



ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

2019 ANNUAL REVIEW



LETTER FROM THE

CHAIRWOMAN

Dear AEF Friends & Supporters,

In 2019 we have continued our dedication to elevate the immigrant community of New York City through higher education. To date, we have helped 63 students representing 31 different countries, and have awarded just under \$475,000 in college scholarships. In many ways this was a year of transition and while we saw a small dip (\$61,500 vs \$63,000 in 2018) in our fundraising, we are sure the time spent conducting our strategic planning will bear fruitful results.

Many of our scholars continue to face uncertainty as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was terminated on September 5, 2017, and the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in November 2019 that will determine the fate of the program. DACA allowed young people who came to the U.S through no choice of their own, the ability to work legally in the country and protected them from deportation. Regardless of the outcome, we remain committed to ensuring the success and safety of our scholars.

Our proudest achievement continues to be our scholars, who embody the diversity and perseverance of our immigrant community. Our 2019 AEF Scholars achieved an average GPA of 3.2 and were awarded a total of \$61,500 with an average award of \$6,833. They are citizens and non-citizens, all New York City high school graduates, attending colleges and universities across the country, and all of them are on their way to achieving their American dream.

Despite the challenging times immigrants across the nation are facing, AEF remains steadfast in our mission to enable and encourage higher education and professional achievement for the immigrant community. Regardless of ethnicity, national origin or immigration status, we envision every exceptional student in New York City as having the same educational and professional opportunities.

Thanks to your support, in 2019 we awarded \$61,500 (92% of funds raised) in college scholarships to nine deserving immigrant students who represented countries like Bangladesh, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Nigeria, Senegal, and Russia. It was quite an accomplishment for these scholars to be selected as we received over 700 applications, a 36% increase from 2018. Our Sixth Annual Gala was also a huge success with another sold-out evening.

As I reflect on our seventh year, I am inspired by all of your support and generosity. Our organization would not be what it is without you. In particular, I want to recognize a few individuals who dedicated countless hours and resources to making 2019 a success: Adrienne Amin, Snehal Amin, Arthur Li, and our entire Gala Committee. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank you for your support in helping us to “Elevate our Community through Higher Education.”

Warmest Regards,

Julissa Arce
AEF Chairwoman of the Board



AEF BY THE NUMBERS



3.2

Average GPA of 2019 scholars



2,700+

Applications opened online



\$61,500

Scholarships awarded in 2019



9

2019 AEF Scholars



\$474,500

Scholarship awards raised in the last five years



63

AEF Scholars selected in the last seven years



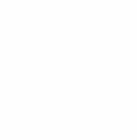
41

Colleges attended by AEF Scholars



31

Countries represented by AEF Scholars



\$48,900

Average household income of 2019 AEF applicants



74 countries
represented by
2019 AEF
applicants



ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

IN OUR SEVENTH YEAR

We **selected nine scholars**, who embody the diverse immigrant community in New York City and represent Nigeria, Mexico, Bangladesh, Haiti, Senegal, Guyana, Suriname, and Russia.

We **awarded a total of \$61,500** in scholarship funds.

We **utilized a grant from Immigrants Rising** to create a strategic vision and fundraising plan in order to take AEF to the next level.

OUR MISSION

TO ENABLE AND ENCOURAGE HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

1. **We make a time and capital intensive commitment to our scholars.** Our awards are between \$2,500 and \$20,000, and we enroll all Ascend Educational Fund Scholars in an intensive academic and professional Mentorship Program.
2. **We serve all immigrant students regardless of national origin, ethnicity and immigration status, and a significant number of our scholars each year are undocumented students.** Most college scholarships limit their awards on the basis of ethnicity and immigration status. We target and serve all immigrants.

AEF SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

JUNJUN



JunJun Zhang is a 2016 AEF Scholar and a third-year student at Northeastern University. She is pursuing a combined major in Math and Finance and is a part of the school's co-op program. After her expected graduation in December 2020, she wants to work fulltime in finance.

As part of the Northeastern co-op program, students can apply to companies to work as a full-time employee for six-months. In the co-op program, a student alternates periods of academic study with six-month periods of work experience in their field(s) of interest. JunJun's most recent co-op was as a research analyst at McKinsey & Company, a leading global management consulting firm. As a research analyst, she researched and created custom case studies that analyzed the performance of different M&A strategies to provide synergy estimation for McKinsey clients during their M&A processes.

