives for meeting mentorship goals, to drive consistent, frequent and face-to-face interactions
- Planning more cohort-based group activities to help scholars support one another
- Offering program elements during the summer months to better support incoming freshman

The scholar cohort responded positively to these changes, each rising to the occasion of stricter program requirements.
OUTCOMES – WHAT CHANGED FOR SCHOLARS

One hundred percent of scholars in the program are the first generation in their family to attend college. This is an exciting opportunity for scholars, but one that highlights needs specific to this population, including a lack of familial role models with first-hand experience of what to expect in college or insight into navigating systems particular to higher-ed environments. First-generation college students may also experience a shifting sense of where they “belong” – feeling out of place among both the student body on campus and among family who do not share their experience as students. It is well documented in studies on programs supporting first-generation college students that providing financial awards alone is not enough to ensure student success in higher-education settings. Instead, the most successful program models elevate scholar skillsets and their networks of support as they navigate unfamiliar systems of college environments.

Using this research base and tools developed by our third-party evaluative partners at Dialogue in Action, our Westreich Scholarship focuses on four key impact goals. That scholars:

Have the financial stability to succeed  
**Objective**: Scholars use their scholarship and knowledge gained at workshops to create a personal budget to become more financially stable.

Form healthy, meaningful relationships with adults  
**Objective**: By receiving support in areas such as problem solving, training, and access to resources through the relationship with their Words Alive mentor, scholars learn that there are adults who want to help them succeed and are reliable in doing so. As trust and respect develops, scholars build a reciprocal relationship with their mentor, which serves as an example for other healthy relationships.

Develop a deeper sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and self-confidence  
**Objective**: Scholars experience positive attitudinal shifts about their circumstances, their place in the world and their value. Scholars recognize their own ability to seek out information to solve problems and transition successfully into post-secondary education or career environment.

Become advocates for themselves and their futures  
**Objective**: Scholars become empowered to invest in their futures by increasing self-esteem, show motivation by proactively participating in WAWS program offerings and contributing to their own personal development. Scholars apply the academic, professional, and community resources at their disposal; create long-term personal, educational, and career goals; and make steps toward meeting them.

BROADENING EXPERIENCES

Mentors clocked **660 volunteer hours** during the year—attending development workshops, planned group activities, the award ceremony, and one-on-one meetings with their scholar.

Mentors support scholars’ personal development by balancing guidance in school and career matters with broader cultural experiences.

Here scholars Alicia and mentor Keri enjoy a play at the Cygnet Theater.

Here scholar Antonise and mentor Brittany visit the Museum of Contemporary Art.
Our ultimate objective is that scholars believe that they can be successful in school and become agents of their own success to achieve the educational outcome they seek. That is the tipping point between someone attending school and someone who calls themselves a scholar. To get there, our program aims specifically to influence what scholars know, how they feel, and what they do about their personal development and progress on their educational journey.

WHAT SCHOLARS ACCOMPLISHED

In 2018-19, the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship supported 11 scholars in their educational journey...

At the end of the year, 100% of scholars were still enrolled in school and progressing along their college and vocational paths!

Significant Status Milestones Include:

- One scholar who remains on track to complete his bachelor’s degree in four years, planning for graduation in spring 2021.
- Three returning scholars, who having earned their associate degrees from community college, successfully transitioned to a four-year university, and completed their first year at San Diego State University.
- The first year in which a past Westreich Scholar, and college graduate, has returned to serve as a mentor to an incoming scholar.

These milestones stand in contrast to the national average in which 89% of first-generation students from underserved communities leave college within six years without a degree. More than a quarter leave after their first year — four times the dropout rate of higher-income second-generation students. Furthermore, according to the National Center of Education Statistics only 11 percent of students who begin their post-secondary journeys at two-year institutes and community colleges, go on to complete bachelor’s degrees.¹

WHAT SCHOLARS SAID

Participating scholars were asked to complete a retroactive evaluation survey during the final weeks of the program. This survey intends to measure scholar skillsets, confidence, and knowledge with importance placed on behaviors before and after the program.

