



Initiatives in Action: Youth Success Initiative



We can do more together.

Mentor Helps Youth Reach College Dream

A college education is paramount to achieving success in our country; it's the gateway to the American dream. Most of us got help from our parents as we spent endless hours on applications, essays and the constant coordination it took to apply for college and student loans.

What if no one was there to guide you?

Meet high school senior Claudia Iberra, an extraordinary young woman from less than ordinary circumstances. She knew she wanted a college education, but no one in her family had ever attended. Claudia was raised in a loving, single parent family with her two brothers for most of her life, and she witnessed at a young age the hardships of financial struggle. In order to make her dreams a reality, Claudia knew she would have to go outside her family for guidance through the college application process.

Through the support of the Youth Mentoring Collaborative, sponsored by Mile High United Way, Bank of the West and the Denver Office of Strategic Partnerships, Claudia received guidance from a mentor from the Byrne Foundation.

Kristin Brookens, a Colorado native and administrative coordinator for Advanced Engineering Investigations Corporation in Denver, began mentoring Claudia in August of 2006. They were a natural match given their shared interest in sports. Kristin played basketball through college and Claudia is on her school's basketball and soccer teams. Once a week, Claudia and Kristin get together and have a meal, coffee, go to sporting events, or just chat over the phone. Their time together in the past few months has been especially significant as Kristin assisted Claudia with college applications and scholarships.

In 2007, Claudia was nominated by the Youth Mentoring Collaborative and the Byrne Foundation to receive the highly prestigious Daniels Fund Scholarship. These highly competitive scholarships are awarded to well-

rounded students whose potential far outweighs their financial ability to pay for college. The scholarship supplements tuition, room and board, and other miscellaneous costs.



Claudia (right) and her mentor Kristin Brookens (left) spend time together before Claudia's soccer practice. Kristin recently helped Claudia successfully navigate the college application and scholarship process.

Mentor Helps Youth Reach College Dream - cont.

Claudia was in competition with 800 other high school seniors for the scholarship; she needed Kristin's help to make her application stand out. For months, Kristin and Claudia went through the intense and tedious process of the Daniels Fund Scholarship, filling out various applications and forms and writing essays. They did this together while concurrently applying for college and other financial aid grants.

“I don't think I could have done this without Kristin's guidance,” said Claudia, “She's helped me in so many ways. No one in my family has ever gone to college and she has--so it was so awesome to have her there for all the stuff I had to do in order to get the scholarship.”

“We were at a Youth Mentoring Collaborative workshop earlier this year and I was impressed by Claudia's progress,” said Kristin. “Imelda from Mile High United Way was reading her essay aloud and it occurred to me in one of those 'ah-ha' moments: this girl is really going to do something with her life. She had three out of the four required essays completed for the Daniels Fund when other kids had only started getting ideas together.”

In early 2007, they spent a lot of time rehearsing for the interview, arguably the most important part of the Daniels Fund Scholarship process. Kristin continually conducted mock interviews with Claudia over coffee or dinner in order to prepare her.

“Kristin is like a big sister to me. We practiced interviewing so much; I felt comfortable and pretty relaxed when it came time for the real interview. She gave me that extra push, and I felt really prepared,” Claudia stated.

In April of 2007, Claudia was selected as an official recipient of the Daniels Fund Scholarship. “I don't think I could have done this without Kristin's guidance,” said Claudia, “She's helped me in so many ways. No one in my family has ever gone to college and she has--so it was so awesome to have her there for all the stuff I had to do in order to get the scholarship.”

“I am immensely proud of Claudia. She made this happen for herself. She's one of those kids that just has a light inside that's visible to everyone, most importantly, in the last few months, to the Daniels Fund.”

In fall of 2007, Claudia plans on attending CU Boulder in the pre-med program. She wants to be a doctor so she can help others in need and make her family proud. 21 other high school seniors from the Youth Mentoring Collaborative also received scholarships.

For more information about our Youth Success Initiative please visit our Web site at www.unitedwaydenver.org.

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Mile High United Way