

DIALOGUES IN ACTION 2018

WORDS ALIVE WESTREICH SCHOLARSHIP

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION: WORDS ALIVE

The purpose of this report is to present the process Words Alive undertook, and the findings discovered, as we set out to measure the impact of our Words Alive Westreich Scholarship program.

Established in 1999, Words Alive was founded on the belief that if you value reading and understand its fundamental connection to all aspects of your life, you will thrive as a lifelong learner — ready to transform your community. In that vein, our mission is to open opportunities for life success by inspiring a commitment to reading, and with our three primary programs: Read Aloud, Teen Services and Family Literacy, Words Alive provides life-changing services to more than 3,800 underserved students and families throughout Southern California monthly.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM: WORDS ALIVE WESTREICH SCHOLARSHIP

Founded by philanthropist Ruth Westreich in 2007, the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) aims to support graduates of the Juvenile Court and Community Schools district as they work to achieve their higher education goals at the college or vocational level. All participating scholars have faced extraordinary circumstances such as homelessness, exposure to gang violence, struggles with alcohol/drug abuse, teen pregnancy or impact by the justice system.

Disbursed in monthly stipends to their personal checking account, the financial award can be used to cover living expenses such as rent, utilities, food, basic toiletries, public transportation, and child care. Additionally, the program pairs recipients with a mentor. Through the mentorship, students have individualized support navigating the college landscape from a career professional, gain assistance in accessing academic and community resources, learn relationship-building skills, and often, find a friendly shoulder to lean on. The WAWS program also offers personal and professional development opportunities through group workshops on many topics including financial literacy, resume building, job interviewing skills and time management.

METHODOLOGY

To continually provide meaningful and evaluation-driven programming, Word Alive commenced the seven-month Project Impact with Dialogues in Action (DIA) to analyze the impact of our Words Alive Westreich Scholarship program using a mixed method, qualitative and quantitative evaluation model. Through this process, we had an opportunity to view our program through the lens of the scholarship recipients, past and present, and their mentors to determine opportunities to enhance our program delivery.

The aim of our evaluation was to ascertain the type of impact our program has on the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship recipients. Over the course of seven months, our team developed and refined ideas of intended impact and indicators and designed and implemented both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an in-depth protocol to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from our program. We used a purposeful stratified sampling technique to select a representative sample from the population we serve. Our population size was 39 scholars. Our sample size was 9 and we drew our sample from the following strata of our population:

- Current and former scholars and mentors who had participated in the program between fall 2012-spring 2018
- Scholars who attended locally and those who attended schools outside of San Diego and therefore had long-distance mentorships
- Scholars who received various amounts of scholarship funding

We also interviewed six mentors who worked with students locally and remotely across several program years. Many of the mentors we interviewed had mentored more than one scholar through the years and could compare those experiences.

We then convened one-on-one interviews lasting from between 45 minutes to one hour in length with a sample from the identified strata of population. Interviewers took notes during the interviews and filled in the notes immediately after the interview to obtain a substantive rendering of the interview.

We analyzed the data inductively using a modified version of thematic analysis. Interviewers implemented the first three phases of thematic analysis (becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes and identifying themes) for each interview. The interviewers familiarized themselves with the data by reviewing the data from each interview four times, each time thinking through a different aspect of what the data reveal about the research question. The data were then bucketed into four categories to serve as an initial set of codes. Finally, initial themes were generated based on the pervasive insights from the data. This process allowed us to interpret the meaning and significance of the data from each interview.

Next, we brought all of the data analyses and initial themes together and implemented the next two phases of thematic analysis (reviewing themes, defining and naming themes). We reviewed the initial themes as a team to identify the overarching themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the collective insights and various ways to gain greater definition of the features of the themes, causes and catalysts of the themes, new or surprising insights related to the themes, and relationships between the themes that were revealed in the data. We then determined the most significant and meaningful discoveries and brought them forward as findings to be described in the final phase of thematic analysis, this report.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

For the quantitative portion of the evaluation, we designed a questionnaire to collect data on our quantitative indicators of impact. We administered this instrument to 39 scholars (the entire population of scholars) and had a response of 13, a 33% response rate. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency. We identified key insights, patterns, and gaps within the data and incorporated these discoveries into the related findings.

We detail our findings below. When quoting from our interviews, we indicate whether the quote is from a scholar or mentor.

FINDINGS

FINDING #1 – MORE THAN MONEY: LEARNING FROM AND LIMITATIONS OF FINANCIAL AWARDS

One might assume that the most impactful element of a scholarship program would be the money itself. However, our research found that the money awarded through the scholarship was not enough to negate the broader constraints of scholars' financial circumstances nor to ensure a sense of financial security. That being said, a much-welcomed finding is that, as a group, scholars are thinking about and using money differently than they did before the program.

The scholarship program has several features intended to help students develop positive financial habits and feel more financially secure. Unlike many traditional scholarship programs, students can spend their awarded funds on living expenses such as rent, food, public transportation and child care. Money is disbursed monthly into personal checking accounts for greater access to cover these kinds of off-campus expenses and is often a student's first time establishing a relationship with a bank. Additionally, students attend a financial literacy course led by experts in the field and are encouraged to work with their mentor on budgeting practices throughout the year.

Interviews with scholars who attended the workshop and/or addressed budgeting with their mentor described a better understanding of spending behaviors and different decision making about how to use their money.

