

Former foster youths to benefit from new grant

By [Michelle Curtis](#)

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In the past two years, a committee of legislative staffers have raised about \$30,000 to help students in Sacramento State's Guardian Scholars program.

The offices of Assemblyman Roger Niello, R-Fair Oaks, and Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, have established the Julianne Mari Huerta Memorial Scholarship in 2008 to raise money for the Guardian Scholars program.

Joy Salvetti, Guardian Scholars director, said the funds will be used for scholarships, stipends and emergency funds, which would help students with medical needs, groceries and bills. She said the committee is continuously raising funds for the endowed scholarship.

Julianne Huerta worked as a fiscal analyst for the state Assembly for six years. Peter Schaafsma, Assembly fiscal staff director, said Huerta worked on foster youth's issues and believed that education leads to better jobs.

"She believed education was a valuable thing for anybody's resume to qualify for better jobs," Schaafsma said. "She was interested in emancipating foster youth."

Established at Sac State in 2006, the Guardian Scholars program provides financial resources, and academic and emotional support for former foster youths, who have been released from foster care after turning 18. The program teaches students about available financial assistance, housing options and health services.

"We are a support program specifically for former foster youth who are attending Sac State to achieve either their bachelor's or master's degree," Salvetti said.

Tia Holiday, junior psychology major, is one of the 58 scholars in the program. She said she joined the program after attending a Guardian Scholars retreat in April.

"I am so used to doing everything on my own, and then I found this program," Holiday said.

Guardian Scholars is allowing Holiday to be involved with Sac State students, who were former foster youths, while working to inspire current foster youths.

Through outreach efforts, the scholars teach middle school and high school students about the program.

"You can get all these students involved," Holiday said. "You are going back out into the community and saying, 'You're a foster youth but you can do amazing things with your life.'"

Holiday said the program has helped her figure out everything, from scholarships and graduate school possibilities.

"I now have a set plan of where I will be in 10 years," Holiday said.

Other donors, such as the Stuart Foundation, Sleep Train and Foster Youth Education Fund, also provide funding for Guardian Scholars.

Students have to be admitted to Sac State to qualify for the program.

Faculty, staff and community members are involved through the program's mentor component. Salvetti said this provides important relationship-building skills as the students interact with faculty, staff and community members.

"It is all about relationships not just academics," Salvetti said. "It is creating, building and maintaining relationships."

For more information, go to www.csus.edu/gs.

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Junior psychology major Tia Holiday, left, chats with Joy Salvetti, director of Sac State's Guardian Scholars. Salvetti said the program enables students to build relationships with fellow former foster youths, faculty, staff and community members.

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