

NEWS

Heart of Florida United Way
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www.HFUW.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Heart of Florida United Way Receives \$380,000 Grant from SunTrust Foundation to Fund Destination Graduation Program

Destination Graduation Program Offers Innovative Assistance to Seminole State College Undergrads

ORLANDO, Fla. (August 28, 2017) – Research shows that the leading cause for post-secondary drop-out among low-income students is not academic, it's financial. To turn the tide on this trend, the SunTrust Foundation recently awarded a \$380,000 grant to Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) to help fund Destination Graduation, a program designed to connect low-income students at risk of dropping out for non-academic reasons to resources needed to stay in school.

Piloted at Seminole State College of Florida, Destination Graduation has already seen proven results. Last year alone, more than 625 low-income students at risk of dropping out for non-academic reasons received emergency resources needed to stay in school. Approximately 83 percent of students served by the program were able to reenroll or graduate. These results are 40 percent higher when compared to a similar at risk low-income population, and 17 percent higher than all students at Seminole State College. It's estimated that 1,200 students will be served over the three-year period of the grant.

"The SunTrust Foundation is proud to partner with Heart of Florida United Way to help alleviate some of the financial pressure students feel when working towards a degree," said David Fuller, president of the SunTrust Foundation. "Through our support of Destination Graduation, our goal is to help students finish college so they can gain the career-ready skills they need to build financial confidence."

By leveraging HFUW's 2-1-1 Information and Assistance Helpline, students are connected to a 2-1-1 specialist, community and campus resources, financial literacy and budget coaching, and persistence grants. Services can range from simply advocating on behalf of a student to providing financial assistance to fix a car so the student can get to work and school. For Arelis Miller, a student at Seminole State College of Florida, the one-time help made all the difference.

"Destination Graduation is a life-changing program to provide hard-working students a hand-up when they need it most," said Arelis Miller, a recipient of Destination Graduation services. "I've gone from homeless to thriving in school, and I think much of it has to do with the opportunity this program gave me. Through Destination Graduation, I was able to receive the support I needed in that difficult time. Since then, I have a 4.0 and have been on the President's List every semester."

The long-term financial ramifications of not completing a degree can make a significant difference. According to research, keeping a student enrolled in college can increase their annual earning potential by 51 percent for an associate's degree and 134 percent for a bachelor's degree.

"This program moves low-income students from poverty and financial vulnerability to a place where they can provide for a family, and also contributes to building a skilled workforce," said Jeff

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Hayward, president and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. "We are grateful that the SunTrust Foundation values the long-term success of these worthy students and our community."

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$24.4 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida's information and assistance, crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 650,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

About SunTrust Foundation

The SunTrust Foundation is committed to SunTrust Bank's purpose of *Lighting the Way to Financial Well-Being* by engaging with local and national organizations to advance financial confidence. Grants and activities focus primarily on financial education, financial counseling, career readiness and small business/entrepreneurship, in addition to local community grants. The SunTrust Foundation supports American Red Cross disaster relief efforts and contributes as a United Way Global Corporate Leader. Established in 2008, the SunTrust Foundation has proudly provided grants totaling more than \$112 million throughout the United States.

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