

Former Foster Youth Find a Family at UC San Diego



More than two dozen undergraduates who are former foster youth are provided with resources and encouragement through the UC San Diego Guardian Scholars Program. Photos by Erika Johnson/University Communications

When former foster youth join the UC San Diego community as undergraduates, they are immediately embraced by a close-knit extended family of caring staff members who affirm the students' potential and assure comprehensive support.

John Burton Foundation Throws Celebration for Former Foster Youth in San Diego

On Dec. 2, UC San Diego and the John Burton Foundation held a special celebration to honor the academic achievements of former foster youth in

A network of resources is made available to them—from helping obtain basic school supplies to advice on navigating the path to a career or graduate school—through the Guardian Scholars Program.

“Being a part of the Guardian Scholars Program has been really helpful—having staff available to answer questions, extra financial support to subsidize costs and workshops where I can connect with other former foster youth on campus,” said Caprecia Camper, a senior at Marshall College.

Less than 3 percent of foster youth are able to enroll in higher education, and even fewer graduate. Working to improve retention, the Guardian Scholars Program helps to orient students to university life, encourages involvement in campus activities and serves as a central reference point. Coordinated by the UC San Diego Financial Aid Office, a dedicated team of staff members serve as a safety net, assisting with overcoming any obstacles that may arise—whether financial, academic or emotional. In addition, quarterly workshops and a graduation celebration are held to build a sense of belonging and offer practical life skills in time management, relationships, wellness, resume writing and more.

“We make ourselves available around the clock for our former foster youth,” said Ann Klein, director of UC San Diego’s Financial Aid Office. “We serve as counselors, mentors, confidants and cheerleaders to their success, striving to make a positive impact one student at a time.”

San Diego County. Students from UC San Diego and other regional colleges were invited to a luncheon at the Faculty Club, where former California Senate President Pro Tem John Burton shared gifts with the students, lauded their academic achievements and provided a boxed meal for them to take home. The event also served as an 81st birthday celebration for Burton, who was presented with a birthday cake and thanks for his continued support of former foster youth through the John Burton Foundation.



John Burton (left), California Senate President Pro Tem, awarded each with a gift in honor of their academic achievements.

Efforts to provide former foster youth with the resources they need to thrive are multiplied through partnerships with community organizations that support the needs of homeless, foster and other at-risk youth. At the beginning of each fall quarter, laptops, printers, dorm essentials and other fundamentals are supplied through the College Bound program, headed by Just in Time for Foster Youth, a non-profit organization in San Diego. Just in Time staff and mentors mobilize the community to help foster youth adjust to independent lives regardless of whether they are living on or off campus.

"Providing an all-around support system for each person leaving foster care is crucial in helping them succeed in their educational endeavors," said Meredith Pranievicz, Just in Time’s inaugural program coordinator. “As an alumna of both the foster care system and UC San Diego, I know that the first year of college is the

most important,” she said. “Partnering together allows us to work side-by-side to help each foster youth attending UC San Diego with the essential tools and resources to help them along the path to success.”

Although all UC San Diego undergraduates who self-identify as former foster youth are considered Guardian Scholars, each must apply to be considered for a Guardian Scholarship.

Each year, several \$5,000 awards are provided by [Promises 2 Kids](#), a local non-profit that collaborates closely with UC San Diego. The funds go directly to the student on a monthly basis to help provide for their expenses while in college. Additionally, technology packages have been granted for the past five years by Sony Electronics, Inc., to ensure students have the tools necessary to succeed in a digitally driven learning environment.

One of this year’s Sony Award recipients, Luis Vargas grew up in Los Angeles in an area plagued by gang violence. When he was 5 years old, Vargas and his two sisters were taken from their home and placed into foster care. Now a junior at UC San Diego studying physiology and neurosciences, Vargas has a desire to help others and currently serves as an Academic Transition Counselor for incoming freshmen.

“The Guardian Scholars Program has given me the support and tools that I so desperately needed. I have been introduced to individuals who provide me with the support I need to graduate and go further in life,” said Vargas. “After receiving the Sony award, I was approached by a career services counselor who said she would love to help me with my career and graduate school goals. It shocked me because I never thought anyone would be so eager to help me in my future.”



The Guardian Scholars Program holds quarterly workshops on life counseling, problem-solving and more as well as opportunities for former foster youth to form connections campus.

To learn more about how you can support the academic goals of UC San Diego undergraduate students who are former foster youth, visit the Guardian Scholarship [website](#). To discover more about the UC San Diego Guardian Scholars Program, visit their [website](#).

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