About understanding their spending behavior, scholars said:

"[The financial workshop] made me realize how much I was wasting and how much I accumulate each month by going to restaurants instead of eating at home." – *Scholar, age 22*

"I've been using a template that my mentor shared with me. I ask myself, 'Do I really need this? Do I want to waste my money on this? Have I bought the right things first?' I'm more aware of what I buy...For example, do I want to go to Jack in the Box and feed myself for an hour or go to the grocery store and feed myself for a week." – *Scholar, age 26*

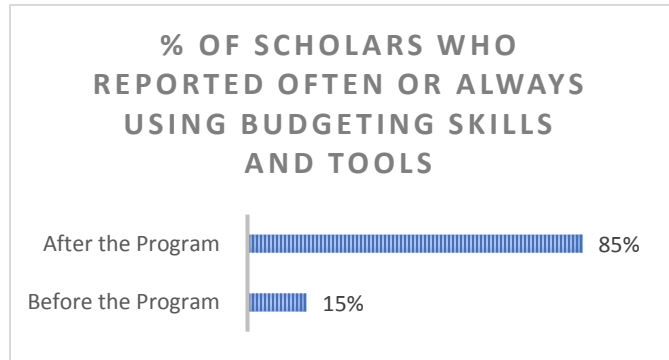
About making money decisions differently, many scholars reported saving money for the first time in their lives, while others described strategizing their spending in other ways:

"I'm spending more of my money on school supplies and using free school resources for food. I'm saving scholarships for further down the line. I'm using that money for other materials, like in 1-2 years when I know I'll have like a \$5,000 tuition. So, I'm planning for that...I'm stretching my budgets to cover everything I need. I'll spend 3 days researching something I need to buy to find the best price. I think these changes are feeding my motivation and keeping it alive." – *Scholar, age 20*

"When I first got the scholarship, I was going through a tough time. I had just been kicked out of my living situation and I was living off the scholarship money. So, I learned how to budget money for necessities like food. I had my young daughter, so I had to think about her. I didn't really have help, so I had to figure it out on my own and I was very young. This taught me how to save money and not spend on things you don't need. And the scholarship money was limited so I learned how to extend it out." – *Scholar, age 18*

Survey responses reflected a similar sentiment, in which after participating in the program, 81% scholars reported that they often or always use budgeting skills and tools to manage their financial situation than reported doing so before participating in the program.

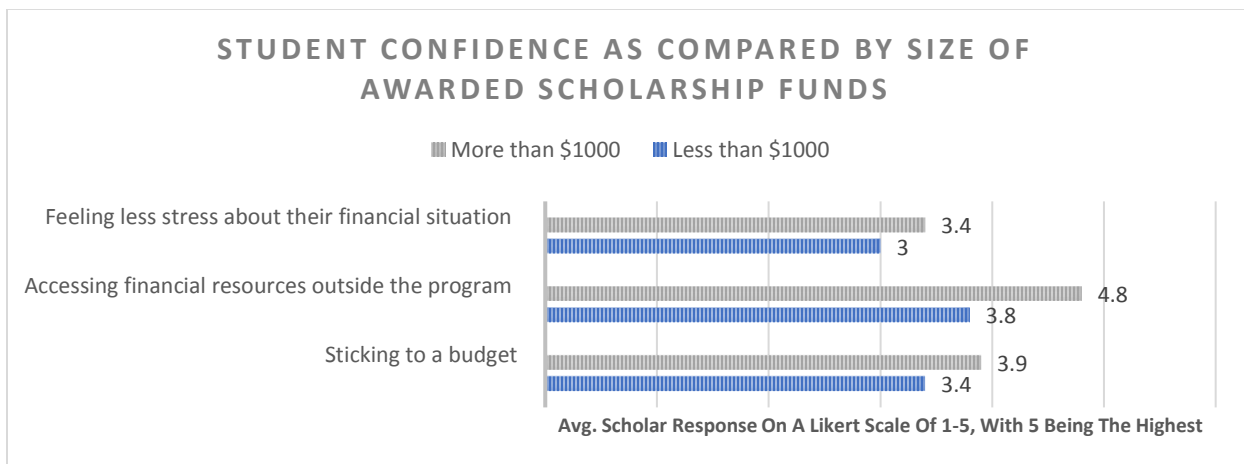
It wasn't easy though, and in their eyes, consistency and discipline with budgeting remains a challenge:



“I go on and off with the financial habits. I try to tell myself, it’s okay just keep it in your head. I have done better budgeting in the past, but then I have an emotional breakdown and that makes all the habits go away. I want to get back to it...I just need more practice with budgeting.” – *Scholar, age 22*

“My [money] management fluctuates. I set up a savings account at a different bank not tied to the app on my phone where I can transfer money between accounts easily, and I didn't get the card. That way I have to make a special trip to the bank to take the money out, which I know I wouldn't want to do. I'll save up a lot, like \$500 until recently, but then I'll dip into it for some expense and have to build it back up. Now I have \$260+ in that account and I know I have to get back on track and not touch it.” – *Scholar, age 26*

We believe a contributing factor to success with budding budgeting skills may be the amount of money awarded to scholars. All scholars participating in the program have been impacted by extraordinary life circumstances and the financial hardship connected to those circumstances, and there was consensus among interviewed scholars that the amount of their financial award was not significant enough to cause lasting financial change or relief in the larger context of their lives. However, seen in the chart below, students who received larger financial awards reported feeling less stressed about their financial situation, as well as sticking to their personal budget and accessing financial resources outside their scholarship more often.



Significance

A central goal of the WAWS program is to provide funding to support a scholar’s academic trajectory. That the financial component is not restricted to certain kinds of expenses makes the scholarship both unique and a powerful tool to address the “real life” financial obstacles that keep scholars from focusing on their education. As

it stands, scholarship awards are not enough to remove those obstacles completely. An intended impact for this program is that scholars work toward a level of financial sustainability by building positive financial habits. As one mentor put it, “any new financial habits are a big deal” and while not perfect in execution, new understanding and practices are in fact taking hold and endowing scholars with a new skillset for managing their challenging financial situations to leverage the resources they have.

One scholar summarized this reality beautifully:

“I have more common sense, better decision-making skills and am wiser. Financial burden takes a lot out of you, [but] I don’t feel as dragged down by it.” – *Scholar, age 20*

Response

- Award more money per student to further ease financial strain.
- Ensure mentors attend the group financial literacy workshop, so they are equipped to assist students throughout the year.
- Offer 1:1 financial conferencing with experts in the field beyond or in place of a “one-size-fits-all” workshop.

