

The Power of a Dream




Syed Hussaini



Waukegan
to College

IMPACT REPORT 2024

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SYED'S STORY

A Dream Fulfilled

"During my junior year of high school, my friend Marlenny Gonzalez told me about the Waukegan to College program and how it had been helping her prepare for college applications in the upcoming school year. I didn't know how to approach the college application process and needed help, so I applied. After being accepted to Waukegan to College, I was introduced to one of the most amazing communities of fellow students and mentors where I was pushed to be my best self, both academically and personally. Not only did they help me navigate the college application process, but they also provided me with mentors who I now consider friends, and like-minded, ambitious peers, plus endless resources. I knew had a support network behind me.

Now, five years later, I've graduated from Dartmouth College with a B.A. in Computer Science and a B.E. in Computer Engineering, and am working as a Hardware ASIC Design Engineer at NVIDIA in Boston, MA. Waukegan to College helped me achieve my goals of going to college, graduating from college, and finding a job after graduation, all of which has changed my life for the better. The program has helped me reach my goals and dreams, as I know it has done and will continue to do for many other students as well."

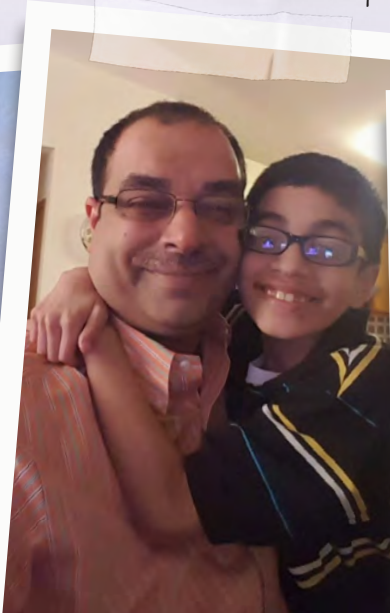
Syed Hussaini
CLASS OF 2024
Dartmouth College



Young Syed



All siblings are in the program



Oldest Brother



Syed's Family



Responding to a Need in Our Community

- Waukegan High School (WHS) is the 3rd largest Illinois Public School with a student body of over 4,200—we partner with an under-resourced school district
- Fewer than 10% of WHS students meet learning standards for English and Math—we provide academic support so that students meet the necessary college readiness benchmarks
- Most WHS students are first-generation (parents did not attend college) and come from low-income households—we provide guidance to students and parents about the the path to and through college
- Only 14% of WHS graduates are enrolled in a 4-year college after graduation, and fewer than half in any post-secondary pathway—we help students identify, apply to, and afford college
- All WHS students have dreams and the potential to follow them—we meet them where they are and support them on their college journey



We believe in the potential of Waukegan students!



College Readiness: We offer 1:1 and cohort advising. Our program includes tutoring and academic enrichment programs.



College Access: Starting junior year in high school we provide SAT/ACT prep, and then personalized college counseling to prepare students for the college application process and beyond.



College Persistence: We continue to support students throughout college, offering guidance, resources, and mentorship to ensure their success.



Parent Integration: From family-based academic advising to workshops and mentoring, we support parents so that they can support their children to excel on their path to college.



Experiential & Social-Emotional Learning: Through college visits, field trips, health and wellness coaching, we help students explore their college and career interests and practice self-care.



Onsite Programming: We meet students where they are and provide advising and afterschool programming at the high school and middle school campuses.



2024 IMPACT

24

High School Graduates

96%

of our High School Seniors matriculated to colleges

16

College Graduates

100

college graduates since 2009

New Student Enrollment - 89 New Students Enrolled

This resulted in **30% growth**, surpassing our goal of **25%**. We have grown our enrollment by **more than 70%** over the past three years.

Six-Year College Graduation Rate: Three Times the National Average

95% compared to the national average of **62%** for all student demographics, and **26%** of first-generation students.

Waukegan to College prepares students to excel academically and guides them on the path to and through college.

