Scholars Fixing to Go Far

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But over the years, other wonderful things have grown out of that center. Elder sponsorship, parent support groups, community improvement projects and a host of other complementary initiatives have blossomed from the sponsorship program that started it all.

Of all the dynamic initiatives that have emerged, the one that has consistently made the greatest difference in the lives of young people is Unbound’s scholarship program. Started in 1998 and supported primarily through donations to a special fund, the scholarship program began as a way for youth who did not have the support of a sponsor to achieve educational goals and participate in the Unbound community.
Today there are more than 8,000 Unbound scholars throughout the world. Some are sponsored while others receive scholarship support alone. Each young person awarded a scholarship has been recognized by local Unbound programs for their leadership potential, and each has made a commitment to invest in their own futures through education, the greatest asset in overcoming poverty.

This issue of Impact focuses on the Unbound Scholarship Program and the difference it makes in the lives of sponsored and non-sponsored youth and their families. But you’ll also see how scholarship support is more than an investment in promising individuals. Because scholars also give back by taking on service and leadership roles in their local areas, it’s an investment in the greater Unbound community.

Unbound was born from the desire to foster mutually beneficial, life-giving relationships. The scholarship program honors that goal by strengthening the bonds between young people and their communities. No matter where life takes them, whether back to their old neighborhoods or around the world, Unbound scholars have the tools they need to thrive.
What started out as a small experiment has grown to become one of Unbound’s core programs.

The Unbound Scholarship Program gives primarily high school and college-age students the chance to continue their educations. Unbound awarded 8,447 scholarships last year. The average amount per scholarship was approximately $400, which made a big difference for students around the globe.

“In Unbound, being a sponsored child and a service scholar really made a significant impact in my life,” said Melody, 24, a former scholar from the Philippines. “[Unbound] showed me the way and opens up a wide range of opportunity right now. It gives me the chance to dream that I will be successful someday, that I can accomplish something for myself and for my family.”

The scholarship program began in 1998 after program staff proposed funding to help students outside of the sponsorship program continue in school. Now, sponsored students can also apply for scholarships and make up more than half of Unbound scholars worldwide.
MORE THAN A SCHOLARSHIP

When most people think of a scholarship, they probably think of a simple exchange of education funds for some sort of achievement, such as good test scores or athletic prowess. Unbound’s program goes further, with scholars taking on leadership roles through community service.

While each local program has its own criteria for selecting scholars, the staffs look for applicants who not only have a financial need, but also display a dedication to helping others and to continuing their educations. The service component is vital.

Caitlin Gasaway, program specialist for Unbound, said the criteria are part of the reason scholars work so hard, knowing that it’s not an opportunity given to everyone.

“Every time I visit a project,” Gasaway said, “it’s a guarantee that you meet scholars that are going to amaze, that are going to impress, just because of their drive and their determination and their desire to serve and work in the community.”
Scholars develop their skillsets through required service hours. Depending on needs of the local Unbound office, they may work alongside staff members and parent volunteers filing paperwork, tutoring younger sponsored children, helping organize mothers group meetings and even planning events for sponsored members, such as birthday parties or letter-writing activities. Local staff supervise their work. Scholars are able to observe the office environment, develop soft skills such as working in a team environment and gain confidence in their abilities.

“When you talk to scholars about their experience,” Gasaway said, “of course they’re thankful for the economic support so they can actually study, but a lot of them will talk about how they can gain these skills that otherwise they wouldn’t have the opportunities to. Even just to use office equipment, or to be entrusted with executing an activity. Just being able to gain those skills and that confidence of, ‘Wow, these people trust me to do this and I can do it.’”
A CHANCE TO STAND OUT

In many places where Unbound works, there aren’t enough jobs for skilled workers. The professional skills scholars develop make them stand out, and some Unbound offices go even further to help the scholars not just achieve their educational goals, but also their employment aspirations.

In Cartagena, Colombia, scholars in their last semester attend a two-day youth camp focused on employment, learning how to create a resume, access job portals, conduct themselves well in interviews and develop other skills needed to land a job.

In the Philippines, scholarship alumni groups are available. These groups allow alumni of the program to connect with their peers socially while sharing job leads and best practices for the workplace with each other.

In Kenya, staff members are helping scholarship youth develop their own microfunding program so they can take loans to start their own businesses.

PERSONALIZED APPROACH

Just like with the sponsorship program, the Unbound Scholarship Program allows scholars to make their own choices in how to use the scholarship funds. Unbound doesn’t tell them what books to buy or what degrees to pursue.

In Unbound’s Cartagena, Colombia, program, staff disburse the scholarship funds in a way similar to sponsorship funds — into a personal bank account.

“We give them responsibility so that they can be the decision makers, and it teaches them how to manage their own resources,” said Rosalba Ortíz, the program coordinator for Cartagena. “They have done a very good job.”

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When you support the Unbound Scholarship Fund, you provide gifted young people with the space they need to make their dreams come true. See envelope for details.

David, a 14-year-old sponsored youth and scholarship student from Guatemala, fixes a bicycle in the shop where he works after school. David wants to be a mechanical engineer, and he tutors younger children in the Unbound program to fulfill service requirements for his scholarship.