

Broadening Horizons

High Hopes Scholar and UC Santa Cruz sophomore Alexander Tesfaldet's long-term goal is to become a doctor. He got an up-close view of the profession while volunteering in Vietnam.



From the hustle and bustle of the crowded streets of Ho Chi Minh City to the scenic landscape and natural beauty of Ha Noi Bay, traveling to Vietnam this past summer for a medical outreach program was a wonderful experience. Not wanting to get behind during my first year of school, I pushed myself to attend various seminars regarding medical professions and opportunities on campus.

That is how I found Volunteers Around the World. The organization helps student volunteers travel to different countries to set up medical clinics for people in some of the most poverty-stricken communities.

I traveled with several other students, excited and anxious about my 2 weeks in the country. I learned so much from the doctors on site about various clinical techniques and the differences in illnesses between Vietnam and the U. S. I also had the opportunity to partake in clinical work by measuring heart rate, taking SpO2, managing the pharmacy, and so much more.

Thanks to the BCF Finish Line Fund, I was able to fund my trip and take part in this wonderful program. I'm glad I took advantage of this opportunity. I feel I have a more mature understanding of the medical field and also improved as a person.

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I couldn't wait to make that happen. Through concurrent enrollment while in high school, I began taking multiple classes at Berkeley City College (BCC) so that when I got into college, I would only have to worry about my major requirements. I wanted to use my free time wisely. I received a lot of help from numerous people, but the person who helped me the most was Skyler Barton. He has supported my dream since he was my counselor in high school. He is now a counselor at BCC and one of the reasons why I chose to start at BCC and plan to transfer to San Francisco State and major in communicative disorders.

My family plays a really big role in my life. They are my biggest supporters—especially my mother. But my biggest role model is Fatimah. She inspires me every day and reminds me that nothing is impossible. If she is able to live in this world with all her struggles, which mine do not compare to, then I can overcome obstacles too. —Eman Aledlah

This is an excerpt of the speech Eman gave at the 2017 Promise Scholarship award ceremony. It has been edited for length.

Bayer USA Foundation Invests \$250,000 in The Berkeley Promise

Funds will be used to support the community college scholarship program launched in December 2017

Bayer USA Foundation has given a 2-year grant to the Berkeley Community Fund (BCF) to support The Berkeley Promise, a college access and matriculation initiative designed to help recent Berkeley public school graduates — particularly those who are first-generation-to-college, from lower-income families, or from underrepresented groups — earn a post-secondary degree, starting at Berkeley City College (BCC). BCF joined the initiative in 2016, when then Mayor Tom Bates proposed a collaborative partnership with the City, Berkeley Unified School District, and BCC.

Bayer's grant will support scholarships, mentoring, and STEM career exploration for the program's participants.

BCF added Berkeley Promise Scholarships to its program mix in 2017, a logical step toward helping more Berkeley youth begin and complete a college education. Our research revealed about 30% of all Berkeley High School seniors and 48% of seniors who are first-generation-to-college and from low-income families start at



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Promise Scholar Spotlight

Meet Eman Aledlah, a member of the inaugural class of Berkeley Promise Scholars in 2017. Eman is set to transfer from BCC to San Francisco State in Fall 2019.



that might not have happened were it not for speech therapy, I was inspired. At that moment I realized I wanted to change lives and make people happy.

I first knew I wanted to be a speech therapist during my junior year of high school. I was taking classes through the Berkeley Independent Studies Program and had some free time to fill, so I volunteered at the Center for Early Intervention in Deafness (CEID). CEID provides early educational services to children under five who have some degree of hearing loss or deafness. My younger sister, Fatimah, who is hard of hearing and has a speech delay, was a student there. I saw how all the children and their families benefited from the therapy they received, just like my family. When I heard Fatimah make her first sound, something

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Did you know?

140 apply

Each year, about 140 Berkeley High seniors meet the GPA, income, and other criteria to apply for a Berkeley Community Fund High Hopes or Promise Scholarship.

50 granted

In 2018, BCF was able to grant 25 High Hopes Scholarships (\$16K paid over 4 years) and 25 Promise Scholarships (\$1.5K, paid over 2 years) thanks to the generosity of our community.

90% persist & graduate

Our High Hopes scholars have a 90% graduation and persistence rate.

Why your support matters

A college degree is a step toward narrowing the inequalities of income, wealth, health, and opportunity in Berkeley.

We are a community of people working together to bridge the opportunity divide for Berkeley youth from lower-income families. We provide scholarships, connections and other support instrumental to success in college and beyond.

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Fatima@berkfund.org

Colleen Sparks
Colleen@berkfund.org

2111 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Berkeley, CA 94704
(510) 542-2126

Perseverance Pays Off

High Hopes alumna Aida Marin, BS Biochemistry, Cal Poly 2018, shares her story and her plans to become a chemistry teacher.

Eight years ago, I set off for San Luis Obispo to pursue a degree in biochemistry at Cal Poly. I had prepared for college through Berkeley High's IB program, was a Y-Scholar, and received a High Hopes Scholarship from the Berkeley Community Fund. I had no idea I was entering one of the most challenging periods of my life.