Experiential Learning

80% of our students experienced college campus tours, career exploration, and leadership development.

Academic Excellence

80% of our students had a 3.0 or greater in math and English and 70% with a C or below were in tutoring.

Parent Integration

63% of parents attended monthly advising (1:1 and Cohort)



Program Highlights



The workshop taught me that there are different kinds of ways people work and to find a way or solution that works for both of you.
-Shyanna

Waukegan to College offers **multiple leadership development opportunities** for students. We partnered with Deloitte, and 15 high school juniors and seniors attended three sessions in downtown Chicago.



Deloitte Academy

At the time of Joan's visit, I was very homesick, so having a visitor that time of year was wonderful! I love showing people the beautiful campus I live on. I took her to my favorite places in town and we even had a chance to tour the botanic garden. It was wonderful to get to know Joan, as she was lovely company and I really enjoyed chatting with her and getting to share more about my life at Smith. Her visit to the Smith campus last year reminded me of all the support I have back at home.
-Sofia

One of the key components of our college persistence programming is that **we visit every first-year college student** (aka freshman) on campus, no matter where they are in the United States. Joan Boughton, our board president, traveled to Smith College to visit with Sofia. She ensured that Sofia was connected with all the important support systems, did an overall check-in, went on a tour of the campus, and treated her to a meal.



First-Year Visit

Our students gained further knowledge in the admissions process through a college visit to Augustana College. **They attended a college fair with eight schools, and engaged directly with college representatives.** Additionally, they began preparing their personal statements, a key component of their college applications, setting them on the path to success.



College Spring Break Week

Visiting campuses was a major part of my college search. How an atmosphere felt and how comfortable I felt about my safety while on campus were two major concerns. The school that I picked to attend, Knox, was actually a school I visited three times and each time it felt comforting, lively, and interesting. Going to see a school is definitely something important to do while making your college decisions.
-Leslie



Our Parent Education Program **engages parents of middle school students in college readiness workshops** while their children attended cohort advising sessions. We are grateful for Martha Padilla and Scarlet Mencia's exceptional contributions in delivering these workshops.

Parent Educators

It was hard work but a lot of fun. We were determined to finish it in a week.
-Armando

Partnering with Lake Forest Open Lands and a program called Urban Wilderness, students in middle school spent time during their spring break to build a canoe. **Students applied math skills, communication skills, active listening skills,** and so much more.



Build a Boat

Celebrating our 2024 College Graduates!

COLLEGES ATTENDED IN 2023-2024



Maritza Aldama
B.S. Data Science
(Concentration in Statistics)
Melanie Antonio
B.A. Neuroscience & Psychology
(Minor in English)
Rafael Bonilla
B.S. Computer Science



Syed Hussaini
B.S. Computer Science & B.E.
Engineering



Natalia Ocampo
B.A. Sociology



Melissa Bueno Bueno
B.S. Biological Chemistry &
B.A. Chemistry



Ivan Martinez
B.A. Industrial Design
Sebastian Salgado
B.S. Computer Science



Tanok Ramirez
B.S. Environmental
Science



Alejandro Garcia
B.S. Criminal Justice Sciences



Michelle Martinez
B.A. Accounting, Finance &
Management
(Minor in Economics)



Vania Torres
B.A. Education



Marlenny Gonzalez
B.A. Political Science
(Minors in Italian and Philosophy)



