



PCEF PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT NOVEMBER 2019
BRIGHT FUTURES
IMPROVING THE ODDS FOR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

“Bright Futures, to me, means a safe space where I know I will get the help to reach my dreams, and a platform to advocate for myself and my community.”

That, from The University of Utah Honors College freshman Sadie Ortiz, a 2019 graduate of Park City High School and Bright Futures participant.

“When I first heard about Bright Futures, I was excited as it was the exact program I needed in order to get to college,” she continues. “If it hadn’t been for Nicole Blumin and the entire Bright Futures team I would not be in the Honors College, as I had been told by many that it would be too difficult.”

Nationally, just 11% of low-income, first-generation college students will graduate from college. With Bright Futures, **it jumps to an 80% graduation rate.**

Think life coaching: Bright Futures is a comprehensive, multi-year program that equips first-generation students with the full spectrum of “college knowledge” so they can get to - and through! - post-secondary education.

“Bright Futures, in many cases, becomes a lifeline and a second family,” says program director Rebeca Gonzalez.

Coaching begins the summer after 9th grade with Summer Academy, where students are introduced to the pathway of college and the seed of commitment to graduating college is planted – and doesn’t end until the students graduate college. That’s an investment of 7 years per cohort.

First - education about logistics. Things like choosing the right school, how to apply, and how to complete financial aid forms are taught. Then, a bit later, tackling obstacles like transportation, which Rebeca cites as one of the biggest challenges. Then, what on-campus housing is - or even what the phrase “meal plan” means. That vocabulary just isn’t used when no one else in the family has had a college experience before.

The logistics piece is only one part of BF. Families are also educated about the importance of college, and why things like applying for FAFSA and honoring deadlines, are critical for entry.

“The most surprising part about Bright Futures was how they interacted with my parents and made sure to keep them in the loop of what was happening between high school and college,” Sadie says. “The program helped my family understand that I need to go away to college to better myself and my community.”

Another huge reason Bright Futures has been such a success is that students are guided to develop social and emotional skills. How to ask for help. How to access resources. How to build those critical support networks. And how to maintain confidence in a very, very unfamiliar place.

“Bright Futures is a source for people to come to when things seem weird or even fishy,” says Rebeca. “We are a safety net. We want to avoid pitfalls that make them feel embarrassed or even unsafe - things like that could mean the end of the experience for people without support.”

The best news about the Bright Futures program: it’s working! The first group of 14 young men and women in the program are now in their first year of college (with one on a mission) - and there are 100 students in the program currently.

New to the Park City program: internship opportunities with local nonprofits, most of them paid, for our students to participate in during summer breaks.

“Just seeing how my students are now so thankful because of Bright Futures warms my heart,” says Rebeca. “Donors are seeing that their dollars are impacting dozens of people.”

Sadie adds, “Bright Futures provided opportunities, a platform, and security that as first-generation college students it is valid for us to dream, as one day our dreams will be our reality.”

Thank you to [Zions Bank](#) and the [Westgate Resorts Foundation](#) for their support of Bright Futures