

AEF

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

ELEVATING OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH HIGHER
EDUCATION



ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN

In 2020, we continued to be dedicated to the immigrant community in New York City. It was a year like no other—a global pandemic, social justice uprisings, and through it all, we remained committed to fulfilling our mission of enabling and encouraging 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.

This year, we selected 9 scholars, representing 7 different countries. Since our founding, we have awarded \$537,500 to 72 students representing 34 countries.

Many of our scholars faced uncertainty as litigation around the DACA program continued. Thanks to the amazing work of organizers and immigrant youth, the Supreme Court issued a favorable ruling in June, and our students breathed a little easier. But the battle is not over. Regardless of further action against DACA, 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 AEF Scholars 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 version of the American dream.

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Thanks to your support, we awarded \$63,000 in college scholarships to nine deserving immigrant students who represented countries like China, Egypt, Haiti, Mali, Mexico, Guatemala, and Grenada. It was quite an accomplishment for these scholars to be selected as we received over 600 applications. Our first virtual Annual Gala was a huge success with award-winning recording artist Becky G delivering the keynote fireside chat.

As I reflect on our eighth 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 2020 a success: Adrienne Amin, Snehal Amin, Arthur Li, and our entire Gala Committee. On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you.

Warmest Regards,
Julissa Arce Raya
AEF Chairwoman of the Board

2020 BY THE NUMBERS



SCHOLARSHIPS
AWARDED



NEW SCHOLARS



COUNTRIES
REPRESENTED



TOTAL SCHOLARS



COLLEGES
ATTENDED BY OUR
SCHOLARS



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.

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHT RAKCHHYA POUDEL

I am currently a senior at Emory University studying Finance, Accounting, and Quantitative Science. I was born in Nepal and moved to New York City when I was eleven. As a first-generation, low-income student, financial security was always a worry for me so I applied for as many scholarships as possible during my senior year of high school. In these past four years of college, I have received immense resources and support from my AEF mentor and network.

My mentor, Cristal, is very supportive of me. Before I started college, she put together resources that my college offered like free tutoring, mental health services, and others, so I could do well mentally and academically. She regularly checks on me and is always there when I need to speak with someone.

During my sophomore year, I realized that I wanted to go into investment banking. My resume was okay for a sophomore in college, but I didn't know how to present myself, answer behavioral questions properly, or do a networking call. I remembered Rob, one of the AEF board members, mentioning that he works at Lazard during my interview with AEF back in 2017 so I reached out to him for advice. Even though Rob was very busy, we regularly did mock interviews. He gave me tips and advice.

AEF has helped teach me, it's important to pay it forward.

Rob regularly checked on me to see how my internship was going. Fortunately, I will be joining RBC full-time after graduation and I couldn't have done this without the help of Rob and the AEF network. It feels very good to know that if I have any questions about the industry or anything, I can talk to Rob, and others at AEF and in the AEF network.

Outside of school, I run a non-profit organization called Bidya. We help sponsor the education of young girls in Nepal who have financial difficulties. I also regularly write articles in Nepalaya News, a Nepali newspaper. My articles focus on FAFSA, colleges, scholarships, and similar topics in order to help the Nepalese community with the U.S. college admission process. As AEF has helped teach me, it's important to pay it forward.

AEF 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?

Over 2,400 applications were opened online, and we received 624 completed applications, of which, 72% were from female and 28% were from male applicants. Our Selection Committee selected the top 16 candidates to interview in person (3% of applicants). Interviews were conducted in early June. While all were deserving of an AEF Scholarship, we selected nine scholars representing Haiti, Mexico, Egypt, Mali, Guatemala, Grenada, and China.

Our applicants represented all five boroughs of New York City: 8% Manhattan, 33% Queens, 27% Brooklyn, 24% Bronx, and 8% Staten Island.



MEET OUR 2020 SCHOLARS

This scholar from Grenada is passionate about helping people safeguard their data and personal information as an aspiring cybersecurity expert. Security, however, has not always been a stable feature of this scholar's journey. His family was forced to immigrate to America following Hurricane Ivan in 2004, and once resettled, he faced numerous family and personal challenges. Nevertheless, he persisted. Through determination and a positive spirit, he discovered and developed a love for coding and for playing the trombone, both of which he actively uses to give back to his community. As a musician, he plays for both his high school's concert and marching bands, and he sings in his church's choir where he also participates in the youth and homeless ministries. To grow his technical skills, he volunteers at the innovative Brooklyn STEAM Center, providing IT support to students and professionals in the Brooklyn Navy Yard complex. This Jaidan and Dilan Educational Scholar will attend John Jay College of Criminal Justice to pursue a degree in computer science.

This scholar from Guatemala is described as a quiet yet powerful leader who is an advocate for indigenous and immigrant youth communities. With Coro New York City Leadership Center, she participated in a youth leadership program and earned an internship with an NYC council member's office representing District 38 in Brooklyn.