Valeria Mencia
B.A. Psychology

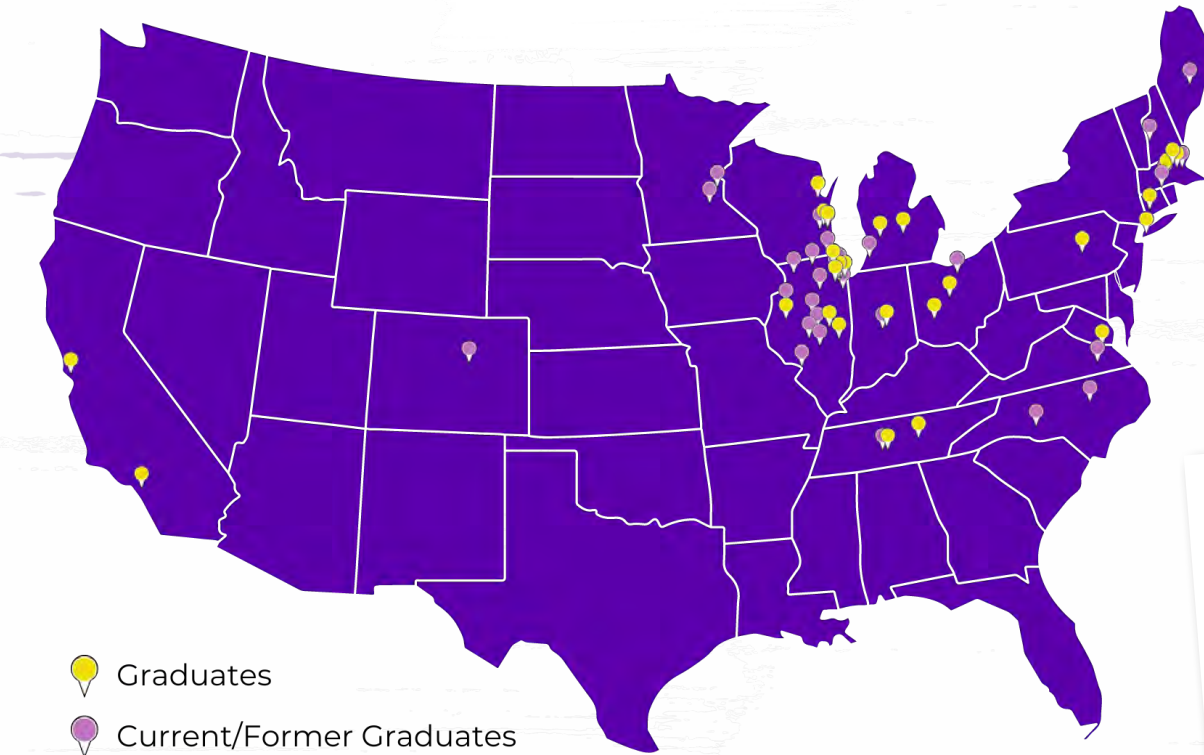


Evie Torres
B.A. Art

Augustana University
Beloit College
Boston University
Bowdoin College
Bradley University
Brown University
Butler University
Cardinal Stritch University
Carthage College
Case Western Reserve University
College of Lake County
Colorado College

Columbia College-Chicago
Dartmouth College
Davidson College
Duke University
Elmhurst University
Hope College
Illinois State University
Knox College
Lake Forest College
Macalester College
Milwaukee School of Engineering
National Louis University

North Park University
Northwestern University
Smith College
Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville
St. Olaf College
Tricoci University of Beauty Culture
University of Chicago
University of Illinois at Chicago
University of Illinois at Springfield
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
University of Richmond
Vanderbilt University



Graduates
 Current/Former Graduates

"The thing that Waukegan to College helped me better understand was that if there is a will there is a way. You can apply this to anything not only the College experience."

Valeria Mencia
CLASS OF 2024
National Louis University

"Waukegan to College has been a cornerstone in my journey, from high school through my four years of college. As a first-generation student from an immigrant family, every challenge I faced in college was new, uncharted territory, but Waukegan to College's unwavering support made all the difference. Whether it was helping me secure scholarships, amazing internship experiences, or the invaluable mentorship experience I had with my mentor Elizabeth Olszewski, they were always wholly devoted to my success. Waukegan to College not only opened the door to higher education for me but also ensured that I was able to thrive and succeed within the college environment. I truly believe I wouldn't be where I am today without the community and guidance Waukegan to College provided me. They supported me academically and also helped me navigate the personal hardships that arose along the way. I'm forever grateful for everything they've done."

Aliyah Plummer
B.S. Biology (minor in Public Health)



Celebrating our 2024 High School Graduates!