As we dove into student interviews and survey responses we concluded that skills of leveraging the money they received as part of the scholarship outlasted the money itself, and that scholars who reported these skills gained them by adhering to program requirements and utilizing the mentorship pillar of the program. As a trend discussed in the findings that follow, scholars who met with their mentor consistently, often and face-to-face benefited most.

FINDING #2 – RAISING THE BAR: COMMUNICATED EXPECTATIONS IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Remaining eligible for the WAWS program requires that students regularly meet with their mentor, turn in academic progress reports, maintain a 2.0 GPA while enrolled in six credits and attend at least three of the professional development workshops offered throughout the program year. The program was intentionally designed with these requirements with the hope that students would develop habits of accountability and timely communication. We also hope that students will learn that they will face consequences if they do not complete program requirements in a timely manner. For example, a late fund request could result in not receiving their financial aid until the next month, or if a student does not attend the required number of workshops, they could lose eligibility for the scholarship for the next school year.

Through the interviews, we found that many students did, in fact, learn these skills. One scholar said very explicitly:

“I’ve learned to have more responsibility. There are different tasks we have to do to complete the scholarship, like submitting our grades and meeting with our mentor once a month. We have to write notes about what happened during the month. This responsibility I’ve learned also helps a lot in school and with my job.” – *Scholar, age 23*

Another scholar remarked:

“I’ve learned how to be on top of things, how to make deadlines and turn things in on time. It’s been good practice.” – *Scholar, age 22*

Yet another scholar said:

“The number one and most valuable thing I’ve learned is organization. To get the funds you’re being checked in on monthly and that forced me to change my life around and make education my number one priority.” – *Scholar, age 25*

Clearly, the program requirements had the impact we intended. These requirements held students accountable and forced them to stay engaged with the program, and in the process, they learned responsibility, increased their communication skills and prioritized the scholarship and their education.

However, we also found that these requirements only had the impact we intended if the scholars understood and perceived them as mandatory. This past year it became clear to us that one scholar, who only met with his mentor three times, didn’t understand that attending the workshops was a mandatory requirement of the program.

In the survey, this scholar responded “moderately” to the statement: “I know what is expected of me by Words Alive and my mentor.” In this scholar’s interview, we saw a general lack of benefit from the WAWS program. When asked, “What changes are you seeing in your life as a result of the program?” he responded, “I haven’t really seen any changes in my life.” Comparing this answer with the other scholars, we see how the requirements being mandatory is absolutely essential.

Significance

It is significant that many scholars mentioned that the skills they learned because of these program requirements were then applied to other aspects of their life, such as school and work, which is imperative on their journey to adulthood.

We also found it interesting and surprising that while many scholars stated they had learned these skills (i.e. timely email communication, responsibility, organization, time management, etc.), they also often cited these same skills when asked about the recurring challenges they face. This points to the fact that these skills are a work in progress and take years to develop. The scholars’ self-awareness in their development is important because it shows they are capable of realizing where they started, what they have learned from the program and where they still have room for improvement.

Response

- Modify the program requirements so that the mentors have more structure and requirements.
- Implement stricter, more immediate consequences for scholars when they fail to meet a requirement.
- Emphasize communication about what is mandatory and what is not. Update Terms & Conditions of the program to include a schedule of deadlines and clear communication about what is mandatory, and have scholars sign it at the orientation.
- Standardize financial award amounts. All scholars have the same requirements, so the reward should be the same too.
- Encourage students to find a mentor outside of the WAWS program.

FINDING #3 – CONSISTENT MENTORING INSPIRES CONSISTENT STUDENTS

Historically, the first-year scholarship students don’t answer emails, show up late, if at all, miss important deadlines and struggle to follow up when they say they will. Few offer excuses or apologies because before they entered the program, they were not accustomed to being asked for an explanation.

Interviews with scholars, all graduates of alternative high schools, revealed that they were unprepared for what would be expected of them in college and “the real world.” But through the norms and expectations of the WAWS program, scholars start to realize what is expected of them in the program, in school, future jobs and in healthy adult relationships.

About communicating violated expectations, one mentor said:

“I tried to be direct and honest. When my [first-year mentee] stood me up once or twice, I wrote her a letter and sent it to her home, telling her my expectations and how she had let me down. I hope she has a better idea that you have to show up and that commitments mean something.”

Scholars who met with their mentor consistently, on the other hand, demonstrated how that consistency became part of how they operated. This was especially true for scholars who had multi-year experiences in the program.

