

THE LLOYD K. JOHNSON FOUNDATION



Making the Case for a Non-Traditional Approach to Scholarship Programming

*Funding students who need it most,
and co-creating a supportive model alongside them.*

A FOUNDER'S WISH

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Introduction

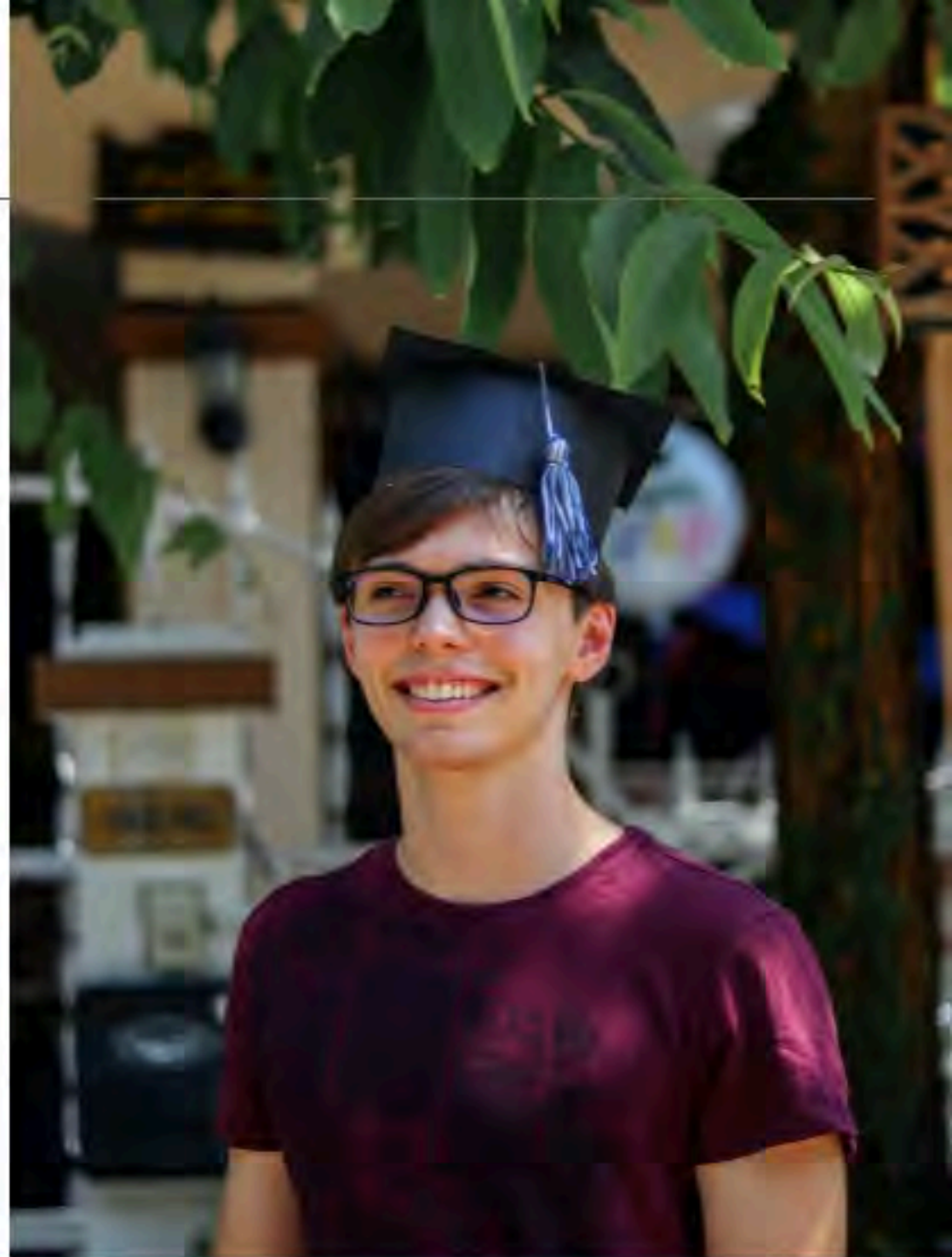
In addition to supporting Minnesota's North Shore communities with grants, our founder Mr. Johnson had just one request of the funds he left: Start a scholarship program for students from Cook County High School, his alma mater. He always valued higher education and he firmly believed it could change the trajectory of a life.

Upon Mr. Johnson's passing in 2006, our board got to work thinking of ways to best meet the needs of this rural community's students. With a giant heart for young people, we immediately began focusing on students who fall through the cracks. After much deliberation and some long chats with school leadership, our board settled on the non-traditional approach you'll see outlined in this report.

