



ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

2018
ANNUAL
REVIEW



LETTER FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN

Dear AEF Friends & Supporters,

In 2018 AEF reached some important milestones in our six-year history; our 2014 scholars began graduating, bringing our total number of college graduates to more than a dozen! Thanks to the grant we received from Immigrants Rising, the board of directors embarked in our first strategic plan to set out our medium and long-term goals for the Ascend Educational Fund. We hired our first part-time staff as an administrative contractor to implement the findings of our strategic plan. We also awarded our first special fund to existing scholars who were faced with uncertainty after the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was terminated on September 5, 2017. 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.

Our proudest achievement continues to be our Scholars, who embody the diversity and perseverance of our immigrant community. Our 2014 scholar, Jin Park became the first DACA recipient to be awarded the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship, and we could not be more proud to be a part of his journey. We awarded \$92,000, with an average award of \$9,200, to our 2018 Scholars who graduated high school with an average GPA of 3.3. 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 2018 we awarded \$92,000 (95% of funds raised) in college scholarships to ten deserving immigrant students who represented countries like Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Haiti, India, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Pakistan, and Togo. It was quite an accomplishment for these scholars to be selected as we received over 500 applications, an almost 50% increase from 2017. Our Fifth Annual Gala was also a huge success with tickets selling out weeks before the event.

As I reflect on our incredible sixth 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 2018 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

2018 AEF Scholars



Average 2018 Scholar GPA



2018 Average Household Income



Awards Raised in 2018



Applications Opened All-Time



Awards Raised Past 6 Years



Colleges Attended by AEF Scholars



Total AEF Scholars



Countries Represented by AEF Scholars





ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

IN OUR SIXTH YEAR

We **selected ten scholars**, who embody the diverse immigrant community in New York City and represent Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Haiti, India, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Pakistan, and Togo.

We **awarded a total of \$92,000** in 2018. We also awarded \$1,125 of additional funds to two current scholars via Indiegogo following the termination of DACA in September 2017.

We **received a grant in 2018 from Immigrants Rising** to create a strategic plan in order to take AEF to the next level.

Our **fifth annual gala**, with 130 people in attendance, raised over \$18,000.

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 we primarily support undocumented students.** Most college scholarships limit their awards on the basis of ethnicity and immigration status. We target and serve all immigrants.

AEF GRADUATING SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

DANIEL



“The key to realizing a dream is to focus not on mere success but significance, and then, even the small steps and little victories along your path will take on greater meaning.”

-Oprah Winfrey

As a young 21 year old, it has always been clear to me what my life goal and true calling is: and that is to be a pilot.

Like any journey there are milestones and potholes, but a true successor never dwells on the negative but harps on the positives. The milestones I have attained on my path thus far are significant in helping to shape me in the man I am becoming. Firstly, after months of training and tedious preparations I received my private pilot license in March 2018 (first of the three major licenses to become an airline pilot). Secondly, in a few months I will graduate college with a Bachelor's degree in Aviation Administration, which too will make me one step closer to achieving my ultimate goal. Finally, I am also proud to say that I have been blessed with a few internship opportunities from which I gained great experience and learned life long lessons.

On a journey like mine, when I look back on where I was and where I am today, there is a lot of which to be proud; however, I am most proud of my personal growth. Personal growth for me covers a wide arena and is inclusive of academic success (as I have managed to maintain a good GPA), professionalism, and improved networking and communication skills. I always knew the destination, but never quite understood how I would reach it. Today I am proud that regardless of my circumstances, I have learned to appreciate my challenges and embrace my situation.

For AEF I am eternally grateful, as it has helped me significantly in achieving my goals so far. Not only did AEF help financially in making my dreams of attending and completing college possible, but the organization has played an imperative role in my professional and mental development. My mentors have been remarkable on this journey with me from the very beginning and have become more than just mentors, but family.

AEF GRADUATING SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

WILMARY



Wilmary wants to implement best practices from international foster care systems in order to reform or create an alternative system to the current NYC foster care system.

Wilmary is a 2014 AEF Scholar who graduated this year from Bard College with a degree in Psychology. She was awarded the prestigious Thomas J. Watson fellowship, which provides for a year of travel and exploration outside the United States. The fellowship offers college graduates of unusual promise a year of independent, purposeful exploration and travel to enhance their capacity for resourcefulness, imagination, openness, and leadership and to foster their humane and effective participation in the world community.

Over the course of the fellowship, Wilmary will travel to India, Uganda, Costa Rica, and the Philippines where she will engage with children, families, and communities in foster care systems. Inspired by her own experience in the New York City foster care system, Wilmary wants to gain insights into how these international foster care systems and the New York City foster care system can learn from each other.

Wilmary has already spent time in India and is currently working in Uganda. Foster care is a rather new concept in these places. During her time in Uganda, she has been giving presentations to motivate families to foster - often using her own experience in the foster care system as inspiration. In India, Wilmary found the burgeoning middle class willing and able to take on foster children on a purely voluntary basis. She found that, compared to the U.S., the voluntary foster care system in India creates a more supportive environment for the children. Wilmary is excited and optimistic about the future of the Indian foster care system.