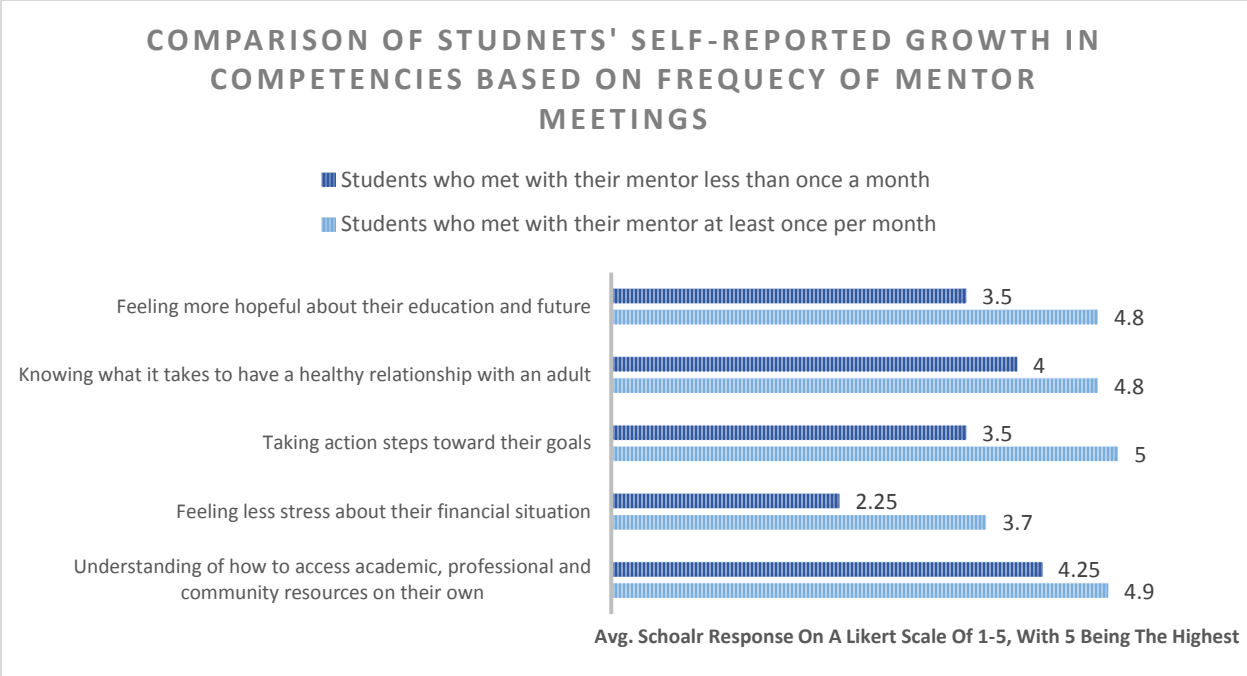
One such scholar, who now works as a financial advisor and manages a small group of employees, attributed her leadership skills to her mentor’s consistency:

“[My mentor] would visit me at school. We kept in contact and would catch up often, we would go hiking or meet up to eat. She was a really good friend,” the scholar said. “[She] taught me what it meant to be consistent.” – *Scholar, age 18*

Another scholar went on to say: “[My mentor] keeps me on track and helps me think of how to tackle things – usually along the lines of ‘stay on top of that until it’s done,’” listing actions she’s taken as a result: consistently visiting professors during office hours to ask for grade progress or get help and following up by phone if an email goes unanswered. “I’m adulting way better because of these skills.” – *Scholar, age 26*

When consistency in relationships becomes a habit, it bleeds into other aspects of life. Our research shows scholars with consistent mentorship also study regularly, turn in assignments on time and pay their bills when they are due.

One hundred percent of the scholars surveyed said they now take advantage of academic, professional and community resources at their disposal. Again, students who met with their mentor more frequently reported better follow through and higher competencies in several skillsets as demonstrated in the graph below.



Significance

The lives of most scholars up to the point of participating in the program have been anything but consistent. Their parents have been in and out of jail, in and out of drug rehab centers – and essentially, in and out of their lives. At times, the scholars have been unsure where they will sleep on any given night or when they will eat their next meal. Surviving one day to the next is all they know.

But when an engaged Words Alive mentor enters the picture, it gives the scholar new context for what it means to be reliable, to be professional, to be a successful adult. Like all skills – consistency is a learned behavior. Mentors who consistently interact with the scholars keep them accountable to the requirements of their schools, the scholarship program and their goals. *Response*

- Implement a mentorship log for mentors and their scholars to track their conversations and what needs to be followed up on for each meeting.
- Require mentors to attend the scholars’ workshops so mentors can ensure knowledge learned is applied.
- Mentors attend quarterly mentor-only meetings for additional training opportunities, roundtable discussions, etc.

FINDING #4 – FACE-TO-FACE: FACETIME WITH MENTORS MEANS STRONGER RAPPORT, GREATER SUCCESS

Through interviews with both students and mentors, we found that mentorship was key to success for the scholars in the program. Scholars who reported a close bond with their mentor, established through frequent meetings, not only were more likely to follow through on their mentor’s advice but also felt like they weren’t “alone.”

Conversely, students with long-distance mentors struggled to form an attachment to them. Scholars and mentors alike reported awkward Skype interactions and missed phone calls. Simply put: Without having to look someone in the eye, it’s easier to flake. These factors made it difficult to build rapport, resulting in relationships that hinged solely on obligation.

“I think it would definitely be easier if it was a closer distance. We’re mostly limited to phone calls,” one mentor said. “When she is in town, it’s often pretty brief but I think our interactions go better in person.”

One pair built a strong rapport despite the distance. The difference? They were able to meet in-person when possible:

“[My mentor] would go above and beyond to meet me where I was at. If we were meeting, she would come to me a lot of times. She would take trips to San Francisco to visit her niece and then stop by and see me. Having her support made the biggest difference. My parents couldn’t come visit me, but she did – and it was such a comfort.” – *Scholar, age 24*

Significance

Trust is the fundamental building block of all successful relationships – and the mentor/mentee relationship is no different. But trust is built over time and difficult to establish in a phone call. Without that element of trust and essentially, rapport, mentees have difficulty opening up, asking for help or placing value on the resources offered. On the flip side, mentors feel like they are prying or stepping out of bounds when trying to follow up or hold their mentee accountable.

This finding indicated that impactful mentorships underwent a period of relationship-building first – and that happens best face-to-face.

Response

- New scholars in the program must live and attend school in San Diego during their first year in the scholarship program.
- Recruit mentors in the cities where students attend school and offer them webinar training.

FINDING #5 – “I FEEL LIKE A BETTER PERSON. I FEEL SO FREE.”

While the intended impacts of the program included relationship-building with others, one surprising result discovered during this study was participants’ changing relationship with themselves.

Through their scholarship application essays and interviews for this study, most if not all, of the students discussed the trauma in their lives. It’s no secret that an unstable childhood can contribute to unhealthy personal relationships in adulthood. Many of the students revealed abusive romantic partners, the inability to enforce boundaries with their family members and feelings of isolation from peers who couldn’t relate.

However, through a consistent relationship with their mentor as described in Finding #3 and the support of their WAWS cohort as described in Finding #6, students developed and employed healthy relationship skills with others. According to this study, 85% of scholars surveyed said they felt more confident in putting healthy relationship skills into action. For one scholar, healthy relationship skills meant establishing and exercising new boundaries: “I’ve learned to say no to certain people.”