AN INTENTIONAL MODEL

We believe with support, all students can succeed.

We also believe that students know best what they need, and because of that, they're our greatest guides.



Eligibility & Funding

We seek to minimize barriers and focus on students who need it most - whether it be barriers of financing, self-belief, academics, or otherwise.

Our scholarship program has just two basic requirements of students:

- **A cumulative high school GPA of 2.0;**
- **The desire to reach their academic goals.**

We fund students for up to 2.5 years, providing:

- **Full Tuition**
- **Books & Fees;**
- **Stipend for School Supplies.**

We require students take a minimum of 12 credits per semester and maintain a 2.0 GPA.

Co-Creating with Students

Just three years after starting the program we began implementing follow-up surveys with our alumni. Our intention was to learn from, and integrate, the student perspective in our program design.

Since that time, we've expanded our student feedback processes to include the thoughts and ideas of alumni, current students, and incoming awardees at various stages of their time under, and after, scholarship award.

We've made a habit of asking for and integrating feedback at all levels of student interaction - and it's working. Our student participation rates are skyrocketing, and our relationships with our students are deepening. But more than that, we've begun to co-create helpful supportive services alongside of our students, and those are working too.

A SUPPORTIVE MODEL

Student feedback has not only allowed us to develop supports, but recognize and honor the need to staff a position dedicated to offering them.

The Support Staff Position

Our support staff seeks to walk alongside students, addressing all the challenges this transition so often yields. A lot of this work is done one-to-one with students, usually on-campus, and often with a little coffee.

Our staff takes the approach of:

- **Mentor & Friend**
- **Advisor & Confidant;**
- **Listening Ear & Encouraging Guide.**

We inspire students to build confidence while helping them to find the campus and community resources that can provide the knowledge they need to succeed on their own.

We have a keen focus on further enhancing critical thinking skills, and more than anything, we encourage students to make the most of their college experience by asking tons, and tons of questions.



ALUMNI SURVEY, 2019

89%

of our alumni advocated for additional supportive services and an increased role for our support staff.

ALUMNI SURVEY, 2019

100%

of our alumni made use of at least one campus or foundation support; 100% of our current students do too.



SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Supports come from students' requests and ideas; from analyzing themes of where students have struggled most; and from decades of our staff and board's work experience in the social sector.

Before the First Semester

Our program offers the following prior to students starting their first semester:

- **10 hours of financial education tailored to young adults**
- **A 3-part series of communications ensuring housing, transportation & finances are in order**
- **A group tour and meet & greet with campus support staff**
- **An informal group lunch and Q&A with foundation staff**
- **A community resource guide customized for young adults;**
- **A personalized calendar with important dates to remember.**

On-Going & Upcoming

Once a student begins their schooling, our support staff provides:

- **Ongoing one-to-one meetings to address academic, personal, and social concerns**
- **A textbook lending library to decrease unnecessary costs;**
- **Formal corrective action plans that can give students second chances when program requirements aren't met.**

Through it all, we offer a dedicated scholarship cell phone and Gmail account in response to students' preferred methods of communication.

We are constantly adapting based on incoming feedback and are working on: Study skills & life skills workshops; internship opportunities & professional mentorships; a pathway for students to join our board of directors; an alumni network; and a presence on social media.

MEASUREMENT

We believe there's merit to measuring traditional qualifiers - so we do.

But we also believe there's value in non-traditional measurement too.



Combining Traditional & Non-Traditional Measurements

We believe there is merit to measuring traditional qualifiers like:

- **Scholarship Funds & Financial Aid**
- **GPA's & College Credits;**
- **Retention Rates & Graduation Rates.**

But we also value measuring success in non-traditional ways too, like:

- **Enhancing Critical Thinking**
- **Developing Financial Literacy Skills**
- **Tracking Campus Support Use;**
- **Ensuring Mission-Focused Decisions**

Simply providing our supports inherently measures some of these less traditional qualifiers, but we've also intentionally modified our program development to imbed them in all we do.

Most recently, this has meant:

- **Changes to Our Guiding Questions Worksheet for Student Meetings**
- **The Addition of Pre & Post Tests for Our Financial Literacy Course**
- **New Student Surveys & Student Input in Support Staff Evaluation**
- **Adapted Program Messaging, Trainings, & Questions for the Scholarship Recommendations Committee;**
- **The Addition of Workshops & Tours.**

Just as our program adapts with student feedback, our measurements do too.

RESULTS

We believe our supportive, relationship-based model is working. Here's why.