"Waukegan to College has helped me in many ways including giving me time to work on scholarships and people to assist me during the college process. Scholarship club was very helpful as it was designated time for me to work on scholarships that could help provide financial aid. Also having a personal statement coach provided extra support when finalizing my personal statement for the common app. Waukegan to College has helped me in a variety of ways and has allowed me to be successful throughout the college process!"

-Selene Cruz

"Waukegan to College had helped me with scholarship assistance and support! Without Waukegan to College I wouldn't have had such a variety of scholarship opportunities or even know how to apply! Waukegan to College has also provided a comfortable space for me as a first-generation student!"

-Sophia Cruz



Student Names and Colleges Attending

- Sonny Albarran**, Northern Illinois University
- Axel Arreola**, Elmhurst University
- Jasmine Beecher**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Selene Cruz**, Lake Forest College
- Sophia Cruz**, Lake Forest College
- Megan Esparza**, Lake Forest College
- Luis Garcia**, DePauw University
- Lorenzo Herrera**, Northwestern University
- Miguel Hurtado**, Hope College
- Aziz Hussaini**, College of Lake County
- Raquel Mendoza**, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale
- Madelyn Montiel**, Northern Illinois University
- Marisol Mujica**, College of Lake County
- Andrea Palma**, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale
- Juliana Reyes**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Arely Rogel**, Elmhurst University
- Leslie Solorio**, Knox College
- Kimberly Villalba**, Northern Illinois University
- Anahi Zuniga**, Whitman College
- Darlene Bahena-Torres**, Regis University
- Armando Hernandez**, Carthage College
- Savannah Roman**, Dominican University
- Linda Renee Ruiz**, Loyola University

We administer five scholarships thanks to donors who specifically want to support college students to be able to afford college. Congratulations to the 2024 Waukegan to College scholarship recipients!

2024 Applications and Acceptances:

- 24 Seniors applied to 250 schools:
- 192 acceptances

2024 Financial Aid Offered:

\$12,940,661

Receiving the Paying it Forward Scholarship has allowed me to stay dedicated to working towards my goals and it means a lot to me since I aspire to medically help others in the future.

Paying It Forward Scholarship
\$30,000 over four years
Juliana Reyes



2024 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

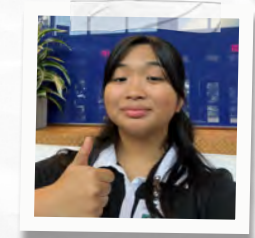
Ken and Sandy Falkinham Scholarship
\$40,000 over four years
Darlene Bahena



Chuck Gutman Envision Scholarship
\$4,000 over four years
Lorenzo Herrera



Chuck Gutman Scholarship
\$4,000 over four years
Juliana Reyes



Hope Scholarship
\$20,000 over four years
Luis Garcia



Mark R. Reckling Scholarship
\$43,000 over four years
Leslie Solorio



VANIA'S STORY

"Waukegan to College helped me first and foremost to think about college. It had always been my goal to want to go to college but getting there was always 'how'. I felt that it was impossible since I was a DACA student and it made it really hard to think that college could be a possibility even though I wanted it. It seemed that there were many things that were in the way before I could even get there. But after meeting Cecilia, my counselor at Waukegan to College, I felt that finally I can go to college, finally there is a place for me. Cecilia was very supportive and laid out a plan for me to go to college. She arranged and took me on a visit to Cardinal Stritch University, and with her guidance and support, I applied and was accepted to attend Cardinal Stritch.

During my first year of college, I took business but soon I realized that I needed to do something that had a bigger impact. I sat down and wrote my strengths, at the end of the day it was clear that I should be a teacher. I love communication, I love talking to people, I love children, I had such a huge passion for school when I was younger.

Once I realized what I wanted to do, my entire perspective changed. I felt that this is my place and there is a seat for me. My professors were there to help me, to motivate me, they were there to tell me that I was going to change all the children's lives. I believed it and I still do and all of those things build me up to be the teacher that I am right now.

