



## **University of California, Riverside Guardian Scholars Program**

Strategies utilized by an AOI National Awards Program winner to help youth build and maintain relationships with caring, supportive adults who they can turn to after they age out of foster care and work their way through college

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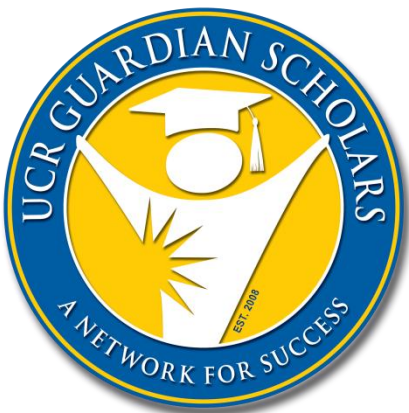
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## About the AOI Relationships Award

The Aging Out Institute (AOI) National Awards Program recognizes organizations for the work that they are doing to help foster youth age out of foster care and into independence successfully. Relationship building is a key success factor for all youth, but because of their difficult childhood and the inherent challenges of being part of the foster care system, foster youth do not often have the role modeling or time to develop strong, stable relationships with adults who will support them in their transition to adulthood. In an effort to impact the challenges faced by foster youth, AOI celebrates and shares the strategies that are effective in helping youth build these strong, supporting relationships. This year, the AOI Award has been given to the University of California, Riverside (UCR) for helping youth build supportive relationships after they age out of foster care through its Guardian Scholars program.





## UCR's Guardian Scholars Program

### Program Overview

UCR's Office of Foster Youth Services (OFYSS) provides a network of resources to students who are transitioning from the foster care system to adulthood to facilitate their successful pursuit of higher education. The program draws on the resources, strength, and support of the campus and community to provide current and former foster youth (aged 16-24) with a comprehensive college experience and the opportunity to realize their full potential.

The Guardian Scholars Program, which is housed within OFYSS, offers additional academic and emotional support services to youth who have aged out of foster care, including access to on-campus year-round housing, individual mentoring, mental health resources, life literacy and leadership seminars, career development internships, scholarship assistance, and bi-weekly community and cultural enrichment activities.

UCR is located in inland Southern California (30 minutes east of Los Angeles County), which is home to the largest foster youth population in the nation. The inland region is comprised of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, which account for the second and third largest foster populations in the state.

#### **GE Services Include (but are not limited to):**

- Application support
- Identifying specific services needed by the youth
- Supporting the youth during their transition into the college
- Ongoing support through various services through to graduation

## **Program Structure & Roles**

### ***Application Process***

The Guardian Scholars Program begins tracking a prospective student's application the moment a student applies to UCR. The program staff reach out to the foster youth who have applied to UCR using data from the UC Common Application, the FAFSA, and social service provider referrals. The student's application is supported to increase the application's chances of receiving special consideration from the admission department.

### ***Identifying Services Needed***

Following the application deadline and again once students have matriculated, foster information is requested from the data department at UCR. Identified youth are invited to complete a survey that will help us to ascertain the services they qualify for within OFYSS, including Guardian Scholars.

### ***Transition Support***

Once a foster youth states their intention to enroll at UCR, the transition from high school or junior college to UCR is supported. This support includes providing students with priority housing access, early orientation, priority registration, and material resources to help with school and residence hall supplies.

### ***Ongoing Support***

Once at the university, every aged-out foster youth has the opportunity to participate in the Guardian Scholars Program. The program believes once a Guardian Scholar is always a Guardian Scholar. All students complete an annual orientation to the program resources, and supports are provided for the duration of their time at UCR and beyond. The support includes exam training, career referrals, and other tangibles to ensure their successful transition from college and into the next stage of their professional and personal development.

### **Youth Participation Requirements:**

UCR's Guardian Scholars supports students who experienced foster care at age 13 or older.

Priority consideration is granted to students who have been emancipated from foster care or entered extended foster care on their 18th birthday.

Any emancipated foster youth is automatically accepted to this intensive, wrap-around support program.

Other students with a history of foster care during adolescence may be considered as space permits, but all aged-out youth are served by the Office of Foster Youth Support Services.

### *Staffing*

Title	Number of Positions	Details about Position
<b>Program Director</b>	1	Paid staff position that oversees the program.
<b>Student Assistant</b>	1	Paid (part-time) student staff position.
<b>Steering Committee Members</b>	5	Volunteer positions that provide guidance and council to the program.
<b>Executive Director</b>	1	Volunteer position that performs executive actions required by the position.