Our Students are Succeeding

On average, our students enroll in college with an incoming GPA of 2.8; most of our students come from households with low income; 44% are Pell-Grant eligible, and 59% are the first in their families to attend college.

Compared to our college partners and home state of Minnesota, our students' GPAs are lower, while their financial need and first-generation status is much higher. That said, our retention rate for students is double that of our college partners, and our graduation rate is upwards of 20% higher.

More than that, our alumni survey responses show that students appreciate a supportive model: 58% of respondents do not feel they would've attended college without our scholarship; 84% believe the scholarship significantly influenced their future; 100% are employed; and 100% have continued or plan to continue their education.



WE RETAIN

75%

of our students, which is double that of our community college partners.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

58%

of our students do not feel they would have attended college without our scholarship.



LESSONS LEARNED

We've learned a lot along the way, and we've run into some challenges too. Some of our biggest stumbling blocks are discussed on the next few pages.

Program Focus

Further defining the program has helped it to thrive.

Our founder Mr. Johnson did not provide specific direction about the scholarship program he wished to create. While this has allowed flexibility in the shape and evolution of the program, at times it has slowed progress and made our efforts less focused than we'd like.

In the past two years our education committee has met frequently. A large portion of this work has been focused on further defining the program to tailor our values and maximize our investments.

Throughout the process, we've committed to helping those who need it most, so, we've further

defined "need" in terms of academic, financial, social and personal barriers. Loosely put, we encourage and select students that may not otherwise go to college without the financial resources the award provides, and the added supports built into the program.

Support Staff

Dedicating staff time is not only necessary, but responsible.

As a very small-staffed foundation we haven't always had the capacity to dedicate personalized attention to our students. But with gradual increases in hours to our support position, we've been able to sustainably build the program while boosting individualized student supports. Our staff spends about one hour per week, per student served.

We believe that dedicating staff time allows for a supportive, innovative, and adaptive model; it's what makes us accountable to our students and to the belief that with support, all can succeed.

LESSONS LEARNED

We believe in the power of intentional language, and work hard to share a consistent message.



Messaging

Reframing, training and consistency in messaging are key.

Messaging has been particularly hard for us because this program challenges conventional thinking.

That said, we've worked intentionally to reframe the language we use. Our choices include phrases like:

- **We believe in taking risks;**
- **We believe this is the best investment we can make;**
- **We prioritize students who could use some added support; and**
- **We look for students who may not go to college without this opportunity.**

We've adjusted our external communications to emphasize our supportive model in our: Outreach efforts and interactions with students; program reports and website; trainings we conduct with our partners; and the questions we ask our recommendations committee.

Internally, we've emphasized the same, by adding student stories to our monthly newsletter and increasing the frequency of scholarship reports at our board meetings. These changes have helped us to gain clarity and further solidify the program's model both inside and out.

LESSONS LEARNED

We believe in collaboration that prioritizes active listening and responsiveness; where all perspectives are valued so that the strengths of each member can be fully realized.



The Recommendations Committee

The Recommendations Committee is a volunteer group of faculty, administrators, and teachers from Cook County High School who provide insight on student application materials as part of our review and award process.

When the program first started, the Recommendations Committee was called the Selection Committee, and the questions asked of them were straight forward and ranked on a scale from 1-5. Questions like: "Do you see financial need" and "How do you rate this student's academic ability". Each committee member would provide a numeric response as well as additional comments if they would like to. Scores would be tallied and provided with the student's application packet to the board for review.

Over time, the board felt frustrated because the reviews of students varied greatly depending upon each committee member's feedback. These widely varying perspectives became difficult to weigh and were not often used in the board's decision to award students. Conversely, and sadly so, the committee members felt as though their input was being disregarded. In other words, the system wasn't working - for anyone.

It's important to recognize this as a misstep in our communications, messaging, naming of the committee, as well as a lack of role definition between the parties involved. We have since: Renamed the committee to accurately reflect their role; provided our board, staff, and partners with a detailed outline of the roles and responsibilities for each member; provided training for our partners; continued to use consistent language and messaging; and adapted the committee's questions to be future-oriented and values-based. This last change also allows our staff to use the committee's feedback in meaningful ways to better support students in the years to come.

Active listening and adapting are essential to true partnership and to continuous improvement.