If it wasn't for Waukegan to College and meeting Cecilia, who knows if I would have ever gone anywhere for college. So that one person changed my whole future. The most important thing was meeting Cecilia, she is the reason why I ended up in college, she is the reason that I found this amazing community of teachers and professors, I always think about her and how if she hadn't been in my life who knows where I would be, who knows if I would be a teacher. Her impact really made a difference. Thank you, Waukegan to College and Cecilia!"

Vania Torres
 CLASS OF 2024
 Mount Mary University



ALUMNI NETWORK

Paying it Forward

"Waukegan to College has empowered me as a first-generation student, providing the support and encouragement I need to believe in my potential and chase my dreams of becoming a Physician Assistant."

-Stephanie Beltran, Alumni Board Member
 CLASS OF 2020
 Eastern Illinois University

"As chair of the Waukegan to College Alumni Network, I've found a deep purpose in uniting alumni to give back and support the next generation. Mentoring students, especially as a first-gen, reminds me how powerful it is to be a resource for those navigating the same challenges I once faced."

-Cecilia Harrington, Alumni Board Co-Chair
 CLASS OF 2018
 Cardinal Stritch University

"You're probably going to hear so much great advice that would make you super successful if you listened to it, but if you're anything like me and don't listen to it, then just remember to be honest with yourself. Only you really know how much you studied. Only you really know if you did your best or if you played too many video games (my issue). Usually, you'll be able to know which side you're on."

-Osvaldo Calzada, Alumni Board Member
 CLASS OF 2018
 Tufts University

"My life would look very different without encountering Waukegan to College. I always knew I wanted to attend college but I was unsure how to navigate the college application process. Waukegan to College provided me with the tools and resources to succeed. Now as an alumni, I am eager to give back to my community and continue to use my 1st generation experience to help students in their journey."

-Gala Torres, Alumni Board Member
 CLASS OF 2023
 Aurora University



1000 Dreams Vision

Our vision is to be serving 1000 students, 5th grade through college, by 2029, guiding them on a path to and through college. We have a strategic framework that consists of four pillars.



1000 Students, 1000 Dreams by 2029

With your partnership, Waukegan to College will be able to achieve our 1000 Dreams campaign!

Huge opportunities require huge efforts! This past year was filled with some amazing and also challenging opportunities. We launched onsite programming in a local middle school. We filled in the gap for students who lost support from another local college access program. 89 new students joined Waukegan to College. We have been confident and bold in our response. Why? The students, families, and the community of Waukegan deserve nothing less. One of our core beliefs is that Waukegan students have just as much potential as any other student in this area. What is lacking is not in them, but in the support system around them. That's why Waukegan to College exists—to provide the necessary resources and guidance so that students can follow their dreams through a college education. I want to highlight three important accomplishments from 2023-24 as we continue to pursue our 1000 Dreams vision, which is to be serving 1000 students by 2029:

- ✓ **We have an amazing team and it's growing!** We added several new positions over the summer to accommodate growth and improve the quality of our programming. Since I joined the organization in 2021, we have grown from 7 staff members to 13. I am so grateful and impressed by the work they do serving our students and families!
- ✓ **We celebrated our 100th college graduate!** That's 100 dreams realized. We are so proud of our graduates and how their journey doesn't stop there. Our alumni are giving back in so many ways. You read about Vania coming back to teach in our community. The Alumni Network is hosting events, mentoring current students and helping connect our college students with internship opportunities.
- ✓ **We deepened our partnerships!** We are grateful to WPS60 school district, the College of Lake County, our program partners, more than 200 volunteers, and all the individuals and organizations that have provided the necessary financial support. We are humbled by your confidence in our efforts.