This new-found confidence coupled with realizing the value of healthy relationships, networking, community engagement and mentorship, led to many students and their mentors saying that the students simply found themselves much more open to communication after participating in the program.

One mentor described this growth in her mentee as: “She does a good job at assessing people and choosing to be with people who are good examples. She has become very open with me.”

Perhaps even more impactful, however, was the growth scholars recognized within themselves. Many students initially felt trapped by the labels placed on them by society: at-risk, homeless, teen parent, juvenile delinquent. Before their participation in the program, many said they never thought they could go to college. In survey responses, they described themselves as “troubled, scared, lazy, unmotivated, unprepared and unfocused” before participating in the program.

But after at least a year in the program, they became *scholars* – describing themselves instead with more positive terms such as “responsible, confident, passionate, ready and focused.”

In-line with these terms alluding to a new sense of agency, scholars described taking action:

“I believe that I’m smart enough to accomplish my goals. I believe I’m capable of taking actions to make changes, that I can identify those actions, and make the changes. Most importantly, I believe in myself, that I’m the only person who can do this. I’ve learned to identify what the challenges are and be specific as you can be to make that challenge a goal, to make it a positive.” – *Scholar, age 25*

“I take action, go out and get the things that are beneficial for me instead of waiting for them to come to me.” – *Scholar, age 26*

For many program participants, that shift stems from the support of their mentor and Words Alive staff. In interviews with scholars, they said that having someone cheer them on made them not want to give up, helped them realize they could rise above their circumstances and see themselves as more capable!

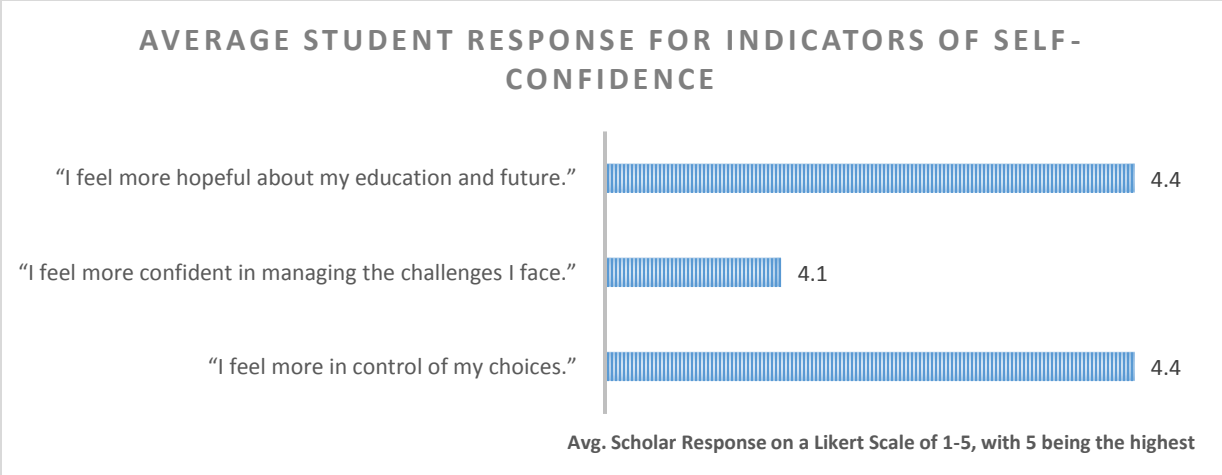
One scholar said:

“I’ve grown so much. I appreciate hearing the uplifting things [my mentor and Words Alive staff] say. It helps me remember my accomplishments and not just my struggles. I feel like a better person; I feel so free.” – *Scholar, age 26*

Another scholar shared:

“I’ve learned self-care, self-love and self-respect...with self-love, especially when you have so many obstacles, helps everything else. Before I didn’t know any better. I’m pushing myself to ask questions and see how much I’ve accomplished. I’m reclaiming my identity as a teen mom, as undocumented. Before, I didn’t love myself, I just saw the labels society threw at me, like screw-up, outlaw, rebel and minority. I didn’t like waking up to that.” – *Scholar, age 25*

With a redefined, positive perspective of themselves and skills honed to address their circumstances, 100% of students surveyed said the program helped them feel at least moderately more in control of their choices.



To love oneself – to truly feel confident both in and out of one’s skin – is important if one is to break free from the trappings of harmful and limiting environments. That the program scholars develop that confidence in such dramatic ways is remarkable.

“I’m more positive about everything and learned to appreciate myself more. I wish I had a friend like me.” – *Scholar, age 26*

Significance

Focused on the expectations and labels placed on them by society, students often say they never imagined they would graduate high school let alone go to college. But as students are repeatedly and genuinely told, “you can do it,” our findings indicate they begin to believe it. This confidence translates to several other attributes, such as motivation and resilience, that help drive scholars’ success.

Equally, one’s desire to cultivate new relationships, create a personal goal of helping others, and confidently navigate the world fosters new opportunities. Being able to identify and develop in these two areas and recognize their importance will provide lasting positive impact.

Response

- Mentors and staff become more participatory in scholars’ lives (attend graduations and other ceremonies, sporting events if the student is an athlete, etc.).
- Program staff to regularly remind mentors to send words of encouragement to their mentees.
- Program staff to send birthday cards and other celebratory communication when appropriate.
- Continue to diversify learning opportunities for scholars, not only through new workshop opportunities but other cultural opportunities.

FINDING #6 – BETTER TOGETHER: BECOMING AWARE OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

The WAWS program also opportunities for scholars to participate in group activities in order to make deeper connections within their cohort and experience new things in the community. These activities, beyond the mandated workshop participation, include volunteerism, meal-sharing, outings to sporting events or performing arts shows and an extension of the Adolescent Book Group designed specifically for them.