### *Partnerships*

Guardian Scholars partners with several community agencies, including the county office of education, social service providers, and a variety of local companies including dentists, therapists, and business owners. These partnerships have developed over the years via their direct outreach to forge connections to support their foster youth. Below, is a brief description of particularly robust partnerships.

**The Riverside Area Multi-Campus Network** has been a partner since 2014 by collaborating with the Riverside area community colleges to broaden the pipeline for students seeking transfer to the UC campus. Four events are hosted per year in collaboration with community college partners. Meetings are held on a monthly basis to discuss rising community college graduates who may be transfer-eligible. The network was established via a collaborative relationship between the UCR Guardian Scholars and area community colleges to provide a formal conduit to enhance the successful transfer of foster youth from 2-year to 4-year universities.

The local **Rotary Club** became a partner in the summer of 2016, providing a small amount of funding to facilitate a summer internship program for emancipated foster youth. This Internship Program provides funding for two students' summer housing costs while they accrued valuable career development experience. Following a successful pilot program, a comprehensive grant was submitted to fund a comprehensive, 10-week, paid internship program, which was launched with the support of the CA Wellness Foundation.

**Leadership Institute** has been a partner since December 2016 and was forged from a partnership with West LA College. The Leadership Institute for the Empowerment for Collegiate Foster Youth developed out of this initial collaboration and is now held annually on the UCR campus with open invitation to all community colleges that wish to participate.

**Financial Literacy Program** became a partner in the fall of 2018 by way of a partnership with the United Way Foundation of the Inland Valley to offer a Financial Literacy Program for foster youth. A dozen foster youth recently completed a six-week literacy program, and all are currently participating in a 6-month savings challenge where every dollar they can save up to \$1000 will be matched 1:1 by the United Way.

### Staff Training/Preparation

The Program Director benefits from many professional development opportunities by regularly attending the Association for the Study of Higher Education's annual conference, which discusses emerging trends and issues facing colleges and universities today. The Program Director also attends state and national foster youth educational conferences to learn about the best practices for supporting foster youth in higher education. The Program Director also meets monthly with an academic advisor with a deep understanding and experience in higher education.

### Research Foundation

Guardian Scholars grounded its program philosophy – particularly in regard to the importance of resilience – in the following research studies:

Yates, T. M., & Grey, I. K. (2012), "Adapting to Aging Out: Profiles of Risk and Resilience Among Emancipated Foster Youth, Development and Psychopathology," pages 475-492. This article illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of resilience.

Yates, T. M., Egeland, B., & Sroufe, L. A. (2003). "Rethinking Resilience: A Developmental Process Perspective," Cambridge University Press, In S. S. Luthar (Ed.), "Resilience and Vulnerability: Adaptation in the Context of Childhood Adversities," pages 234-256. This chapter provides an overview of their model of resilience as a developmental process, rather than an individual trait.

Yates, T. M., Tyrell, F. A., & Masten, A. S. (2015). "Resilience Theory and the Practice of Positive Psychology from Individuals to Societies," Wiley & Sons, In S. Joseph (Ed.), "Positive Psychology in Practice," 2nd edition, pages 773-788. This chapter discusses ways to promote positive youth development at multiple levels and in diverse populations.





## The Student Experience

### *Knowledge/Skills*

Throughout the program, Guardian Scholars helps youth build the following non-tangible skills that will help them succeed in life:

**Decision Making:** The value of forethought, planning, and – in particular – financial literacy is empathized in this program. The differences between need versus wants and assets versus liabilities are discussed and explored.

**Goal Setting:** Students can enroll in a 6-month savings program, which entails goal setting regarding monthly financial savings. Academically, every incoming student develops a 4-year academic plan and transfer students prepare a 2-year academic plan. Students are also required to craft a 5-year professional plan during their freshmen year. This 5-year plan empowers the student to map out their professional pursuits in a deliberate and strategic manner to assure they fulfill their goals and secure gainful educational or employment outcomes after graduation.

**Self-Control:** Self-control is managed through study groups that explore budgeting, saving, healthy eating, nutrition, health living, exercise, delaying gratification, setting attainable goals, and differentiating needs versus wants.

**Handling Failure:** Students are supported in handling failure through an academic intervention program. All students who's GPA falls below a 2.0 and students who are struggling academically are required to attend the Assistance, Coaching, and Encouragement (ACE) Program. ACE is a customized academic support program for students encountering academic difficulty. The goal of ACE is to aid students in the development of essential and lifelong academic skills and study habits that will ultimately help them achieve academic success. Students who are struggling financially and fail to maintain a monthly budget are required to meet with the Guardian Scholar's Financial Wellness Coordinator. A budget is created and the student is held accountable to it.

