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 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
Scholarship funds are vital to remove immediate financial barriers to attending school, but it is in pairing that financial award with the personal growth and skillsets to address the challenges of their lives that launches scholars to a new level of what’s possible. For that reason, the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship focuses on three interconnected pillars of support.

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.

—I love Words Alive because they help keep me accountable in my goals. There have been countless times when I felt like I could not make it another year and here I am going into my senior year of college. There is so much power in taking education into your own hands. I am so thankful for the high standards they hold me to.

—scholar at Point Loma Nazarene University studying graphic design

PICTURED: SCHOLARS, MENTORS AND SCHOLARSHIP BENEFACCTOR RUTH WESTREICH POSE WITH RETIRED DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF LORRAINE HUTCHINSON – THE ONLY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN TO HOLD THAT OFFICE IN SAN DIEGO HISTORY AND GUEST SPEAKER AT THE 2019 AWARD CEREMONY.
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 information to solve problems and transition successfully into post-secondary education or careers.

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 284 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, mentors, and their children connect at a group bonfire to kick-off the school year.

“The best part is the relationship you build with your mentor and the support and friendship they provide. For me, my mentor has been a blessing. I felt like I was attending college while being blind. I had no direction and didn’t know what questions to ask or where to ask and even what resources I could apply to. My mentor stepped in and supported and helped me transition into this college student life. She is a person I can depend on. The relationship you build with your mentor is a relationship that will last a lifetime.”

—scholar at City College studying biology
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 ACHIEVED**

In 2019-20, the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship supported 16 scholars in their educational journey...

At the end of the program year, despite disruptions caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt shift to remote learning, 88% of scholars were still enrolled in school and progressing along their college and vocational paths!

*Significant Status Milestones Include:*

- Three scholars graduated with their Bachelor of Arts from San Diego State University, with an average 5-year journey to complete their undergraduate degree. Each of these three scholars also earned their associate degrees during their time in the program.
- One scholar remains on track to complete his bachelor’s degree in four years, planning to graduate in spring ’21.

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 seven scholars, or 44% of the 2019-20 cohort.

At a glance, after the program:

- 100% of scholars reported that they take action towards the goals they set
- 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

¹ First Generation Foundation [http://www.firstgenerationfoundation.org/](http://www.firstgenerationfoundation.org/)

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[3]
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, 80% of scholars reported always or often using budgeting skills and tools after the program. Scholars participating in the program for the first time in 2019-20 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. Figure 2 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.

—scholar at San Diego State University studying Social Work

“I learned how to budget and take care of my credit. Like using credit only on things that I will be able to pay off fast, and that I can afford.”

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know what it really costs to live in San Diego.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to create a personal budget.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I stick to my budget each month.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less stressed about my financial situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Agree</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1
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 2019-20 program year, 100% of scholars met monthly, if not more often, with their mentor. In addition to meetings, 70% of scholars were in communication with their mentors via other means multiple times a month.

As shown below in Figure 4, in addition to strengthened budgeting skills after the program, scholars identified themselves as more knowledgeable on what it takes to have a healthy relationship with another adult and more confident in putting those skills into action. Additionally, 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 as well as 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 2019-20 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 below 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.

**Figure 5**

**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>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to cope with stress.</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more in control of my choices.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident in managing the challenges I face.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more hopeful about my education and future.</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to find academic, professional, or community…</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to set a realistic goal.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 ambitious, confused, passionate, inexperienced, hopeful, and blooming. However, after participating in the program, scholars described themselves in terms of personal agency, including:

The COVID-19 virus pandemic brought unprecedented disruption to school, family, and community life. In addition to an abrupt transition to remote learning, scholars weathered interruptions to public transportation, childcare, housing and wages central to their survival. Scholars were asked to identify how they applied skills and relationships developed in the program as they navigated the new norm in spring 2020. Scholar statements suggested leveraging skills to manage finances, time and stress to keep their personal and academic trajectory on track.

About adapting to life’s unexpected challenges, scholars said:

*The financial aid skills have made me understand how to manage my money. Especially right now, it has showed me to not be wasting money online just because of the need of shopping.*

*One thing that I learned and really stuck out to me was managing my time. I learned how to set time for studying/schoolwork and time to relax or even to be with family and friends. It really helped during Covid-19 because I had to make a whole new schedule and learn how to manage my time even more.*

*The skills I’ve learned as being a part of WAWS helped me cope with COVID-19 by going outside and beyond to look for alternative scholarships and resources that helped me through this time. It also made me actually start a budget plan that I am determined to follow through.*
I feel more comfortable managing the stresses that come with COVID-19. I am able to share those skills with my friends and family.

The healthy relationship workshop has helped me understand that everyone in my home is feeling very emotional, but it’s how we communicate and express our emotions in order to cope with our feelings [that matters]. Most importantly to give and take in a positive way, through helping our family.

I’ve been using meditation and the deep breathing techniques that I’ve learned through a few of the workshops. I’ve been journaling and reaching out when I feel overwhelmed.

My mentor helped me think of where in my house would possibly be best to study. She also helped me make my new schedule and to take time to ask my professors questions when I needed to.

REFLECTIONS AND THANKS

In our eleventh 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, The Carol Goodman Legacy Scholarship, Union Bank, Wells Fargo, and HP, Inc.

Photos

- Top left: Scholar receives recognition for her service as a student representative on the San Diego County of Education School Board.
- Top right: Scholars celebrate completion of a computer literacy workshop by exercising new skills on laptops gifted by HP, Inc.
- Middle row: Scholars, their family and friends celebrate recognition at the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship award dinner.
- Bottom left: Scholars display vision boards created at a workshop designed to help scholars craft goals and areas of focus for the year ahead.
- Bottom right: Mentors and scholars get to know each other at a kick-off event to launch the program year.