

Impact on Individual and Community: Santa Fe College

Impact on Individual

The Walmart Brighter Futures 2.0 Project impacts the lives students, their families, and the community not only through financial gains via training opportunities, but through morale enhancement. According to Carlos:

I didn't have many choices when I was younger, and after my daughters were born, I could not go to school. I had to go to work. When I had the time and opportunity, I came to SF for the GED program. I think it is great that SF provides the community with these opportunities. It fulfills me just to come to campus every day, and I just wish that more people could benefit from the Brighter Futures Project. I've always enjoyed helping people; now I'm in Santa Fe's C.N.A. program and classes are going great! I always tell young people that it is never too late to start a career if you want one. You just need to take an opportunity like the Brighter Futures Project when it presents itself. I hope that the Brighter Futures Project will continue, not for me, but for other people; I think everyone in the community will benefit from that.

Instructors and staff in the SF Adult Education Program notice that Walmart Brighter Futures Project 2.0 students stand apart in both attitude and personal presentation. Throughout their time in the program, students' commitment to school increases; their dedication to career training is enhanced; and their attention to personal hygiene, appearance, and appropriate demeanor flourishes. Students whose attendance and attitude were once a concern for teachers and staff within the Adult Education Program have made a complete change. Brighter Futures Scholars display confidence and pride in their abilities that some may have never thought possible.

This positive change carries over to the families and the communities. Students are proud of their program and their accomplishments. They are positive role models for their children. Many say with pride that they study at night right alongside their children. Their children help them with some of their academics, and they can better assist their children. Parents say their families are so proud of them. When a family is impacted, little by little a community is impacted. Participants share their successes with neighbors, and soon more community members from low-income neighborhoods are joining the program.

Impact on Community

The Walmart Brighter Futures 2.0 Project works with individuals in extreme poverty, many at low to medium literacy skills. The Brighter Futures Project works closely with SF College Adult Education Program and focuses the majority of project resources on helping students with the least educational and employment opportunities find meaningful, gainful employment that can improve not only their financial stability but their emotional and mental stability as well. While the Adult Education Program serves adults with disabilities, ESOL students, and college readiness students, many of the students in Santa Fe College's Adult Education Program did not complete high school and have not yet received their GED. In an effort to assist this population, the Walmart Brighter Futures 2.0 Project has focused its efforts on certifications that do not require a GED or high school diploma, but can still lead directly to immediate employment or serve as a ladder to further educational training. To this end, the project has focused its energies on C.N.A., Early Childhood Education, Security Guard, and Industrial Technology Programs such as Welding; Automotive Repair; Plumbing, Air Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration

Technology (HARV); and Apprenticeship Programs. The Walmart Brighter Futures Project attempts to fill a gap in funding and guidance for a student population that previously had very little access to either.

The Walmart Brighter Futures program is also available to low income individuals, who are not in the SF Adult Education Program. Students working toward their Registered Nursing (RN), Graphic Design, and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certificates and degrees, for example, are assisted with guidance, wraparound support, and books and tuition to assist with what financial aid (FA) does not cover. Students who have gotten into FA difficulties, meaning their grade point average or their percentage of courses passed falls below FA criteria, are assisted in creating a success plan; submitting a FA appeal, if applicable; and accessing wraparound support to help them alleviate the circumstances that put them in these difficulties in the first place. When staff meet with these students, it is determined that many got into FA difficulties because of poverty-related issues. These students have met a roadblock in their quest for further education and need assistance in removing that block and getting back into college.

The impact on the community from the services provided by the Walmart Brighter Futures 2.0 Project is great. Community partners are eager to refer their clients to a program, which offers services and support they cannot provide. In return, students in the Walmart Brighter Futures Program benefit from these relationships and mutual referrals. Individuals who have no high school diploma, who have basic English skills, or who are unable to return to college because of difficulties in the past are a negative drain on the community. Because many do not earn a family-sustaining wage, they need services and supports in various aspects of their lives. Some turn to crime for a source of income; some fall into despair and turn to drugs or alcohol to self-medicate. This brings a whole new set of complications for the individual and his or her family. The negative impact to the individual, family, and society in time lost from life, detrimental impacts on children, and money spent for treatment or incarceration is felt for generations to come.

To increase ties to the community, the Walmart Brighter Futures 2.0 Project has partnered with many community providers who address the many issues associated with poverty. A prime example is the Duval Community Initiative designed to increase access to community resources for one of the most impoverished communities in Gainesville. This project was initiated by the Gainesville Police Department police chief. He hopes to reduce crime by addressing the causes of crime: poverty, lack of education, and lack of employment. The Walmart Brighter Project also partners with many faith-based support programs. A new partnership is in the draft stages. A local pastor has many programs designed to provide guidance and opportunities to young African-American men in the disadvantaged neighborhoods throughout Northeast Gainesville. Through partnerships, he provides an Innovative Dads program, Mentor2Mentor connections, and a My Brother's Keeper initiative.