As scholars begin to experience new environments, they find that their personal backgrounds can be dramatically different from many of their peers, making a sense of “belonging” and connection with others difficult. However, by spending time with one another during designed activities in the program, scholars got to know each other better, and in time, relate. Many of the students participating in the program recognized an elevated awareness of the peer relationships within the group – other young people who have shared experiences and whose camaraderie can provide a sense of safety and mutual well-being.

“I didn’t realize before, how many kids were in situations similar to me,” said one current participant. Finding common ground with her program peers helped her reach out at school: “I found a society oriented towards youth in foster care, homeless, orphaned or in other difficult situations or for kids whose parents weren’t emotionally available. I became involved in the society and got another scholarship through them,” she continued. - *Scholar, age 24*

In addition to developing like-minded peer relationships within the WAWS group, and then feeling confident to seek out those relationships and support systems beyond the group, the students also expressed an increased level of “community engagement” – a new level of ease with networking, finding resources, giving back and being a resource for each other.

“I like to talk with my classmates and have little conversations. Through small talk I found out that one of my classmate’s boyfriend was mistreating her. I encouraged her by sharing my past and my experience with domestic violence. I suggested she go to a therapist and even suggested I could go with her if she [needed the] support.” – *Scholar, age 22*

Significance

No one wants to feel alone, that their experiences, especially traumatic, are isolated, or that no one else understands their path. That the WAWS program is designed to meet the needs of students and young people sharing very particular and specific backgrounds is unique, and on one that the students clearly have been able to capitalize. Additionally, as the young people who participate in the program progress, they have found it not only helpful to their peers, but also beneficial to themselves, to be able to recognize the value of these peer relationships and both use them to seek assistance and provide leadership when appropriate.

Response

- Offer more social group outings such as sporting events, performing arts shows or potlucks.
- Provide networking opportunities with other peer groups who have similar shared experiences and backgrounds.
- Create an online social network system for connections in and out of WAWS with the ability to share personal and professional connections and resources for growth and development.

FINDING #7 – THE MENTEE BECOMES THE MENTOR

We were surprised to find that through participating in the program and developing a relationship with their mentors, our scholars in turn became mentors for their peers.

When asked what they were passionate about, six out of nine of the scholars interviewed said “helping people.” Many of the scholars are pursuing careers such as social work, therapy, and child development with the ultimate goal of helping youth that have similar stories to their own.

In addition, many of the scholars spoke directly about becoming mentors for their peers. One scholar said:

“Now, I pass on the advice my mentors have given me to other people. I’m a mentor for some of the students at Lindsay because I’ve been in their shoes. It’s good to share your experience because they can see a role model and can relate to you. It gives them faith that things will work out... I just try to be a helping person and when someone’s experiencing a lot of emotions I try to be a calming presence like the calming presence my mentors have been for me. I’ve learned to ask for help and people still ask me for help.” – *Scholar, age 22*

It's clear from this example and others that being a mentor wasn't necessarily an innate skill the scholars possessed, but something they learned through their relationship with their WAWS mentor. This statement from one of our scholars illustrates the range of skills these students learned from their mentors:

“I valued [my mentor’s] honesty. She would be upfront but in a professional way. I learned how to be that way with other people. ‘Let’s go grab coffee’ is not something I had done before but now do with other people.” – *Scholar, age 24*

Significance

One of our intended impacts for this program is that scholars form healthy and meaningful relationships with their peers and adults. Because of their upbringing, many of our scholars lack healthy adult relationships in their lives. To see the students develop relationship-building skills and then become a mentoring force in their community is significant because it proves that the scholars can learn the basic tenets of a healthy relationship and give and take in positive ways in those relationships.

Response

- Implement roundtable meetings in which scholarship students can discuss issues, problems and successes they are facing so far and look to each other for help and advice.
- Actively encourage students to become mentors for others, perhaps through mentorship workshops or other mentor-focused opportunities in the community.
- Use the Strength Finder tool to create diversified learning opportunities for the scholars. Strength Finder can be used to assess the scholars’ greatest strengths and learning exercises will help them use those strengths to their greatest potential, to help themselves and their peers.

FINDING #8 – “I BELIEVE IN MY FUTURE.”

All scholars in the program are graduates of Juvenile Court & Community Schools, which serves a student body experiencing extraordinary challenges such as juvenile delinquency, homelessness, community violence and/or teen parenting. Because of this, they are often focused on the present, getting through day-by-day and making sure their basic, immediate needs. Through our interviews with participants and mentors, we found that many of the scholars made clear connections between participating in the program and a discovered or renewed focus on their future. In fact, 92% of the students said they now feel more hopeful about their education and future.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances these students come from, scholars often felt as if they were not in control of their own lives but were instead trapped by their upbringing and environment. However, we found that after participating in the program, the financial, mentor and professional development aspects of the program have helped scholars believe in themselves, their futures and their abilities — creating a sense of agency over their personal and academic trajectory. This translates to students taking action toward improving their future.

After participating in the program,

- 85% of scholars said they now use coping strategies to address challenges they face
- 85% of scholars said they now take action steps toward the goals they set
- 100% of scholars said they the now take advantage of academic, professional and community resources

Mentors recognize this growth too:

“I think she sees each of these accomplishments as milestones – and they are. It supports her sense of self-worth, value and confidence. For some people, it’s easy, but for her it has been incredibly challenging. Every single milestone increases her confidence. And she’s facing this hurdle now but she’s not going to give up.”

Two scholars mentioned they actively plan ahead in terms of applying for additional scholarships, saying, “I’m saving scholarships for further down the line” or “I’ve been going over my statements more. I figure out when different scholarships are coming in and when the deadlines to apply are.”

“I had never saved money before and the scholarship program taught me how to...I’m planning on buying a house. Not anytime soon but hopefully in 10 years or so,” another scholar said. “I have the skills to save money now and the motivation to buy a house.” – *Scholar, age 24*

This same scholar, when asked about how she dealt with challenges, such as persistent mental health issues, throughout her college career said, “I realize I have to focus on my future. The depression and PTSD were because of my past experiences. I learned that I could change things now, so I won’t be in the same situation later on. I need to believe in my future.”