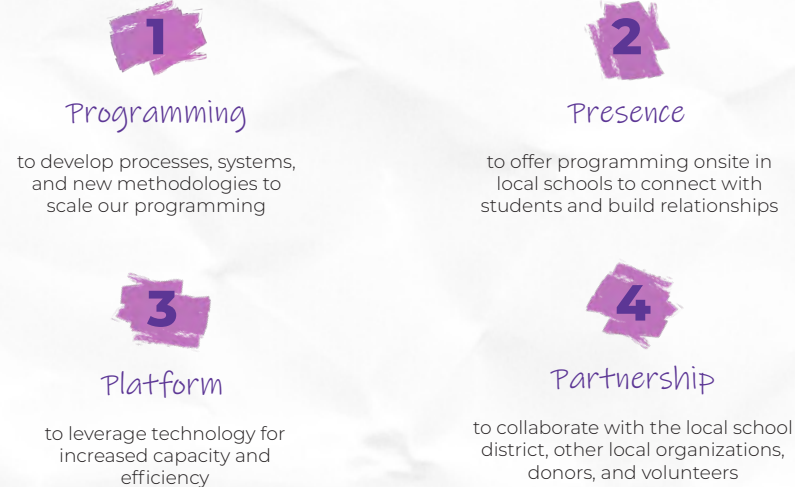
We couldn't even begin to have the current level of impact without all of you! Thanks for investing in our extraordinary scholars!

Aaron Arnold
Executive Director
Waukegan to College



This mural was completed as a part of the Career and College Pathways program at John Lewis Middle School. It is entitled "Pathway to Dreams" and was painted by Gloria Rivera, a Chicago-based muralist who worked with a group of sixth-grade students who shared their dreams and even did some of the painting.

1000 Dreams Strategic Framework



More than 200!

Thank you, Volunteers and Mentors!

We extend our deepest gratitude to all the incredible individuals who have supported Waukegan to College this past year. Your dedication, generosity, and belief in our mission have been instrumental in making a lasting impact on our students' lives—we truly couldn't do it without you! Thank you for being a vital part of our community.



ANDREA AND RAQUEL - MENTOR PAIR

"My mentor has become a significant part of my life; I can go to her for anything. I have fun going on new adventures with her and going to her for academic help. She always finds a way to help me and answer my questions. She has tremendously impacted my journey to college, and I will forever be grateful. I have learned so much from her and have become a better person due to her advice. I don't know what I would do without her."

STEPHANIE HICKMAN - MENTOR

"I support Waukegan to College because its mission aligns with my personal journey as a first-generation college graduate who benefited from a similar program. After learning about the organization through a classmate, I wanted to give back, and with my background in leadership and camp work, mentoring seemed like the perfect fit. My mentee, a bright high school student aiming for a career in science and healthcare, has become a special person in my life. Watching her grow, overcome challenges, and work toward her dreams has been incredibly rewarding. The resources Waukegan to College provides are truly transformative, and it feels fulfilling to know that I'm helping someone who may not have had access to the same opportunities without this support. It's a privilege to be part of her journey, and it reminds me why I got involved in the first place."

JEFF OLSON - ACADEMIC TUTOR

"I began tutoring at Waukegan to College about two years ago as a way to give back to my community after semi-retiring, and I've been continually impressed by the quality of the program, the dedication of the staff, and the commitment of the students. The program is highly effective and has produced impressive results, which is why I remain committed to volunteering. I've found it incredibly rewarding to connect with students both academically and personally, and I love passing on the knowledge I've gained throughout my career as a mechanical engineer."



The support of our volunteers is vital to the success of our students.
Consider volunteering today!

www.waukegantocollege.org



"Five years ago, I responded to a volunteer request in a Waukegan to College newsletter forwarded to me by a board member for a "College Essay Coach", a role critical to the college application process.



As a freelance communications consultant amplifying the voices of non-profits, small businesses and individuals, I saw this opportunity as a natural extension of my skill set in writing, editing and consulting to help students position themselves in their personal statements.

And **what a journey I was about to take! Most of these amazing, brave, highly motivated students are first-generation or the first in their families to head down the college path, which is a feat unto itself.**

In five years, I have coached over 60 students to generate heartfelt, authentic personal statements. The protocol is thorough, but the rewards are great, since more students yearly get into their top colleges.