**Leadership:** Students are given leadership development opportunities through the annual "Leadership Institute for the Empowerment of Collegiate Foster Youth," a day-long institute where current foster youth learn and practice their leadership skills and abilities from former foster youth who are current professionals in the field. Students are also given opportunities to practice their learned leadership skills by speaking at various outreach conferences and events.

**Learning Balance:**

Active Learning = 80%

Passive Learning = 20%

**Characteristics/Attitudes**

Guardian Scholars also helps youth build character and positive attitudes that will help them succeed in life. Below are a few examples:

**Confidence:** Guardian Scholars partners with the Assistance League of Riverside to provide the students with a shopping trip to purchase new clothing. Self-confidence is boosted as they become educated about professional attire and self-presentation skills. The students are also given the opportunity to share their voices through panels, outreach presentations, along with visual and performance art. Guardian Scholars provides mentoring and encourages students to serve their community. New personal experiences, including ropes course, hiking, and professional experiences that include internship program and mock interviews, are also encouraged.

**Desire for Learning:** This characteristic is supported through weekly, required seminars. The seminars offer a safe and intimate space where speakers share their wisdom and knowledge regarding the importance of continued learning long after college graduation.

**Creativity:** For the past three years, Guardian Scholars has produced "Voices and Visions," a visual and performance arts event that features spoken word poetry and art exhibits aimed at debunking stereotypes that harm foster youth. The event is run by foster youth from UCR and community college partners. By writing poetry, creating art, and promoting the event, the youth receives positive reinforcement and encouragement regarding creative efforts. The event coincides with foster care awareness month in May, and serves as a major fundraising and education platform.

**Integrity:** Integrity is promoted by encouraging students to perform community service. In years past, students have participated in a back-to-school program that provides school clothes to school-aged foster youth. The foster youth pay their positive experiences forward by continuing to mentor foster youth still in high school.



**Optimism:** Throughout the school year, UCR Guardian Scholars alumni return to campus for various events. The alumni return with stories of struggle and success, and they share their insights about how they overcame these obstacles in life. At the end of every year, a celebration honors the students' accomplishment throughout the school year. This milestone event reminds students of the gifts and talents they bring to the world and instill hope that they, too, can be successful.

**Patience:** Working toward goals is stressed, as well as supporting peers who may be struggling with interpersonal or other vulnerabilities that require patience and compassion.

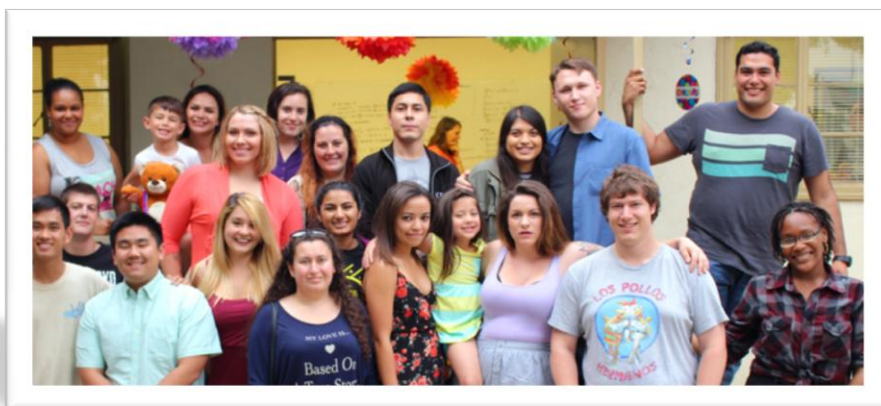
**Perseverance:** Students are urged to persevere by accepting support from others. Steering committee volunteers, the Executive Director and the Program Director all help the students along their paths.

**Self-Awareness:** Self-awareness is developed by students through the writing of reflective essays, spoken word poetry activities, and group seminars. When relevant, students are encouraged to seek mental health services such as individual or group counseling.

**Relationship Building:** Through weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly meetings with mentors, the Program Director, Executive Director, and their peers, UC Riverside Guardian Scholars have access to a network of support that fosters relationship building. Community building activities are facilitated through group activities including visiting museums, luncheons, and family style dinners. In addition, a peer-mentoring program helps students learn the value of shared support.