Significance

At Words Alive, we want participants in all of our programs to become advocates for themselves and their future, especially so in the WAWS program. This finding indicates that through program participation, scholars are learning to proactively contribute to their own personal development by creating long-term goals and that they’re making steps towards meeting them. This is not only significant to the individual student but to the larger community. By becoming individuals who are no longer just getting by day-by-day, they are prepared to contribute to local economies, culture, politics, and to help their communities thrive.

Response

- Have students fill out a five-year plan.
- Implement a mentorship log in which mentor and student fill out what they discussed at each meeting. The log will have a “what’s next” column to encourage mentors and students to follow through with their plans.
- Add workshops and exercises about goal setting to the program.

CONCLUSION

The life challenges that these scholars face as they enter the WAWS program are many and complicated, yet by the end of their time in the program, many scholars view themselves as actors with a set of skills and tools and a defined sense of agency to persevere and achieve anyway. Our research has shown that scholarship funds indeed remove some of the immediate financial barriers to attend school, but it is the personal growth and skillsets to address the challenges of their lives that scholars develop through a cultivated relationship with a mentor that launch them to a new level of what's possible.

STEPS FORWARD

The program adjustments planned for the 2018-19 program year:

- Standardized financial awards.
- Stricter, more immediate consequences for scholars when they fail to meet a requirement.
- Emphasize communication about what is mandatory and what is not. Update Terms & Conditions of the program to include a schedule of deadlines and clear communication about what is mandatory, and have scholars sign it at the orientation. Mentors and scholars retain a copy.
- Enhanced initial mentor training (through help of The National Mentoring Partnership).
- Mentors attend quarterly mentor-only meetings for additional training opportunities, roundtable discussions, etc.
- Provide mentorship kit that includes mentor resources, student resources and activities the pair can do together, along with clear program objectives and requirements, etc.
- Implement a mentorship log for mentors and their scholars to track their conversations and what needs to be followed up on for each meeting.
- Require mentors to attend the scholars' workshops so mentors can ensure knowledge learned is applied.
- Provide incentives for students to meet with the mentors regularly.
- New scholars in the program must live and attend school in San Diego during their first year in the scholarship program.
- Program staff to send birthday cards and other celebratory communication when appropriate.
- Continue to diversify learning opportunities for scholars, not only through new workshop opportunities but other cultural opportunities.

INDICATORS OF IMPACT

<i>Impact #1 – Scholars have the financial stability to succeed.</i>	
What we mean: Students use their WAWS scholarship and knowledge gained at WAWS workshops to create a personal budget to become more financially stable.	
<p>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars know how to create a personal budget. • Scholars have an increased understanding of the actual cost of living. • Scholars have an increased knowledge of financial resources outside of WAWS. <p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars use budgeting skills. • Scholars access financial resources (such as FAFSA, food stamps, etc.) outside of WAWS. <p>Feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars feel less stressed about their current financial situation. • Scholars feel more confident in managing their financial situation. 	<p>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars believe that financial stability is possible. • Scholars believe that financial stability is important for their future success. <p>Become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars are more financially secure. • Scholars become a responsible financial figure in their family, peer group, community, etc. <p>Love:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars are more committed to the long-term financial management necessary for stability. • Scholars are committed to persevering through difficult financial times.

<i>Impact #2 – Scholars form healthy, meaningful relationships with peers & adults.</i>	
What we mean: By receiving support in areas such as problem solving, training, and access to resources through the relationship with their Words Alive mentor, students learn that there are adults who want to help them succeed and are reliable in doing so. As trust and respect develops, students build a reciprocal relationship with their mentor. This serves as an example for other healthy relationships.	
<p>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars know the basic tenets of a healthy relationship. • Scholars can identify mentors and allies in their life. <p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars use relationship with mentor to develop relationship-building skills. • Scholars practice reciprocity in relationships. <p>Feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars feel confident in putting these relationship-building skills into action. • Scholars feel an increased resiliency as a result of working with their mentor. 	<p>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars believe in growing trust and reciprocity in adult relationships. <p>Become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars become a member of a healthy adult relationship (such as with friends, teachers, parents, Words Alive staff, etc.) outside of mentor/mentee relationship. • Scholars become a mentoring force for someone in their community and/or family. <p>Love:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars value building a network of personal and professional support.

Impact #3– Scholars develop a deeper sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and self-confidence.

What we mean: Students learn that they are more than their circumstances and that they have value. Students understand their place in the world beyond the labels they may attribute to themselves or feel society has placed upon them (such as “homeless,” “at-risk,” etc.).

<p>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars know their strengths and challenges. • Scholars know of coping strategies. • Scholars know how to create and maintain a school/life balance. <p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars use positive vocabulary to describe themselves. • Scholars use coping strategies to address their challenges. <p>Feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars have an increased feeling in control of their choices. • Scholars feel more confident in managing challenges. • Scholars feel a decrease in shame, resentment, and hopelessness. • Scholars feel an increase in self-efficacy, self-esteem, and hopefulness. 	<p>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars believe they can succeed as students and people. • Scholars believe in their worth and value. <p>Become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars become resilient. • Scholars become future-oriented. <p>Love:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars nurture their passions and appreciate who they are as people. • Scholars embrace themselves and their past holistically and compassionately.
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Impact #4 – Scholars become advocates for themselves and their futures.

What we mean: Students show motivation by proactively participating in the WAWS program and contributing to their own personal development. Student apply the academic, professional, and community resources at their disposal. Students create long-term personal, educational, and career goals, and make steps toward meeting them.

