

Impact Maker

2016 \$100,000 Grant Recipient

Bound for College: Providing Life-Changing Educational Opportunities to Local Students

By Sandi Schwartz

Public education is facing a crisis of epic proportions, according to a recent article in The Washington Post. As journalist Laura Meckler explains, "Test scores are down, and violence is up... For public schools, the numbers are all going in the wrong direction. Enrollment is down. Absenteeism is up. There aren't enough teachers, substitutes, or bus drivers."

Sadly, we see this in our own community. There are teacher shortages and hundreds of kids who never returned to school since the pandemic. The Florida Department of Education reports that over the past fifteen years, while the percentage of Palm Beach County seniors graduating has increased, student achievement has not. Reading proficiency is at 54% and math proficiency at 47%. The income-achievement gap is the main reason for this disparity, and it is only getting worse.

One local teacher recognized this issue and decided to do something about it. Mark Sauer held senior management positions with three professional sports franchises, but when it was time to retire, he decided to step into the classroom. He was a teacher in the School District of Palm Beach County for six years, and from that experience, decided to create Bound For College (BFC) [formerly Delray Students First Inc.] in 2012. Kamilah

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Mark Sauer

Jones, Director of Development, commented about her colleague, "Mark is beloved by the students. He became a teacher in retirement because he realized that the kids needed help to be successful. He truly believes in these kids and is committed to the kids and the organization."

BFC provides free college readiness resources to motivated underprivileged and underserved students to help them prepare for, enroll in, and succeed at a first-rate post-secondary institution. This includes counseling and advising support to prepare for the SAT and ACT, submit quality college applications, and apply for and obtain scholarships and financial aid.

Working with three local schools—Atlantic Community High School, Boynton Beach Community High School, and Village Academy in Delray Beach—BFC focuses on ACT and SAT tutoring after school. "Most money from our organization goes right back into the schools. We provide books and training to deliver a high-quality tutoring program," Mark explained. There is tremendous cooperation and gratitude at the partner schools for the program. Each school has a coordinator that hires teachers to tutor after school. This is such an incredible bonus of the program; it is not only helping students, but teachers as well to boost their income.



BFC also organizes world class college tours for kids who would otherwise never get a chance to step foot on a college campus. Students are invited to participate in multiple college tours each year throughout the state to learn

about campus life. Over the years, the group has visited FIU, FAU, UM, UCF, USF, UF, FSU, PBSC, FGCU, UNF, and more. In addition to the traditional tour, BFC alumni meet with the current students to highlight on and off campus resources like student jobs, support services, food pantries, and affordable housing. These tours are quite popular; the last one had about 50 students and they had a blast.

The success of the program continues to expand as more BFC students graduate high school and head off to college to pursue their dreams. Each year, about 200 students (including 60 seniors) are positively impacted by everything BFC has to offer. During the 2020-2021 school year, students participated in 2,100 hours of tutoring, increased their ACT/SAT national percentile ranking by an average of 23%, and the majority attended college debt-free.



Mark and Kamilah credit the recent success of the organization with winning an Impact 100 grant in 2016. "It is truly a transformational gift and a critical funding pipeline in Palm Beach County," Kamilah said of Impact 100. Because of the grant, they were able to hire a program coordinator, improve and expand their operations, create a manual that serves as a blueprint for future schools, get accredited by Nonprofits First, add a program in Atlantic Community High School, and acquire funding from United Way to support work in Boynton Beach Community High School. Mark commented, "If Impact 100 didn't put us in Atlantic Community High School, we would never have grown to help more students. The grant helped us scale up." Receiving the grant has helped them secure additional funding, and they always mention Impact 100 in new grant proposals.

Bound for College saw meaningful results in the lives of specific students as a result of Impact's grant.

They can even draw a direct correlation between the Impact 100 grant and several student success stories. One student, who was unable to speak English when she enrolled at Atlantic Community High School after arriving from Haiti, now attends FAU's nursing program. She participated in BFC tutoring for two years, and not only mastered English, but became an A student and earned a Bright Futures Scholarship, a

Viner Community Scholarship, and a Teamwork Education Foundation Scholarship. Another student was the third member of his family to attend BFC's tutoring program. His older sisters have gone on to graduate from UM and FAU. He earned a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship and Viner Family Foundation Project Stars Scholarship to assist him with his studies at UCF.

BFC not only changes lives but is working towards generational change to break the poverty cycle. As Mark explains, "Everything feeds on itself. One of the unforeseen results is how the kids help themselves. Younger students in the schools hear about kids getting into college and they want to join the program. Students post about college tours on Instagram so others want in. It is all interconnected. It's about cultural change."

To learn more and support BFC, please visit weareboundforcollege.org.