



*USA Funds® is a nonprofit corporation that works to enhance postsecondary-education preparedness, access and success by providing and supporting financial and other valued services.*

# Education Partnerships

## **USA Funds Programs Promote Early Awareness of Higher-Education Options**

**H**igher education is the key that unlocks brighter futures for today's youth, but many families need more-complete information about the value of education following high school, the range of education options available to them, and the wide availability of financial aid. USA Funds offers two programs to meet this need — the new USA Funds Consejos and USA Funds Unlock the Future®.

### **USA Funds Consejos**

Latinos are the nation's largest minority group and the fastest-growing segment of the population. Unfortunately, Latinos also have the lowest high-school- and college-completion rates of any racial or ethnic group. Many Latino students would be first-generation college students and have unique needs.

To meet the unique cultural needs of the Latino population, USA Funds teamed up with the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships to develop the early awareness program USA Funds Consejos. The program is designed to provide Latino students and their families more-complete information about the value of a postsecondary education, the education options available to them, and the availability of financial aid.

USA Funds Consejos is adapted from *Éxito Escolar*, NCCEP's college-access curriculum.

Erika Read worked for The College Crusade of Rhode Island when she became familiar with a module of *Éxito Escolar*. She saw the module at a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs conference last year.

"I was blown away by the DVD. It really tells the story of how it is for minority students and their families," says Read. "It is a great tool and one that is really needed. The DVD focuses on the family unit, and that is not just important in the Latino culture, but in all cultures."

That module became the basis of USA Funds Consejos, which provides information from *Éxito Escolar* in a one-time presentation along with supporting materials.

Released in September 2007, USA Funds Consejos is presented in the popular telenovela format, and features the characters of brothers Robbie and David Chavez and



**Kyle Malone, USA Funds manager, access and outreach, presents USA Funds Unlock the Future to families at Crispus Attucks School in Indianapolis.**

their family as they plan for their future. Their experiences provide a springboard for discussion and activities designed to help students and their families along the path to higher education. The program allows presenters to customize the presentation to the particular audience that they are trying to reach — whether that includes middle-school students, parents or entire families.

The complete USA Funds Consejos kit includes:

- ◆ A 40-minute DVD presenting the story of Robbie and David Chavez.
- ◆ A guide to assist in planning, preparing and facilitating the program.
- ◆ Workbooks for students and their families.

### **USA Funds Unlock the Future**

Intended for a general audience, USA Funds Unlock the Future introduces students and their families to the benefits of and options for education after high school. The program offers easy-to-use video presentations and separate presentations for students and families.

Each USA Funds Unlock the Future kit includes:

- ◆ A 20-minute video hosted by middle-school students featuring real people and their real stories.
- ◆ A 30-minute "Oprah-style" talk-show video with segments covering the value of higher education for their children and financial-aid availability.
- ◆ An easy-to-use "how-to" guide for facilitators.
- ◆ Fliers to help with promoting the presentation.
- ◆ Take-home materials for participants.

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# Selected grants awarded by USA Funds April 1, 2007-June 30, 2007

USA Funds awards grants to advance its nonprofit mission to enhance postsecondary-education preparedness, access and success.

## Indiana Dollars for Scholars

*Indianapolis*

**Project** General Support

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$65,239

The mission of Indiana Dollars for Scholars is to “expand access to higher education and to encourage the education preparation of Indiana students.” The state network includes 102 Dollars for Scholars chapters serving more than 231 Indiana communities.

## Maryland Higher Education Commission

*Annapolis, Md.*

**Project** College-Planning Calendar and Spanish Translation

**Geographic Scope** Maryland

**Amount** \$58,213

This 16-month calendar, distributed to all Maryland high-school juniors, provides tips and important dates to remember in the college-admission and financial-aid process.

## Riley Hospital for Children

*Indianapolis*

**Project** School Program

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$50,500

The school program at Riley Hospital for Children helps children, adolescents and teens with chronic or life-threatening illnesses to be successful in school and prepares them to re-enter their own schools after extended absences.

## American Indian College Fund

*Denver*

**Project** “Flame of Hope” Gala 2007

**Geographic Scope** National

**Amount** \$50,000

The event will raise funds to support student scholarships at 32 tribal colleges.

## Circle City Classic

*Indianapolis*

**Project** College-Readiness Program

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$50,000

The quarterly workshop helps eliminate barriers that keep high-school students from attending college. The event features SAT- and ACT-examination preparation and sessions about test-taking strategies, financial aid and career development.

## Hispanic Scholarship Fund

*San Francisco*

**Project** 31st-Anniversary Gala Celebration Alumni Hall of Fame

**Geographic Scope** National

**Amount** \$50,000

USA Funds is a corporate sponsor of this annual event. In its 31-year history, HSF has awarded more than 78,000 scholarships totaling \$195 million to students at nearly 2,000 colleges and universities.

## United Negro College Fund

*Indianapolis*

**Project** UNCF Gala 2007

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$50,000

UNCF’s annual fund-raising events have raised more than \$2 billion over 60 years. Today the organization supports more than 65,000 students at more than 900 colleges and universities across the nation.

## Indiana Black Expo

*Indianapolis*

**Project** 2007 IBE Youth Summit and Back-to-School Rallies

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$40,000

Indiana Black Expo’s Youth Summit encourages participants to have a meaningful and positive effect on society. The grant supports youth-development initiatives and local educational initiatives.

## Parents & Kids

*Jackson, Miss.*

**Project** Regional College Fairs and College Planner

**Geographic Scope** Mississippi

**Amount** \$40,000

*Parents & Kids*, a Mississippi-based educational magazine, hosts college fairs throughout the state as well as college planners for fair participants.