<p>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars know the requirements and expectations of the WAWS program. • Scholars know about academic, professional, and community resources at their disposal. • Scholars know how to set SMART goals. <p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars meet the requirements and expectations of the WAWS program. • Scholars apply academic, professional, and community resources at their disposal. • Scholars take action toward their goals. <p>Feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars have an increased feeling in control over their educational trajectory. 	<p>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</p> <p>Believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars believe that it is possible to meet their goals. • Scholars see value in the WAWS program beyond their financial award. <p>Become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars proactively participate in the WAWS program. • Scholars become advocates for the skills and/or resources emphasized by the WAWS program. • Scholars become goal-oriented and develop a growth mindset. <p>Love:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars are more committed to personal development in order advocate for themselves and their futures. • Scholars trust themselves, their power, and their voice.
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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for Scholars:

1. What lessons have you learned because of your participation in the program? → How has this knowledge impacted your ability to succeed? (**Know → Believe / Impacts #1-4**)
2. What financial habits have you developed since becoming a WAWS scholar? → What changes are you seeing in your life as a result? In what ways are those changes giving you a new set of motivations? (**Do → Become / Impacts #1 & #4**)
3. What kind of actions are you taking with your mentor? → How have you applied those actions to other relationships? (**Do → Become / Impact #2**)
4. How has working with your mentor made you feel? → How do you honor your personal values in your relationship with your mentor? (**Feel → Love / Impact #2**)
5. What strengths and weaknesses have you realized about yourself? → How has your perspective of yourself evolved? (**Know → Believe / Impact #3**)
6. What recurring challenges, if any, are you recognizing as you move along? → What are you realizing you have to believe in order to overcome those challenges? (**Know → Believe / Impacts #3 & #4**)
7. What has been the most frustrating thing you've learned about yourself in your college career thus far? → How are you dedicated to working through these feelings? (**Feel → Love / Impacts #1-4**)
8. What ideas, principles or passions are you now more eager to express? → How are you staying committed to these ideas, principles or passions even when it's difficult? (**Feel → Love / Impact #3**)
9. What opportunities have you acted on since your participation in WAWS? What did you achieve? → How has that changed the way you will approach your future? (**Do → Become / Impact #4**)

Questions for Mentors:

1. What lessons have you seen your mentee learn because of their participation in the program? → How has this knowledge impacted their ability to succeed? (**Know → Believe**)
2. What financial habits has your mentee developed since becoming a WAWS scholar? → What changes are you seeing in their life as a result? In what ways are those changes giving them a new set of motivations? (**Do → Become**)
3. What kind of actions does your mentee take in your mentor/mentee relationship? → How has your mentee applied those actions to other relationships? (**Do → Become**)
4. What recurring challenges for your mentee, if any, are you recognizing? → What are you realizing they have to believe in order to overcome those challenges? (**Know → Believe**)
5. What opportunities has your mentee acted on since their participation in WAWS? What did they achieve? → How has that changed the way they plan to approach their future? (**Do → Become**)

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your full name?
2. What is your current email address?
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - High School
 - Vocational / Trade School Certificate
 - Associate Degree
 - Bachelor's Degree

- Master's Degree
 - Other (please specify)
4. How often did you meet with your Words Alive mentor when you were part of the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program?
- Never
 - Less than once a month
 - About once a month
 - About every other week
 - Every week
 - Other (please specify)
5. Think about how your time as a scholar and mentee in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program has impacted what you know, do and feel about financial literacy. How much do you agree with the following statements?
- Likert Scale: 1-Not at all / 2 / 3-Moderately / 4 / 5-Extremely
- I know what it really costs to live in San Diego.
 - I know how to create a personal budget.
 - I stick to my budget each month.
 - I feel less stressed about my financial situation.
6. Think about how your time as a scholar and mentee in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program has impacted your understanding of the following. How much do you agree with the following statements?
- Likert Scale: 1-Not at all / 2 / 3-Moderately / 4 / 5-Extremely
- I know what my strengths and challenges are.
 - I know what it takes to have a healthy relationship with another adult.
 - I know what is expected of me by Words Alive and my mentor.
 - I know how to cope with stress.
 - I know how to find academic, professional, or community resources on my own.
 - I know how to set a realistic goal.
7. Think about how your time as a scholar and mentee in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program has impacted the way you feel about your personal and academic path. How much do you agree with the following statements?
- Likert Scale: 1-Not at all / 2 / 3-Moderately / 4 / 5-Extremely
- I feel more confident in putting healthy relationship skills into action.
 - I feel more in control of my choices.
 - I feel more confident in managing the challenges I face.
 - I feel more hopeful about my education and future.
8. Think about how often you did the following BEFORE participating in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program.
- Likert Scale: 1-Never / 2-Rarely / 3-Sometimes / 4-Often /5-Always

- Use budgeting skills and/or tools to manage my financial situation.
 - Access financial resources outside of my WAWS scholarship (such as FAFSA, EBT or Cal-Fresh, etc.).
 - Give and take in positive ways in my relationships with others.
 - Use coping strategies to address the challenges I face.
 - Take action toward the goals I set.
 - Take advantage of the academic, professional and community resources at my disposal.
9. Now, think about how often you do or are likely to do the following AFTER participating in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program.
- Likert Scale: 1-Never / 2-Rarely / 3-Sometimes / 4-Often /5-Always
- Use budgeting skills and/or tools to manage my financial situation.
 - Access financial resources outside of my WAWS scholarship (such as FAFSA, EBT or Cal-Fresh, etc.).
 - Give and take in positive ways in my relationships with others.
 - Use coping strategies to address the challenges I face.
 - Take action toward the goals I set.
 - Take advantage of the academic, professional and community resources at my disposal.
10. Think about how your time as a scholar and mentee in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program has impacted the way you view yourself and your future.
- a. In one word, describe the scholar you were BEFORE.
 - b. Now, in one word, describe the scholar you've BECOME.
11. What else would you have wanted to learn or experience through your participation in the Words Alive Westreich Scholarship (WAWS) program?