Each participating scholar has faced extraordinary challenges such as homelessness, exposure to gang violence, struggles with substance abuse, teen pregnancy, poverty, or impact by the justice system. The life challenges that these scholars face as they enter the program are many and complicated, yet by the end of their time in the program, many view themselves as activators with a set of new skills and tools, and a defined sense of agency to persevere and achieve.

Survey responses from scholars who participated in the program were overwhelmingly positive and demonstrated growth in key areas of financial literacy, healthy relationships, self-confidence and action taken toward personal development. Note that the sample size for this report represents 9 scholars, or 81% of the 2018-19 cohort.

¹ First Generation Foundation http://www.firstgenerationfoundation.org/

“[The scholarship] has helped shape who I am. I can envision a better future for myself.”

—returning scholar at Point Loma Nazarene University, studying graphic design
At a glance, after the program:

- 100% of scholars reported that they often or always take advantage of resources at their disposal
- 100% of scholars reported feeling more confident putting healthy relationships skills into action
- 100% of scholars reported feeling at least moderately more hopeful about their education and future

**Financial Literacy & Stability**

A central goal of the WAWS program is to provide funding to support a scholar’s academic trajectory. Unlike many traditional scholarship programs, scholars can spend their awarded funds on living expenses such as rent, food, public transportation and childcare. That the financial component is not restricted to certain kinds of expenses makes the scholarship both unique and a powerful tool to address the real-life financial obstacles that keep scholars from focusing on their education. In order to leverage that funding, the scholarship program has several features intended to help students develop positive financial habits and feel more financially secure. Money is disbursed monthly into personal checking accounts for greater access to cover these kinds of off-campus expenses and is often a scholar’s first time establishing a relationship with a bank. Additionally, scholars attend a financial literacy course led by experts in the field and are encouraged to work with their mentor on budgeting practices throughout the year.

After the program, scholars reported a positive impact on their knowledge of and their ability to manage their financial situation. As Figure 1 shows, **100% of scholars reported always or often using budgeting skills and/or tools after the program.** Scholars participating in the program for the first time in 2018-19 showed the greatest gains in applying budgeting skills and tools. This may be because returning scholars began the program year with more established budgeting habits developed in previous years of participation. The Figure below shows the percentage of scholars, on a Likert Scale of 1-5, who moderately agree, agree or strongly agree that a specific indicator of financial stability was impacted through their participation in the program.

### Scholarship Program’s Impact on Indicators of Financial Literacy & Stability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know what it really costs to live in San Diego.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to create a personal budget.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I stick to my budget each month.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less stressed about my financial situation.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2**
Healthy, Meaningful Relationships with Adults

The scholarship program also continues to show impact in helping scholars form healthy, meaningful relationships with peers and adults. The lives of most scholars up to the point of participating in the program have been anything but consistent. Key family members have been in and out of their lives, and at times, scholars have been unsure where they will sleep on any given night or when they will eat their next meal. Surviving one day to the next is all they know.

But when an engaged Words Alive mentor enters the picture, scholars find a new context for what it means to be reliable, to be professional, to be a successful adult. Like all skills – consistency is a learned behavior. Mentors who consistently interact with scholars help keep them accountable to the requirements of their schools, the scholarship program and their goals. In the 2018-19 program year, 90% of scholars met monthly, if not more, with their mentor.

As shown below in Figure 4, in addition to strengthened budgeting skills after the program, scholars identified themselves as more knowledgeable of what it takes to have a healthy relationship with another adult and more confident in putting those skills into action. After the program, 100% of scholars reported that they give and take in positive ways in relationships with others. Examples of this behavior in the lives of scholars include honoring commitments to and responding to messages from mentors in a timely manner and establishing boundaries with friends and family. As seen with the application of budgeting skills, returning scholars reported a higher frequency of this behavior before the 2018-19 program year.
Become advocates for themselves and their futures

Correlated to this improved skillset to manage their financial situation and cultivate healthy relationships, after the program 100% of scholars reported that they felt more in control of their choices and more confident in managing the challenges they face. This translated into a heightened awareness of their personal toolkit, as shown in Figure 6 below, and taking action toward improving their future.

For example, Figure 5 at right shows the before and after comparison in percentage of scholars, on a Likert Scale of 1-5, who report often (4) or always (5) taking advantage of resources at their disposal and action toward their goals.