Her most significant learning experience during the co-op was in taking ownership of a research project. She developed a database of approximately 500 M&A deals with their specific metrics of synergies. Using the database, she was able to obtain additional insights on the nature of synergy announcement beyond just an overall dollar number. As a part of the research project she learned how to develop a long-term plan and outline for a multi-phase project that involved people from different departments, and she learned how to collaborate effectively with team members including some of the most senior members of her department. This gave her the confidence to come back to school and tackle all her work with a new, advanced mindset.

On campus, JunJun has embraced her Chinese heritage by joining the Eon Dance Troupe where she learns Chinese traditional dance. She also joined the NU Finance & Investment club to engage with other students that have similar career goals.

"As I transformed myself from an ESL speaker to a thriving first-generation college student, I gained enormous self-confidence and sense of belonging. Now, I am excited for my future and am eager to share what I have learned."

AEF GRADUATING SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

CHRISTIAN



I first heard about AEF through my college guidance counselor. I explained to her my legal status and that all the scholarships I started could not be finished since they required one form or another of legal status. She emailed me my first introduction to AEF. She emailed me and said, “You deserve the chance to apply to at least one scholarship like everyone else.”

Post-graduation, I was able to land a job at Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BAML) by leveraging the AEF network. At BAML I work with the Business Controls group under the Chief Operating Officer. Every day, I walk inside the Bank of America Tower at Bryant Park with a huge smile on my face.

I consider all of the AEF board to be my mentors, especially Diana Melencio. She has been an invaluable resource to me by helping me ensure the maximum utilization of my resources and connections. It could be that we share similar experiences, but she’s showed me how to not pigeonhole myself and guided me to the right path; even if it is with some tough love at times. Whether I meet up with her for a few minutes or a few hours, with all the advice and experiences she shares with me, I always leave smiling knowing I’m ready to tackle whatever life has in store for me next.

I also volunteer at school events at my alma mater speaking to current students. I hope to show these students that I was only able to move closer to my dreams with the help of others, and when their time comes, to be that same support for the next wave of students.

Everyone at AEF is so proud of everything that Christian and JunJun have accomplished so far and we are excited to see what the future holds for them.

AEF SCHOLAR SELECTION PROCESS



AEF scholars were selected based on qualities traditionally valued and demonstrated by the immigrant community: hard work, resourcefulness, perseverance in the face of adversity, academic achievement, leadership, and commitment to one's community. All candidates submitted an application including three required essays: (1) Describe how your experience as an immigrant or a child of immigrants has affected your life and how it will contribute to your future success, (2) Tells us how you have contributed to your community and how you plan to contribute to your community in the future, and (3) What are you most proud of?

Over 2,700 applications were opened online, and we received 708 completed applications, of which, 68% were from female and 32% were from male applicants. Our Selection Committee selected the top 26 candidates to interview in person (4% of applicants). Interviews were conducted in early June, and all finalists completed two in-person interviews. While all were deserving of an AEF Scholarship, we selected nine scholars representing Nigeria, Mexico, Bangladesh, Haiti, Senegal, Guyana, Suriname, and Russia.

Our applicants represented all five boroughs of New York City: 11% Manhattan, 31% Queens, 31% Brooklyn, 21% Bronx, and 6% Staten Island.



MEET OUR 2019 AEF SCHOLARS



This scholar from **Mexico** cannot be defined by a simple description. Hailing from Chinese parents and fluent in English, Spanish, and Chinese, she is the bridge between multiple immigrant groups in her high school and is a vocal champion of inclusiveness and diversity. With her gregarious and energetic nature, one would never guess that she immigrated to the US only five years ago. In that time, this scholar has left her mark on her community by volunteering at the Neuroscience Lab at Hunter College, by improving the life of her peers while on student government, and leading as a member of her school's Gay-Straight Alliance. On a recent visit to Washington D.C. for a conference on current political and social issues, she met several House of Representatives members. This Rita Amin Educational Scholar attends **Georgetown University** and plans to major in Business.

This scholar from **Bangladesh** came to the US with his family seven years ago to seek asylum and pursue a better life. Since his arrival, he has found countless ways to uplift others through his personal talents and community service. He has used his photography to raise awareness and engineering skills to take action. As an avid photographer, he

uses his lens to capture members of his community and empower them by taking pictures that help to break stereotypes. After experiencing severe back pain from constantly carrying his camera equipment, this scholar has used his engineering skills to create a prototype backpack with pressure controlled straps to help students better handle their daily load. Whether he decides to pursue the arts, engineering or both, this scholar will find his path at **New York University**.