When Wilmary returns from her fellowship, she would like to continue doing work similar to what she is doing in Uganda. Her current goal is to work as an adoption recruiter to find families for the many foster kids waiting to be adopted by a loving family. Her long-term goal is to pursue a Masters in Public Policy so that she can continue to work with and effect greater change in foster care systems.

Everyone at AEF is so proud of everything Wilmary and Daniel have accomplished so far and seek to accomplish. They embody everything we hope for in an AEF Scholar.

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) Tell 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?

Almost 2,500 applications were opened online, and we received 519 completed applications, of which, 67% were from females and 33% were from males. Our Selection Committee selected the top 19 candidates to interview in person (4% of applicants). Interviews were conducted in mid June, and all finalists completed one in-person interview. While all were deserving of an AEF Scholarship, we selected ten scholars representing Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Haiti, India, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Pakistan, and Togo.

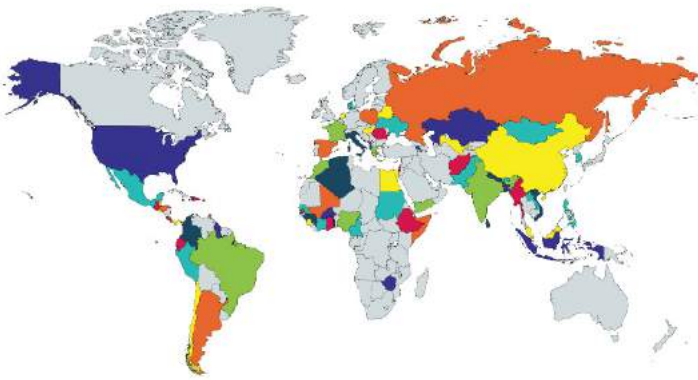
Our applicants represented all five boroughs of New York City: 12% Manhattan, 35% Queens, 24% Brooklyn, 25% Bronx, and 4% Staten Island.



AEF SCHOLAR SELECTION DATA

Regardless of ethnicity, national origin, or immigration status, we envision every exceptional student having the same educational and professional opportunities.

APPLICATIONS BY NATION OF ORIGIN



APPLICATIONS BY BOROUGH



Manhattan (12%) Queens (35%) Brooklyn (24%)
Bronx (25%) Staten Island (4%)

FINALIST INTERVIEWS

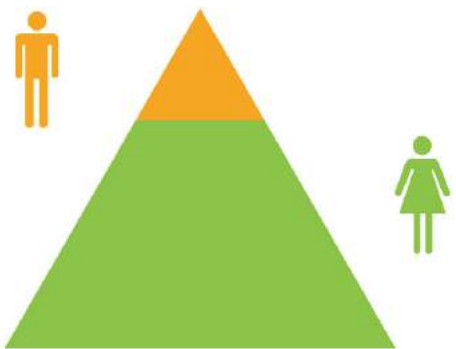


Finalists (3.66%) Applicants (96.34%)

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$48,331

APPLICANT GENDER RATIO



Females (67.05%) Males (32.95%)

MEET OUR 2018 AEF SCHOLARS



This **Colombia-Mexican-American** young man is graduating with an Advanced Regents Honors diploma. As lead performer in the Honor Guard of Junior R.O.T.C., he served as a mentor to other students in the program and distributed care packages to active duty soldiers. In his own words, he accomplishes everything in the hopes of changing the world, after seeing his parents' struggle to ensure his access to education. As secretary of Pi Club and his role as programmer developing mobile applications, he has a passion for green technology and quantum computing to develop smart cities. He plans on studying Computer Engineering at **Carnegie Mellon University**.

This scholar from the **Dominican Republic** has a love for math and has spent considerable time researching NYC public school funding issues and advocating for improved and equitable resources across NYC public schools. He was a member of his high school's moot court, was an assistant coach on the debate

team, and he is graduating with a perfect GPA. Per his teacher's "his influence has lead us to frequently refer to our exceptional young men as "the Wyatt's", who are collectively a group of students we must keep looking out for to make sure we are providing the best possible educational experience for". In the fall, he will attend the **University of Pennsylvania** where he will major in mathematical economics.

Three years ago, this scholar came to the U.S. from **Ethiopia** to chase his dream of becoming a doctor. While in Africa, he saw firsthand the effects that commonplace illnesses such as the flu still leave on those less fortunate and as a result he is committed to helping end such suffering. As a student in NYC, he has conducted research at Lehman College, interned with the Bloomberg Arts & Culture program and worked at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Attending **Hunter College** in the fall as a Pre-Med, we cannot wait to see what is next for this highly engaging and motivated scholar.

A young man from **Gambia** with an unparalleled work ethic, he supports himself through two part-time jobs while also completing his high school coursework and preparing for college. Only in the U.S. for the past 3 years, this scholar is the true definition of hard-work as he splits time working as a security guard and a customer representative at a major bank yet still finding time to play soccer and tutor students at his high school. Pursuing a degree in Biology, this scholar will spend a year at **Jefferson Community College** before transferring to **Cornell University** as he strives to become a doctor.