To help build capacity, I collaborated with the advisors at Waukegan to College to create a custom personal statement writing process to indoctrinate other volunteer essay coaches, since we have many students in the growing College Access Programming.

This journey has enlightened me to a cohort primed to share their unique stories, and I am motivated every Spring to amplify their voices in personal statements as Coach Patty."

-Patty Charhut
College Personal Essay Coach/Editor

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS AND SUPPORTERS



"It's our pleasure to be one of Waukegan to College's many partners, as they strive to ensure their participants have access to a range of opportunities and resources during a critical and uncertain time in their lives. Thank you, Waukegan to College, for your enduring commitment to helping students attain their dreams."

-Hunter Family Foundation

"Waukegan to College provides resources to encourage and prepare youth, and their families, for the unparalleled opportunity that education offers. The St. James Lutheran Church Community in Lake Forest is privileged to witness the commitment, growth and achievement in first generation college students, one individual at a time!"



-St. James Lutheran Church



"Waukegan Community Bank is proud to support the work of Waukegan to College and their mission. We firmly believe education is the key to countless doors of opportunity, growth, and achievement. Helping each student to realize their maximum potential plays a pivotal role in the success of not only the lives of the individual student and their families, but by accretion the Waukegan community as a whole."

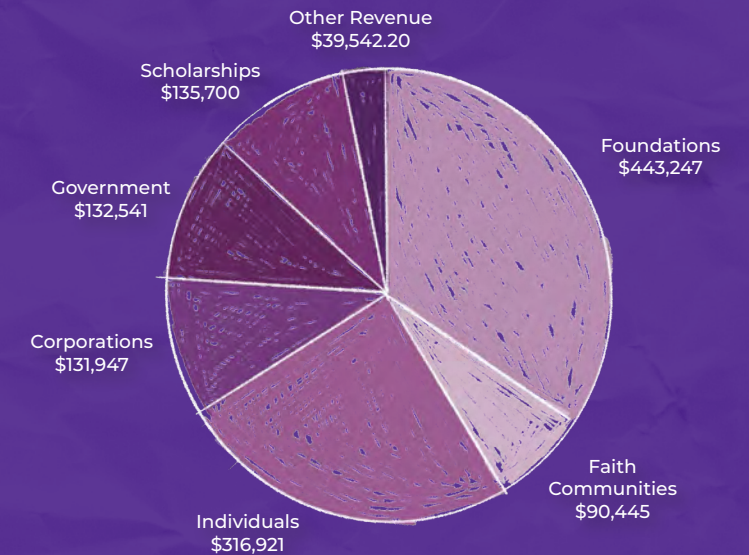
-Waukegan Community Bank

Thank you for choosing to invest in our students' dreams for a brighter future.

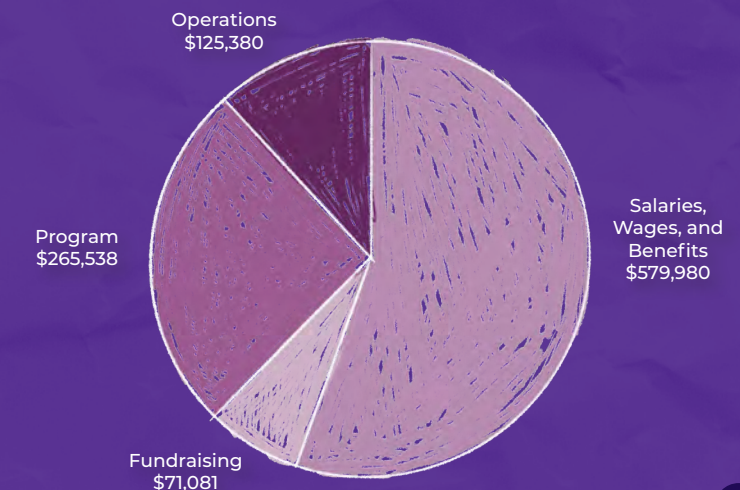
A contribution to Waukegan to College is an investment in the lives of promising, talented, and hard-working young people in Waukegan. These remarkable students are committed to following their dreams by becoming the first person in their families to earn a college degree. This will not just impact them as an individual but will transform their family and the community of Waukegan.