A young woman from **Nigeria** who immigrated just two years ago with an infectious enthusiasm, this scholar demonstrates a strong commitment to engage her community and advocate for change. In order to improve her English-speaking and communication skills, she stepped out of her comfort zone and joined the Debate team, which taught her courage, to never underestimate yourself, or to over think situations. As a member of her school's Climate Club, she traveled to the Catskills with young, positive-minded people to discuss ways to slow down the impact of climate change, and she educates her peers at school on recycling and other solutions. She does not like to procrastinate and is always early to start her

assignments, even with a two hour daily commute to her high school. This Isela Carlos Achievement Scholar attends the **Borough of Manhattan Community College** and plans to become a nurse.

Born in **Senegal** and raised through experiences in Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso, this scholar made his biggest and most difficult transition to America just two years ago. With only the support of an older brother, he has excelled both in and out of school. This scholar's dedication to serving others led him to an internship with Columbia University, enabling him to support his community by translating English to French and Mooré. He also earned entry into the prestigious Cooper Union STEM to STEAM Summer program and the Design Initiative for Community Empowerment Program at Pratt Institute. Through these experiences, he fell in love with engineering and architecture and attends **Guttman Community College** and plans to transfer to a top architecture program at a 4-year college.

This scholar, whose parents hail from **Guyana and Suriname**, has clear designs on effecting systemic change at a national and international level for immigration reform. When she is not planning her path towards law, you can find this scholar displaying her talents in both the arts and sciences. In 2018 she placed 2nd in NYC and 8th in NY State in the Science Olympiad. She is equally at home in the theater, where she served as the overall director of a 200-member, 100% student-run production of the musical S!NG. Her role ranged from writing the entire script to casting and overseeing the success of the production, which she handled with aplomb. Her leadership and energy will serve this Dr. Sampat & Dr. Udaya Shivangi Scholar at **Harvard University** where she plans to major in Government.

This scholar who immigrated from **Mexico** at the age of five has never let his immigration status define him. He was known around his school as the college process guru and openly shares any resources and tips with his classmates. He wasn't allowed to compete with his crew team as he did not know how to swim- a fear he'd had for many years. He faced it head on and competed in his first meet this year. While he is a leader in student council and the Gay-Straight Alliance, he also works two jobs as a busboy and maintenance worker. His hard work and dedication have not gone unnoticed by his teachers and peers. As a young man from the Bronx with DACA, he wants to inspire others to pursue their dreams. This Dos

Rayas Perseverance Scholar attends **Middlebury College** where he plans to major in Engineering.

This scholar whose mother fled the **former USSR** due to religious persecution possesses a desire to elevate the community around him and a dedication to better the academic pursuits of his peers. Quick to notice the inequities in the SHSAT testing process in New York City, this scholar founded a tutoring program to teach test-taking skills to low-income minority and immigrant students in his Coney Island neighborhood. A nationally ranked ballroom dancer, he has competed for over 12 years and recently finished 2nd in the nation in his respective dance category. When not tutoring his peers or helping his mother at home with his younger brother, this scholar has interned at Mount Sinai where he discovered his passion to improve aid and healthcare for underrepresented individuals. This Ping Chu Benevolence Scholar plans on studying Public Health and Biology at **Dartmouth College**.

A young woman whose parents emigrated from **Mexico** and who is passionate about music and singing, this scholar persevered through English as a Second Language classes and a learning disability that resulted in self-contained classes with 15 students per class. Through music, she has been able to open up, express herself in writing, and has gained confidence with higher self-esteem and an audition for America's Got Talent, which has also supported her transition into general education classes with her peers. She volunteers at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx as part of a Christmas program for cancer patients, and works as a retail associate at T.J. Maxx. This Arthur Li Chasing Excellence Scholar plans to inspire other children by becoming a music teacher and attends **Guttman Community College**.

This young man from **Haiti** is as sharp and focused on his future as he is caring about those around him. He moved to New York two years ago without his only parental support in order to fulfill his academic potential. In Haiti, he was elected class president in 9th grade and took it upon himself to organize student-led study groups before every midterm to help his classmates bring up their grades. He assisted students by tutoring peers in four subjects as they prepared for the rigorous Regents exams. When he is not focusing on others, this scholar gained entry into the prestigious Rockefeller University Summer Neuroscience Program where he fell in love with neuroscience, which he plans to pursue at **St. Francis College**.