**Resilience:** Guardian Scholars strives to create a community where every emancipated youth has the opportunity to realize their resilience. By providing support mechanisms to aid the transition into higher education, Guardian Scholars tries to help each student discover their own resilience in meeting academic and transitional life challenges while also offering a message of hope and opportunity.

**Self-Reliance:** The program is designed in such a way that students earn their scholarships so there are no entitlements or handouts. The program is tailored to meet each student's needs, but every student must be working towards improvement and independence.



## **Marketing**

The program and its services are marketed in the following ways:

- The Guardian Scholars Program produces the College-Bound Day for Foster Youth every fall to provide outreach to various high school and middle school aged foster youth in the Riverside County area. In 2018, there were about 60 high school students in attendance.
- The Program Director, students, and volunteers host informational tables and/or workshops at various conferences, college fairs, and outreach events in the Southern California area.
- The Program Director sits on several committees including the Southern California Higher Education Foster Youth Consortium, which raises the program's visibility across the state, region, and country.
- The program maintains an engaging website, brochures, and area media coverage, including television and print news.

## **Measures of Youth Success**

With the support of the Guardian Scholars program, students achieve persistence, graduation, and GPA scores that meet or exceed their non-fostered peers, which is an incredible achievement given the poor academic achievement statistics among former foster youth who do not have the support of a program like this. In addition, Guardian Scholars strives to ensure that each student obtains gainful employment or pursues graduate school after they complete their undergraduate program at UCR.

### ***During Program***

Guardian Scholars has a four-year graduation rate of 65 percent and a five-year rate of 80 percent, which compares favorably with rates for all low-income students, 61 percent and 84 percent. The campus wide graduation rates are 69 percent and 88 percent, respectively.

### ***After Program***

Occupational, educational, and personal outcomes are obtained through anecdotal reports from staff that have personal relationships with graduates, as well as through an annual survey sent to former program participants.



### Continual Program Improvement

Once a year during the summer, a survey is sent out that elicits feedback from students to make sure their needs are being met with regard to housing security, food security, opportunities to develop meaningful, professional experiences, opportunities to develop leadership experience, and a sense of belonging to the program and to the university. Results of this survey inform regular improvements to the program's structure and methodology.

### Challenges

Guardian Scholars continues to provide foster youth with academic support, however, the program cannot earn the degree for the student. It is also important that we assisting donors to understand the unique challenges and opportunities with the population..

### Lessons Learned

Private donor support has been critical to the success of Guardian Scholars, both for the material benefits, but also for the connections to social capital for their students.



*L-R: Mercedes Jaudon (Student Assistant); Tuppett M. Yates, Ph.D. (Volunteer Executive Director & Founder); Kenyon Lee Whitman, M.A. (Program Director); Theresa M. Luther (Steering Committee Member).*

## Aging Out Institute would like to thank the following people for their support of the 2018 AOI National Awards Program:

**We also want to thank the individuals who donated toward the fundraiser that enabled us to launch our awards program in 2018:**

Lois Morris	Brian Keefer	Gregory Tobin
Chad Ruegsegger	Marina Aris	James Brinser
Jane Lyons	Nicole Kilburg	Greg and Lisa
John Hogan	Girard Hemminger	Russel Nix
Sonya Chaudhry	Pamela Nelson	James Black
Fostering	Jennifer Spillane	Sharon Stalker
Footprints	Tracy Griffith	Matthew Rexroad
SammSmeltzer	Vanessa Fernandez	Lynne Jasames
Johnson Lightfoote	Tom Berkshire	Betty Colonomos
Laura Sterner	Sarah Wilson	Anonymous
Beth Gliksmen		

# THANK YOU!

**The judges of the Relationships category who devoted a significant amount of time and effort to help design the awards program process and tools, review the applications in the Relationships category, and make the difficult decision about which organizations should receive the award this year:**

**Dr. Johanna Greeson**  
Assistant Professor  
School of Social Policy &  
Practice University of PA



**Susan Punnett**  
Executive Director  
Family & Youth  
Initiative



**The Relationship category sponsor that took a chance on a new awards program because they saw the need to come together to help foster youth who are aging out of care:**



<https://www.fosteringfootprints.org>

**And a special thank you to all the organization representatives who took the time to fill out an award application and let us know about the great work they are doing!**





**MISSION:** AOI promotes resources and strategies that help youth age out of foster care and into adulthood successfully.

**VISION:** To improve national outcomes for youth aging out of care by identifying, sharing and encouraging the widespread use of effective strategies for helping foster youth transition to adulthood.

[www.agingoutinstitute.org](http://www.agingoutinstitute.org)