FINANCIALS

Revenue



Expenses



Ways to Support Our Mission

All contributions are an investment in the lives of young, talented and hard-working individuals. Your support will not only aid their individual transformation, but also that of their families and the Waukegan community.

We are grateful for the support from dedicated and generous partners like you.

Individual Giving

Select a giving level to initiate the academic/personal transformation of our students.

Monthly level of giving that coincides to your budget.

Corporate/ Workplace Giving

If you support our mission, partner with us to empower our students to succeed in life.

- Sponsorship
- Employee giving and match

Memorial or Tribute Gift

Consider making a donation in honor of someone who has had an impact in your life.

Other Ways to Give

Estate & Legacy, Donor-Advised Funds, Stock, and Cash Wires.



On average it costs about **\$4,000 annually for one Waukegan student to participate in our program.**

We offer this programming to students free of charge and depend on generous donors like you to provide the resources needed to serve these extraordinary and deserving students and their families.

Learn more about how you can support a Waukegan to College scholar today!



Waukegan to College Staff

Aaron Arnold
Executive Director

Laura Garcia
College Readiness Advisor,
5th & 6th grade

Noemi Garcia
College Readiness Advisor,
9th & 10th grade

Jacklyn Hernandez
College Readiness Advisor,
10th grade

Jackie Lopez
College Readiness Advisor,
8th grade

Estrella Ortiz
College Readiness Advisor,
7th grade

Mayra Perez
College Access Advisor,
12th grade

Laura Rios
Program Director

Angie Sage
Individual Giving Manager

I'mani Sellers
Associate Program Director

Pricilla Uriostegui
Program and Operations
Administrator

Victoria (Tori) Velazquez
College Readiness Advisor,
10th & 11th grade

Joseph Young
College Persistence Manager

Board of Directors

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Stephen Rice
Vice President

Valerie Lopez Finn
Treasurer

Kim Furrer Lenzini
Secretary

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Gilberto Colin

Kalif Crutcher

Syed Hussaini
Parent Representative

Marshall Lancaster

Iain Lopata

Roland Ramirez*

Pat Ludwig

Jennessa Lystlund

Claudia Phalen

Jennifer Sparrow*

Najet Torres
Parent Representative

**Are not currently on the board but served during the last fiscal year*

Letter from our Board President

What a notable year it has been for Waukegan to College! Yet again we have expanded our reach, more deeply impacting our students, families, and the Waukegan community than ever before. Our 1,000 Dreams vision continues to guide us. We surpassed our ambitious growth goal, via planned student recruiting and by opening our doors to the Waukegan Schuler Scholars who unexpectedly needed assistance when that program closed. We are now the only community-based organization focused on college readiness and access within Waukegan School District #60.

Our students are incredibly inspiring to watch as they put in so much effort and overcome difficult challenges! I hope you are as excited as I am about Waukegan to College's success to date and aspirations for the future. We have already achieved so much with your generous contributions of financial support and volunteer hours, but we will need more to meet our goal of 1,000 students by 2029. Please join our journey and see how your involvement can enrich the lives of our students and families—and perhaps, in the process, how it may positively impact yours.

With gratitude and hope,

Joan Boughton
Board President
Waukegan to College



Our Mission

Waukegan to College exists to create brighter futures for first-generation students, their families, and their community by preparing students to enroll in and graduate from a four-year college or university.

Our Core Values

Ambition

Strive for excellence and dare to dream

Equity

Access, opportunity, and inclusivity

Leadership

Accountability, self-advocacy, and action

Collaboration

Work together; everyone has a role and a goal

Relationships

Family, partners, and community

**Believing in
the potential of
the next generation**