After the devastating 7.1 magnitude earthquake in **Haiti** this young woman's family was forced to live in a tent and later to immigrate to the U.S. As a survivor of the earthquake, she believes in living her wildest dreams while aiming for success without waiting for tomorrow. As she settled into a new life in New York, she became a youth leader at a non-profit focused on literacy and helping new Haitian immigrant students enroll in high school. A participant in the Sadie Nash Summer Institute, she developed her leadership skills and is a member of the track & field team. She plans to study biomedical engineering at **La Guardia Community College**.

A young woman from **India** who immigrated to the US at the age of 12-years-old and due to her English accent and cultural differences she faced bullying in school, but she did not let it stop her from becoming a fierce woman. Seeing the lack of female representation in her advanced math courses, she founded a math club at her school to encourage more participation by women in Calculus classes. She aspires to be a leader in the STEAM industries, where she hopes to change the male-dominated tech industry. She will be attending **New York University** in the fall.

Get this young man from the **Ivory Coast** talking about his Tribeca Film Festival Grand Prize winning video and his creative ideas for new movies, and you will find his love for the process infectious. He immigrated to the U.S. three years ago

and despite facing many challenges, including homelessness, this young man has excelled academically. He finds time to tutor other students in math and history, plays midfield on his school's soccer team and works 20 hours per week to support himself. In the fall, he will attend **Fairfield University** where he will major in political science and film production.

A fierce young woman, who emigrated from **Mexico** at a young age, she was denied participation in various after-school programs due to her immigration status, but "nevertheless, she persisted," as she wrote in her essay. Despite being in challenging circumstances herself, she has a passion for helping others and has raised funds for earthquake victims in Mexico, and Hurricane Maria survivors in Puerto Rico. This future marketing executive will be attending the **University of Pennsylvania** this fall.

Labeled a "special case," due a childhood hearing impairment, this fearless young man was forced to teach himself basic literary principles and this experienced fueled his passion to advocate for education equality in the New York high school system. A passionate advocate of social justice, he has stood up against discriminatory rhetoric and has led rallies to fight injustices in his community. He emigrated from **Pakistan** at a young age and he will be attending **University of Rochester** in the fall majoring in Political Science.

An inspiring young woman who came to the U.S. a few years ago from **Togo** and despite facing many challenges with her immigration status and living without her parents, she has flourished in her school community. She is an active volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club of Harlem and says helping children helps her forget her own struggles. She has conducted research at Columbia University on preterm births and will pursue the beginnings of her Nursing degree at **Bronx Community College**.

AEF SCHOLAR EVENTS



SIXTH ANNUAL PICNIC

We hosted our sixth annual “Mentorship Picnic” on Saturday, July 14 at WeWork Tower 49. Our 2018 Scholars met their mentors for the first time! The picnic also offers an opportunity for all of our scholars to meet and network with other AEF scholars and mentors from our prior four years.

Approximately 40 people were in attendance. The highlight of the afternoon was a panel discussion with the 2015 - 2017 Scholars and hosted by a recently graduated 2014 Scholar on best advice, lessons learned, resources available, and other personal insights on the transition to college.





AEF FUNDRAISERS

AEF'S FIFTH ANNUAL GALA

We hosted our Fifth Annual Gala, "Yes We Can", on Saturday, March 24 at WeWork's Bryant Park Ballroom. We had 130 supporters in attendance, and we raised almost \$7,000 from our silent auction alone with net proceeds of over \$18,000 for scholarship awards.

Two of our 2017 AEF Scholars, Gerardo and Agie, shared their personal stories and paths to success driven by resilience, hard work, and perseverance. Gerardo studies at New York University and Agie at Barnard College. Three of our recently graduated scholars attended and networked with AEF supporters.

Guests enjoyed cultural bites once again from Chef Ronaldo Linares. The evening was highlighted by a belly dance performance with Brazilian, and Lebanese and Syrian influences, a salsa lesson from Baila Society, and a DJ set by Tommy T. We would like to send a special thank you to our gala sponsors, Marchburn Design, Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA), and Deep Eddy Vodka, in addition to our eight honorary Gala co-chairs and 11 Gala Planning Committee members.

FALL CAMPAIGN WITH INDIEGOGO

Following the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, we hosted an Indiegogo drive in October for our existing scholars. Many of our AEF Scholars are DACA recipients. Over the past few years they have thrived in college, worked to pay for school and have been at ease, knowing DACA protected them from deportation. In order to provide additional assistance and ease the uncertainty, we successfully awarded \$1,125 of additional funds to two current scholars via the Indiegogo 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.

ARTHUR LI
ADRIENNE & SNEHAL AMIN

AEF SUPPORTER CIRCLE



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

ADRIENNE & SNEHAL 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
CARMEN FLORES
MANNY GUERRERO
ARTHUR LI
DIANA MELENCIO



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