A NOTE FROM LEADERSHIP

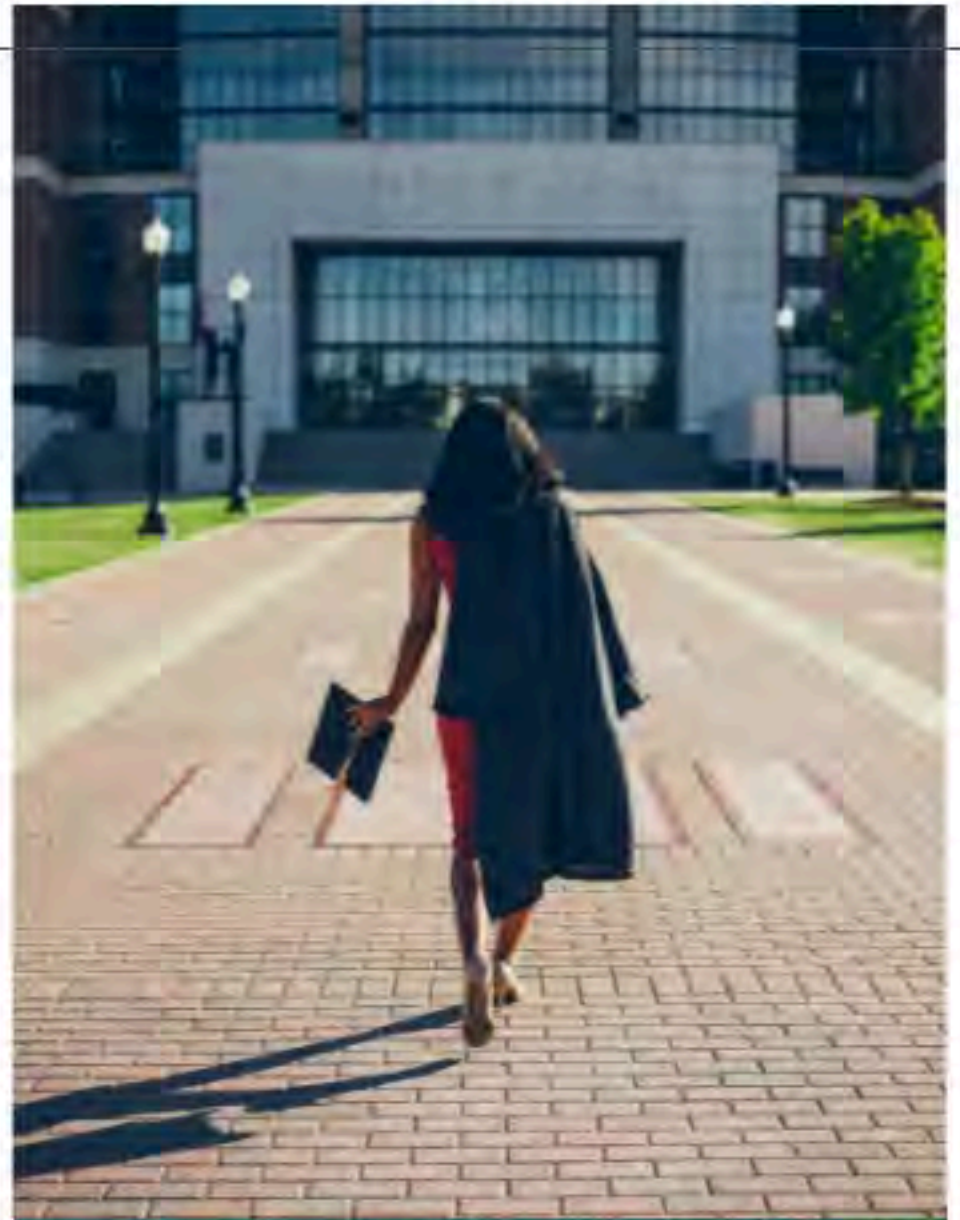
We're making the case for a non-traditional approach to scholarship programming; consider joining us.

In Summary

While a brief synopsis of our journey over the past 12+ years, we are firm believers in the importance of providing a supportive model for students that reaches far past the dollars we award. Not all of our students make use of all the supports we offer, and some simply don't need them.

That said, when we think about the kind of future we want, it's one that's rooted in inclusivity; one that fosters access and equity; and one where all of our paths are made stronger by those who support us along the way.

With that, thanks for taking the journey with us as we make the case for a non-traditional approach to scholarship programming. We hope you're encouraged to continue with the supports you may already provide, or are inspired to develop supports of your own that will make your students paths all the stronger.



MORE INFO:

For more information about our scholarship program, visit us at: lloydjohnsonfoundation.org/scholarships.

You can check out our recent alumni survey summary report on our website too, under [news/foundation-reports](#).

OUR CONTACT

If you'd like to find out more about our program or chat with our staff, we'd be honored to share.

You can reach us at 218.726.9000 or rachel@lloydjohnsonfoundation.org.