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More Than Bootstraps Awarded Grant from Westfield Foundation

The $10,495 grant will support stipends for students in the MTB College Access and Success Program

WESTFIELD and PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY – January 6, 2026

More Than Bootstraps (MTB), a New Jersey non-profit dedicated to helping low-income, first-generation students access and succeed in higher education, has received a $10,495 grant from the Westfield Foundation to initiate the MTB College Access and Success Program in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Founded by Audrey Fisch, a long-time Westfield resident and college professor, More Than Bootstraps addresses the challenges first-generation, low-income students face in getting to and succeeding in higher education. The Westfield Foundation provided early support for More Than Bootstraps.

Now underway with its sixth year of programming, MTB employs a near-peer mentoring approach. The organization matches high school students with near-peer mentors. To date, MTB has worked with graduates of the Passaic Public Schools currently enrolled in institutions from Princeton to William Paterson University who have led their younger high school peers, following a curriculum that focuses on knowledge about higher education and financial aid, communication with families, holistic student development, and the promotion of student well-being and agency.

The award from the Westfield Foundation will allow MTB to bring its programming to the city of Plainfield. College students who have graduated from Plainfield High School will train with their peers from the Passaic MTB program. In Spring 2026, the Plainfield College Student Leaders will recruit high school sophomores to participate in the inaugural class of Plainfield High School Fellows. After additional summer training, the MTB College Access and Success program in Plainfield will begin in earnest, with Plainfield College Student Leaders mentoring their younger Plainfield High School peers.

Katie Curran Darcy, Executive Director of The Westfield Foundation, offered this comment about the renewed partnership: “More Than Bootstraps exemplifies the kind of partner we value—one that builds confidence and independence and creates pathways to long-term success. We are proud to grow our partnership and support the expansion of this impactful model into Plainfield and to help ensure more first-generation students have the support they need to thrive in higher education and beyond.”

Grants and donations to More Than Bootstraps fund the monthly stipends that allow the high school and college students some time and space to come together and create a community of success while still meeting their financial responsibilities.

MTB launched in Westfield on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, 2020. Donations from Westfield residents and local organizations, including the Westfield Foundation, Temple Emanu-El of Westfield, the Westfield Rotary Club Foundation, and the Westfield-based Union Innovation NJ Alliance, provided the initial resources to support the inaugural five College Student Leaders and six High School Fellows in the Passaic MTB program. All of those college students have now graduated from college, and one of the initial high school fellows will graduate from college in January 2026. To date, all MTB college students have graduated from college within four years.

In 2025-2026, the organization is serving 58 Passaic High School and College Students.



New High School Fellows and their College Student Leaders at the MTB Fall 2025 Kickoff

"We are grateful to the Westfield Foundation for recognizing how difficult it is for first-generation college students to pull themselves up by their bootstraps in getting to and succeeding in the complex American higher educational environment," said **Audrey Fisch**, president of More Than Bootstraps. "Early support from the Westfield Foundation was critical to getting MTB off the ground, and we are thrilled that this new support will allow us to bring to Plainfield the MTB model where students empower each other to succeed."

Interested donors are invited to visit the MTB website: www.morethanbootstraps.org/donate.

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About MORE THAN BOOTSTRAPS

More Than Bootstraps builds a community of first-generation, underrepresented students who empower each other to access and succeed in higher education. *More Than Bootstraps is a 501(c)3 organization, Tax ID 83-2245008.* For more information, visit www.morethanbootstraps.org or call (908) 397-0893.

MTB DIGITAL PRESS KIT: www.morethanbootstraps.org/mtb-digital-press-kit

About the WESTFIELD FOUNDATION

Founded in 1975, The Westfield Foundation is a nonprofit community foundation dedicated to supporting organizations that drive positive change and elevate Westfield, NJ, and its surrounding areas. Through strategic investments in education, the arts, community development, and health and social services, the Foundation serves as a catalyst for lasting impact and a trusted steward of local philanthropy.

50th ANNIVERSARY
The Westfield Foundation

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