

The Commissioner's Corner

Higher Education - the Engine out of Poverty



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Welcome to my first blog about higher education in Missouri. I'll use this blog as a way to tell the behind-the-scene stories about higher education's people, accomplishments and challenges.

Recently the MDHE (Missouri Department of Higher Education) had the opportunity to distribute grants through the federal College Challenge Access Grant program. We provided more than \$700,000 to nine groups that help low-income students attend college. The grant recipients do amazing work. [College Bound](#) of St. Louis received \$100,000. We spoke with Lisa Orden Zarin, who founded College Bound in 2006.

Lisa told us that she is the daughter of a teacher, a single mom, who instilled in her the belief that education is the engine that can transport people out of poverty. "It's something that no one can take away," Lisa said. "It is society's most important value."

College Bound has a 100 percent success rate. All 80 of the students they have assisted so far are either in college or have letters of admission in hand. This year, the students received non-need-based scholarships worth \$3.6 million. But it wasn't easy.

A few of the students described their obstacles to colleges. Aryiel's father died, her mother couldn't find a job, their utilities were cut off and they bounced from one relative's house to the next. Devon's list included threats from drugs and street crime. Alexis said her hopeless attitude spilled over to her school work and relationships with other people. But they all found support and persistence in the staff of College Bound.



"As a person of privilege, we have little idea how difficult it is for these students to persevere," Lisa observed. "Once they get to college, they can feel as if they've been transported to Mars. That's why we start in the 9th grade to build a true sense of transformation so that, when they reach college, they know they've earned the status to be there."

The student's in turn, mentor younger students and help with service projects such as Habitat for Humanity. College Bound's motto, Lisa says, is "To whom much is given, much is required."

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