AEF SCHOLAR EVENTS



SEVENTH ANNUAL PICNIC

We hosted our seventh annual Mentorship Picnic on Saturday, June 29 at Bryant Park. 2019 Scholars met their mentors for the first time, and networked with both the scholars and mentors from our prior four years, in addition to select AEF volunteers. Approximately 35 people were in attendance. The highlight of the afternoon was a discussion with the 2015 - 2018 Scholars on best advice, lessons learned, resources available, and other personal insights on the transition to college. Every year, this event is open to all current and former scholars and mentors. If you would like to attend next year, please reach out to Daniel Kokini at Mentorship@ascendfundny.org.

AEF SCHOLAR EVENTS



AEF + NYSYLC CAREER READINESS WORKSHOP

AEF hosted our annual career readiness workshop on Saturday, September 21 in partnership with the New York State Youth Leadership Council (NYSYLC) at their office in lower Manhattan. NYSYLC's mission is to empower immigrant youth through leadership development, grassroots organizing, educational advancement, and self-expression. Close to twenty students from AEF and NYSYLC joined the workshop with the support of ten AEF volunteers throughout the day.

The workshop covered resume writing, LinkedIn and online presence, entrepreneurship and resources for undocumented students via webinar led by Immigrants Rising, industry round tables hosted by AEF volunteers, and mock interviews. The students learned an incredible amount from the volunteers and from each other, and we were equally inspired by the students' engagement and insights. We were thrilled to partner with NYSYLC, and thank each of the volunteers for their time.



AEF FUNDRAISERS

AEF'S SIXTH ANNUAL GALA

We hosted our sixth annual gala, a masquerade ball, on Saturday, October 26 at WeWork's Bryant Park Ballroom. A sold-out crowd was in attendance, and AEF raised over \$8,000 from the silent auction alone.

Two of our AEF scholars, Monserrat and Angela, shared their personal stories of achievement, perseverance, and dedication to their communities. Angela recently graduated from the City University of New York and is now attending medical school via the prestigious Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program. Monserrat attends the University of Pennsylvania.

Guests were entertained by a sizzling tango performance from Alonzo & Agostina Tango NY, a comedy set by New York Times columnist and comedienne Maeve Higgins, and a quick salsa dance lesson. DJ Tommy T once again closed out the evening with a crowded dance floor.

We would like to send a special thank you to our gala sponsors, Marchburn Design, Tito's Vodka, and pastry chef Natasha Guerrero of NatAnotherBaker, in addition to our 14 Gala Planning Committee members.



AEF FUNDRAISERS

DREAMER T-SHIRT CAMPAIGN

AEF partnered with Grammy-Award winning Latin Artist Alejandro Sanz, Immigrants Rising, and Dream Big Nevada on a t-shirt campaign to raise funds for all three organizations. As part of the campaign, Alejandro Sanz invited and met dreamers at all his concerts, including AEF Scholars for his sold-out New York concert. The “DREAMER” t-shirt was worn by the likes of Ricky Martin, Camila Cabello, JBalvin, Zoe Saldana, and Lionel Messi.

FALL CAMPAIGN WITH INDIEGOGO

We hosted a spring social on Thursday, April 11 to launch our fundraising drive with GoFundMe. Approximately 40 volunteers and supporters joined for the evening, and ultimately we raised \$9,675 of additional funds via the campaign.



AEF ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Council for AEF consists of thoughtful leaders who are instrumental in ensuring the longevity of our organization by providing advice and guidance to the Board of Directors.

ADRIENNE & SNEHAL AMIN

AEF SUPPORTER CIRCLE



The AEF Supporter Circle are recognized as supporters who contribute at least \$5,000 to our scholarship funds.

CHIRAG AMIN
AMIN FAMILY

CELESTE EVERETT CASTANEDA & EDISON CASTANEDA



FRIENDS OF AEF

Friends of AEF are recognized as supporters who contribute at least \$1,000 to our scholarship funds.

JULISSA ARCE
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MUZAFFAR CHISHTI
NANCY & STEVE DAETZ
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ROB STENZ



Learn more about how you can support AEF at
www.ascendfundny.org

