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Nonprofit helps everyone go to college

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By: News 8 Austin Staff



Jonah O'Hara with News 8 Austin's Paul Brown.

College Forward is a local nonprofit that provides college prep services to economically disadvantaged students in Central Texas.

The group believes that access to higher education is the right of every young person.

News 8 Austin's Paul Brown spoke with program manger Jonah O'Hara.

Q: Tell us about what inspired College

Forward to form?

O'Hara: College Forward is really the creation of Lisa Fielder, our executive director, and she had just put two of her sons on their way to college and was very interested in the area of college access and decided that there were needs here, very much so.

Q: It is a complicated process for anyone to go through. So, first let's talk about who qualifies?

O'Hara: The students we work with right now are based out of Hays ISD, Del Valle, Austin ISD and Georgetown and students qualify by being in the top 60 percent of their class and qualifying for the national school lunch program.

Q: And talk about the commitment, because this process is something that the student and their family, while they are such great benefits, it's something they have to take very seriously, and then there's the commitment on the part of the organization, as well.

O'Hara: The success of our students and the organization as a whole is entirely contingent upon the relationships that we establish, and those relationships begin with two hours a week, twice a week, in a classroom setting a the student's high school, and we also have weekend commitments and activities. Students are required to do about 20 hours a year, an academic year, of community service.

Q: And this starts the junior year, right?

O'Hara: Starts the junior year and then continues all the way until they achieve their Bachelor's Degree, so we support them all the way through the college process, getting to college and then being successful once they are there.

Q: What can people do to help? You're a nonprofit, I'm sure there's many ways.

O'Hara: There are. For students, for volunteers, for any member of the community that is interested in helping out, we certainly need volunteers in various different capacities, working directly with the students, as well as supporting the organization, our needs, and also for those that simply don't have the time, but are committed and interested in our cause, then donations are always welcome, as well.



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