Scholarship Program’s Impact on Indicators of Self-Confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know what my strengths and challenges are.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to cope with stress.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more in control of my choices.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident in managing the challenges I face.</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more hopeful about my education and future.</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to find academic, professional, or community resources on my own.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to set a realistic goal.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before and After Comparison of scholars who reported often or always take the following actions...

- Take advantage of the academic, professional and community resources at my disposal
- Take action toward the goals I set
- Access financial resources outside of my WAWS scholarship

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6
SCHOLAR COMMENTS

Perhaps most illustrative of scholar growth is the change in words scholars apply to themselves. We asked scholars to identify one word to describe the scholar they were before and the scholar they had become after participating in the program. Their responses suggested an empowering experience.

Before participating in the scholarship program, scholar descriptions of themselves included words such as lost, timid, unprepared, unmotivated, less, discombobulated, anxious and hopeful. However, after participating in the program, scholars described themselves in terms of personal agency, including:

![Progressing Prepared Confident]

Finally, scholars were also asked to identify how the program had helped them change their story. Scholar statements suggested a new-found confidence, sense of belonging and agency over their personal and academic trajectory.

About changing their story, scholars said:

“Words Alive has brought me close to someone who has been with me for the past four years, my mentor. I am forever thankful in bringing me someone who will support me always. I needed someone. Also, WAWS staff have taught me how to manage my finances and how to work in my education and professional life. Thank you so much for your hard work and support you have brought in the lives of all the scholars of the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship.”
– returning scholar at San Diego State University, studying social work

“Words Alive has empowered me by motivating and supporting my educational journey. It has given me the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty through literacy and speech. I have come to an awareness that as a student and single young mother my lack of education and resources would affect my children and continue the negative cycle of poverty and educational gap. I now know education is important and critical in my life, to learning how to advocate for myself and my family needs. I feel confident in reading paperwork or homework assignments and understanding it.”
– returning scholar at San Diego City College, studying English

“Words Alive has changed my life in many ways. They have helped me become wiser, they have helped me push through school, and just have always been there to help me overall.”
– returning scholar at San Diego State University, studying criminal justice
“It has changed my life by giving me a mentor and an organization I can call home and share what’s going on in my life without a second thought whether or not I can trust them. They have made me a better person throughout college and professionally and given a lot of insight into expanding on my dreams and inspirations.”
– returning scholar at San Diego City College, studying software engineering

“Being at scholarship recipient at Words Alive gave me the strength to become a little bit more confident in myself.”
– first-year scholar at San Diego City College, studying biology

“Words Alive has been the support system that has guided me from high school to community college to my dream university. I can confidently say that I would not be where I am without Words Alive. I know that I can always turn to my mentor and [Words Alive staff] to get help with anything I may need. My confidence has gone way up and I always want to be involved with this program as a mentor or volunteer after I graduate. I can’t say thank you enough and am so excited to be a part of the program for another year. Thank you for all you do to ease our transitions into college!”
– returning scholar at San Diego State University, studying social work

**REFLECTIONS AND THANKS**
In our tenth year administering the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship, we continue to observe a deep resiliency among scholars and see evidence that supporting scholar growth translates to stronger values of learning in their lives.

The success of scholars celebrated here would not be possible without the generous support of The Westreich Foundation, The Julia and Zoey Shenkman Scholarship Fund, Union Bank, Wells Fargo, and HP, Inc.

**Photos**

- In the spirit of giving back, scholars prepared meals for those in need at Kitchens for Good after learning about the organization’s health and social enterprise programs. (Top left)
- Scholars received final exam survival gift baskets from Union Bank, encouraging them to do their best and reminding scholars that members of the community are rooting for their success. (Top right)
- Scholars learned about crafting an effective cover letter during the resume writing developmental workshop. (Middle left)
- Students sharpened their digital literacy skills and explored new laptops during a special workshop made possible by HP, Inc. In addition to completing computer-related schoolwork, ensuring that each scholar had access to a computer also provide the opportunity to move many program resources to the cloud where scholars could access them at any time. (Middle right)
- The 2018-19 scholar cohort following the award ceremony. (Bottom)