



Heart of Florida United Way Receives \$380,000 Grant from SunTrust Foundation to Fund Destination Graduation Program

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ORLANDO, Fla. -- Research shows that the leading cause for post-secondary drop-out among low-income students is not academic; it's financial. To turn the tide on this trend, SunTrust Foundation recently awarded a \$380,000 grant to Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) to help fund Destination Graduation, a program designed to connect low-income students at risk of dropping out for non-academic reasons to resources needed to stay in school.

Piloted at Seminole State College of Florida, Destination Graduation has already seen proven results. Last year alone, more than 625 low-income students at risk of dropping out for non-academic reasons received emergency resources needed to stay in school. Approximately 83 percent of students served by the program were able to reenroll or graduate. These results are 40 percent higher when compared to a similar at risk low-income population, and 17 percent higher than all students at Seminole State College. It's estimated that 1,200 students will be served over the three-year period of the grant.

"The SunTrust Foundation is proud to partner with Heart of Florida United Way to help alleviate some of the financial pressure students feel when working towards a degree," said David Fuller, president of the SunTrust Foundation. "Through our support of Destination Graduation, our goal is to help students finish college so they can gain the career-ready skills they need to build financial confidence."

By leveraging HFUW's 2-1-1 Information and Assistance Helpline, students are connected to a 2-1-1 specialist, community and campus resources, financial literacy and budget coaching, and persistence grants. Services can range from simply advocating on behalf of a student to providing financial assistance to fix a car so the student can get to work and school. For Arelis Miller, a student at Seminole State College of Florida, the one-time help made all the difference.

"Destination Graduation is a life-changing program to provide hard-working students a hand-up when they need it most," said Arelis Miller, a recipient of Destination Graduation services. "I've gone from homeless to thriving in school, and I think much of it has to do with the opportunity this program gave me. Through Destination Graduation, I was able to receive the support I needed in that difficult time. Since then, I have a 4.0 and have been on the President's List every semester."

The long-term financial ramifications of not completing a degree can make a significant difference. According to research, keeping a student enrolled in college can increase their annual earning potential by 51 percent for an associate's degree and 134 percent for a bachelor's degree.



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“This program moves low-income students from poverty and financial vulnerability to a place where they can provide for a family, and also contributes to building a skilled workforce,” said Jeff Hayward, President & CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. “We are grateful that the SunTrust Foundation values the long-term success of these worthy students and our community.”

About SunTrust Foundation

The SunTrust Foundation is committed to SunTrust Bank’s purpose of Lighting the Way to Financial Well-Being by engaging with local and national organizations to advance financial confidence. Grants and activities focus primarily on financial education, financial counseling, career readiness and small business/entrepreneurship, in addition to local community grants. The SunTrust Foundation supports American Red Cross disaster relief efforts and contributes as a United Way Global Corporate Leader. Established in 2008, the SunTrust Foundation has proudly provided grants totaling more than \$112 million throughout the United States.