Her dedication and outreach resulted in increased voter turnout and community advocacy. At school, she volunteers with an organization that provides a safe space for students to speak out and implement strategies to help the LGBTQ community, and another organization that devises ways to teach about immigrant rights and policies. She is also active in teaching her peers the history of languages in Guatemala and translated her native Ki'che for an individual seeking asylum with assistance from the Brooklyn Defenders Service. This Castaneda Family Scholar will attend St. Joseph's College with a goal to ultimately pursue immigration law.

This exceptional student and recent transplant from Mali is inspired to show her mom and her traditional family that women are as capable as men. She finds joy in helping students new to this country navigate school, which inspired her to establish a Multicultural Club, and she is also a mentor for her five sisters. This scholar worked hard to be the first in her family to go to college and is inspired to become a pharmacist due to the lack of access to necessary drugs in her country.

MEET OUR 2020 SCHOLARS

Her goal after graduating with a degree in Pharmaceutical Science is to open her own pharmacy for those in need and previously could not afford prescription medication. This [Amin Educational Scholar](#) plans to attend [York College](#) this fall.

This first generation scholar from [Mexico](#) will talk your ear off about astronomy and soccer. She's played varsity soccer since her freshman year and was captain of her team both junior and senior years, in addition to the multitude of other clubs and activities in which she participated and led. In addition to spending each weekend with additional study as an SEO Scholar, she was a member of the Honor Roll and was a National Honor Society Senator and still found time to compete and earn 2nd place in a Posse scholarship competition, participate in Model UN, and babysit. SEO also propelled her to attend a pre-baccalaureate program at Brown over the summer to take philosophy and calculus classes and meet new people. This [Isabella Lucia Educational Scholar](#) will attend [Stony Brook University](#) and likely focus on an area in STEM.

This scholar from [China](#) found his way to New York City via an initial stop in Texas where he unfortunately encountered the hardship and discrimination that many immigrants face due to being different from the surrounding community.

Ever the optimist, he used his experiences to shape his desire to bring about change with respect to how people globally view those from other nationalities and cultures. An active member of the student body at Stuyvesant High School through dance teams and mentorship programs, this scholar developed a passion for business and economics as he saw how they function across cultures and nations on a daily basis. This scholar will attend the [University of Southern California's](#) highly selective World Bachelor in Business program, where he will spend time in Hong Kong and Milan as he continues to use business as a means to break down barriers and pursue his dream of becoming a global citizen.

This [Mexican American](#) scholar is passionate about social justice and immigration rights. She led a team to secure a \$30,000 grant for her community's food pantry after she noticed the scarcity of resources. She has also presented in front of Senator Chuck Schumer to advocate for immigrants. Her parents are from Mexico, and this scholar draws her strong work ethic and motivation from them. Her teachers called her a "kind, caring, and almost gentle soul."

MEET OUR 2020 SCHOLARS

She held an internship throughout her four years of high school at a designer fashion store where she learned that Latinas “can make it” in any industry. This Founders Scholar is headed to Pomona College in the fall.

This scholar from Haiti lived with his aunt in poverty while his mother immigrated to New York City, until the tragic earthquake enabled his parole status to reunite with his mother. In addition to being top ten in his class, he is dedicated to his church community and has served as an usher and ultimately a worship conductor, which has changed his outlook on life by inspiring a mind of faith and optimism and has also taught him skills he did not think capable of such as public speaking. He is also active in his school community as a tutor and mentor to middle school students, completed a NASA research internship with CUNY, and will also receive an Associates degree as a Smart Scholar at CUNY’s Medgar Evers College. This C&S Scholar will pursue engineering at The Cooper Union this fall.

This scholar emigrated from Mexico and has been living in New York City for the past two years with his older brother. He provides for himself by working at least 20 hours per week after school.

He is so passionate about the Italian culture and history that he taught himself how to speak Italian and in total speaks six languages. He holds a strong work ethic, which shows as he was able to pass six Regents exams within a year of arriving in New York City, while learning English at the same time. While his parents remain in Mexico, he draws his perseverance and fire to succeed from them. This scholar will attend Lehman College and may focus on physics and philosophy.

This Cairo-born, Egyptian immigrant’s positive attitude and energy is infectious. He overcame selective mutism to find his voice through activism, where he built a strong community to speak about issues he is passionate about. It is this community that he helped build that he is most proud of. His love of musical theater and involvement in the arts have enabled him to express himself through acting and singing. The combination of his love of working with children and musical theater led him to aspire to be a pediatric surgeon – utilizing music to help kids find ease during a stressful time. This scholar will attend Pomona College this fall.

OUR SUPPORTERS

AEF ADVISORY COUNCIL

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 AMIN

ARTHUR LI

AEF SUPPORTER CIRCLE

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

ADRIENNE AMIN

CELESTE EVERETT CASTANEDA

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