Cal Poly is the least diverse college in the CSU system. I didn't even consider this when applying to schools. I had the notion that all of California was just like Berkeley! As a first-generation, low-income, minority student, it was really hard to feel comfortable in the racial, financial, and social climate at Cal Poly. I felt like I didn't belong. As the years went on, I struggled with anxiety and depression, which prevented me from excelling in my schoolwork. I clearly needed help, but felt I could not talk to my parents about it since they had no idea what I was going through. I took a leave of absence from school and moved back home with my family. It was the right decision, but the lowest point in my life.

Throughout this time, BCF's Lynn Walker consistently reached out to me. I had never met Lynn and did not feel comfortable disclosing my struggles to a stranger. At home, my parents pressured me to seek help, so I finally found the courage to return Lynn's call. I was surprised to discover she was not calling to shame me for not submitting my updates to BCF for the past couple of semesters. She was genuinely concerned about my well-being. Lynn was not afraid to admit

that she, too, experienced moments of failure during college and she did not try to devalue my experiences. She gave me what my parents could not understand — validation for the way I was feeling at Cal Poly. Having Lynn there for me



Aida Marin and her parents at graduation

that day allowed me to cope with my illness and prompted me to plan my return to school.

I found a paid internship at an asbestos and lead testing laboratory in Berkeley. They later hired me as a full-time analyst

and general lab technician. I realized what I had learned so far at college was very useful to this work and that a degree from Cal Poly would be valuable. I grew eager to return and complete my last year of school.

Lynn also helped me reconnect with Bob and Susan, the couple who funded my scholarship. They were sincerely interested in my journey through Cal Poly, but I fell out of contact with them when my grades began to drop.

I was readmitted to Cal Poly in 2016 and graduated with a BS in biochemistry in June 2018. Based on work with Cal Poly's Career Center and School of Education, my career goal is to be a chemistry teacher. With valuable advice from my BCF mentor, Diana Burden, I am applying to dual credential and Master's in Education programs throughout the Bay Area. I am so thankful to Lynn, Bob and Susan, Diana, and the BCF program for helping me throughout my successes and failures in college.

— Aida Marin

Re:Think Pathways to Success

"Do not judge me by my success. Judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

— Nelson Mandela

Life circumstances can derail plans and cause us to defer our aspirations. That was true for me. I left home when I was 16 years old, lived on the street for ten weeks while waiting to get into a runaway shelter, struggled financially for many years thereafter, came out of the closet, and started community college four times before I stuck with it. Leaving home at 16 and my subsequent struggles would have led to the prediction that I would not be successful in life. That prediction would have been wrong.

When people meet me, they naturally assume I went directly from high school to a four-year college. That assumption is based upon my current situation. I am a UC Berkeley graduate (with honors) and have a master's degree. I'm currently the CEO of a \$36M non-profit social enterprise with 600 employees. I have financial investments and own property. While life is good, the rough road I travelled to get here is not evident.

The option of community college was critical to achieving my educational ambitions. Without that access point to college, I may have never obtained a degree. Supporting first-generation college students who are determined to persevere in their educational aspirations is the reason I joined the BCF Board.

While it is assumed there is a "right" path to academic achievement and a successful future, there are, in fact, many different pathways one can take. It's one

of the many reasons I'm so proud of BCF for initiating the Promise Scholarship. It acknowledges not everyone can or should follow a direct path from high school to a four-year college.

Community college has often been viewed as a lesser path. I couldn't disagree more. Community college can be a great college option. It allows for greater scheduling flexibility, is far less expensive than other college options, and smaller class sizes allow students direct access to professors. If for some reason life circumstances derail plans to transfer to a four-year university, it is possible to earn an AA degree or other certifications that can launch a career, something four-year

universities don't offer. For many students, community college may be the only pathway to a bachelor's degree. By supporting a broader range of first-generation college students, you, together with BCF are helping to further social equity for those whose life circumstances require additional flexibility in reaching their educational goals and aspirations.

— William Rogers
William is President and CEO of Goodwill of San Francisco | San Mateo | Marin and a BCF board member.



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Bayer Invests \$250,000 in Promise Program —continued from page 1

community colleges. The low tuition and open-access provide an accessible pathway for students who cannot afford to attend a university for all four years, don't meet the more selective admissions criteria of a university, or need to stay close to home due to family responsibilities.

BCF's program builds on lessons learned during the first ten years of our High Hopes Scholarship Program for students attending 4-year colleges and universities. Berkeley Promise scholars receive \$1,500 while they are at BCC, paid over three semesters. They also are placed in a First Year Experience learning community, par-

ticipate in transition-to-college workshops, and receive mentoring, guidance, and transfer support. Evidence from Promise programs across the U.S. shows that support systems like this help community college students succeed.

BCF welcomed 25 new students in an inspiring ceremony on December 7 at BCC. We now support 45 Promise scholars. Those who succeed in earning a degree at BCC and transferring to a 4-year college to pursue a bachelors degree will be eligible to apply for an additional \$8,000 scholarship and become part of BCF's High Hopes Scholarship Program.