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ASU gives scholarships for contributions to community

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Everyday superheroes such as Shela Hidalgo have the power to change the world.

The 22-year-old college student is among Arizona State University's Spirit of Service Scholarship recipients.

Aiming to educate hearts as well as minds, the ASU program offers scholarships to students dedicated to community service.

Hidalgo, an ASU honors student, considers volunteerism a part of her education.

In just the past couple of weeks, she has run a Valley marathon to raise money for Arizona children with disabilities, helped organize two conferences to foster community service, served as a Tempe-based AmeriCorps volunteer and worked on developing a program for Habitat for Humanity to assess the impact home ownership has on low-income families' reliance on government services.

And that doesn't include the time she puts into her undergraduate studies. She's earning a bachelor's degree in non-profit management and leadership in the College of Public Programs, writing her honors thesis for ASU's Barrett, The Honors College and completing a certificate in non-profit youth-and-human services.

ASU Spirit of Service Scholars such as Hidalgo are the nation's next generation of public-service leaders, said Jonathan Koppell, dean of the ASU College of Public Programs.

The scholarship, in its third year, provides \$5,000 each to about 20 students annually. The funds go toward college tuition.

In contrast to typical college scholarships awarded on academic performance, the Spirit of Service Scholarship focuses on the extent to which a student is committed to helping others.

The program extends students' service work by requiring them to mentor Valley high-school students. And each scholarship recipient is matched with a mentor from the professional public-service sector.

With hoards of Baby Boomers set to retire in the next decade from public service, ASU sees the need to train students who are fueled by a calling to transform their communities, Koppell said.

The goal is to reinforce the idea, and show students, that such aspirations have value.

"In the contemporary culture these days, quite frankly, if you express an interest in making the world a better place, you will most likely be met with a derisive snort or snide sneer, rather than a hearty pat on the back," Koppell said. "We want to recognize that ... service is a noble calling, making a difference is something to be celebrated."

Koppell said that a surprising number of Spirit of Service Scholarship applications come from students who have faced adversity and are driven to give back.

"One of the things that really impresses me about the students that apply who come from difficult backgrounds ... is they go to school not to make money to improve their own situation, but to prepare themselves to go back into the community to help others that they know are in need," he said.

Hidalgo's dream job is to create a national-education program that would provide mentors

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at public schools to support struggling students' academic efforts.

The U.S. must face reality that the majority of students attending schools in low-income neighborhoods are falling through the cracks, she said. The number of homeless children and those living in foster care are increasing. Without a stronger support system these students are at risk for dropping out, she said.

Individuals can overcome tough odds, Hidalgo said, counting herself as a survivor of a broken home, but children shouldn't have to do that on their own.

Hidalgo said she ran away from home on a Christmas day when she was in middle school. Her alcoholic father had beaten her because she refused to bring him a beer, she said.

Hidalgo bounced from friend's home to friend's home until she was old enough to work full time in high school and afford her own apartment.

"I had one goal in life and that was school," she said.

"It was the only thing that no one could take away from me. It was the only thing no one could say I wasn't good at. It was the only thing that was mine."

Hidalgo said she thinks she lived, and is thriving, because she is meant to be an advocate for abused children.

"I look at every scar on my body and I think I survived it," she said. "But I want to make sure that other kids are doing more than just surviving, I want to make sure they're living."

Koppell is a believer in Hidalgo's spirit.

"Spending time with Shela and the other scholars makes you feel optimistic about the future because there are a collection of really bright students out there looking to make a difference," he said.

"They're going to be where the solutions come from."

Spirit of Service Scholars

Read more about the lives and accomplishments of ASU Spirit of Service Scholars: spiritofservicescholars.asu.edu

Want to invest in the scholarship? Visit spiritofservicescholars.asu.edu/support or contact Jennifer Kabrud at 602-496-0408 or jennifer.kabrud@asu.edu.

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