## Indianapolis Public Schools

*Indianapolis*

**Project** IPS Summer School 2007

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$25,000

USA Funds’ grant funded academic summer-school programs in Indianapolis Public Schools, permitting 500 students to advance their education during the summer months.

## The Fund for Hoosier Excellence

*Indianapolis*

**Project** Scholarship Support

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$25,000

The fund encourages outstanding minority students to excel in school and remain in Indiana as leaders. The Fund for Hoosier Excellence has awarded more than \$1.5 million in scholarships to 236 Indiana students.

## Indiana Commission for Higher Education

*Indianapolis*

**Project** 2007 Public Opinion Survey on Higher Education Issues in Indiana

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$20,000

The 2007 Public Opinion Survey on Higher Education Issues is a quantitative, fact-based effort to identify and measure Indiana residents’ perceptions of higher-education options available in the state.

## Indiana Student Financial Aid Association

*Bloomington, Ind.*

**Project** 2007 Indiana College Goal Sunday

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$20,000

Indiana’s College Goal Sunday 2007 provided free assistance to students and parents completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

## United Negro College Fund

*Indianapolis*

**Project** UNCF Vice-Chairs and Donors Receptions

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$20,000

USA Funds supported two events to increase awareness of UNCF’s annual scholarship campaign.

## Girl Scouts of the Hoosier Capital

*Indianapolis*

**Project** 2007 Girls of Distinction Awards and Scholarships

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$15,000

Student scholarships support the Girl Scouts’ mission to “inspire girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism and service so that they become happy and resourceful citizens.”

## National Association of Latino Elected Officials Educational Fund

*Los Angeles*

**Project** NALEO 24th-Annual Conference

**Geographic Scope** National

**Amount** \$15,000

The conference is the largest gathering of Latino elected and appointed officials in the nation. USA Funds’ contribution supported a session about the importance of Hispanic-student access to postsecondary education.

## Barrio Logan College Institute

*San Diego*

**Project** High School Steps to Success Program

**Geographic Scope** California

**Amount** \$10,000

BLCI’s college-preparation programs address the particular needs of first-generation, low-income students and families that are served.

## YMCA of Greater Indianapolis—Urban Mission Branch

*Indianapolis*

**Project** From Day 1

**Geographic Scope** Indiana

**Amount** \$7,000

This summer program introduces incoming freshmen to high school by helping participants develop realistic goals and expectations before beginning the high-school experience.

## Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund

*Washington, D.C.*

**Project** APIASF “Today’s Minds, Tomorrow’s Future” Gala

**Geographic Scope** National

**Amount** \$5,000

This organization focuses on the scholarship needs of Asian- and Pacific Islander-American students.

## Council for Opportunities in Education

*Washington, D.C.*

**Project** 26th-Annual Conference

**Geographic Scope** National

**Amount** \$5,000

The COE annual conference promotes college-access initiatives and honors staff of Federal TRIO programs throughout the nation. COE’s programs related to postsecondary-education access include Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and Educational Opportunity Centers.

## State Higher Education Executive Officers

*Boulder, Colo.*

**Project** 2007 SHEEO Annual Meeting

**Geographic Scope** National

**Amount** \$4,000

USA Funds continues to support this annual event for state-level coordinating boards focused on governing, financing, academic policies and other higher-education interests.

# USA Funds Staffers Combine Passion for Baseball, Higher-Education Access to Help Inner-City Youth

Julie Ragsdale and Sean Ragsdale each have loved baseball since childhood, and today baseball still is a big part of their lives. Fortunately, the USA Funds staff members can combine their love of baseball with their outreach to the community.

Since 2004 Julie Ragsdale, USA Funds senior corporate counsel, has served on the board of directors of Play Ball Indiana. As secretary for the board and a member of the executive committee, she is involved in a variety of roles, including raising funds, writing bylaws, developing long-term strategy, and volunteering for the many events the organization hosts throughout the year. Her husband, Sean Ragsdale, USA Funds' finance specialist, also is a volunteer with Play Ball Indiana.

This year, Julie Ragsdale also is spearheading the Sandlot Lunch, the organization's main fund-raiser in the fall. The event will feature Marty Brennaman, National Baseball Hall of Fame sports announcer and long-time radio voice of the Cincinnati Reds.



Julie Ragsdale of USA Funds, right, joins fellow coach Danny Wilson, left, and their Play Ball Indiana softball team at the RBI World Series Regional Tournament in Pittsburgh.

Play Ball Indiana works with inner-city youth, building good character and fostering responsible behavior while encouraging development of baseball and softball skills. Since 1996 the overall number of teams in Play Ball Indiana has grown to 100 from 24, with more than 2,000 young baseball and softball players in the program each year.

"I truly believe in the work we do at Play Ball Indiana," Julie Ragsdale says. "It's great seeing kids have something positive in which to put their energy and passion."

Mike Lennox, Play Ball Indiana executive director, has been with the organization for 11 years and has known organization board member Julie Ragsdale since she got involved with Play Ball Indiana.

"Julie is the type of person you wish you could clone," says Lennox. "She is willing and able to do everything. She coaches, she coordinates events — anything we need, she is always willing. She has been a great asset to our organization."

## USA Funds Programs Promote Early Awareness

(continued from page 1)

Since its introduction in 2003, USA Funds Unlock the Future has reached approximately 21,000 students and 7,000 parents.

Students and families continue to report the need for early awareness materials. A recent USA Funds Unlock the Future focus-group discussion with students and parents in San Francisco reinforced the idea that middle school is an appropriate time to introduce postsecondary-education preparedness to students. The discussion demonstrated that students and parents are passionate about postsecondary education, but often encounter barriers in areas such as confidence, fitting in, information and access.

Lalia Sarah, Learning Community coordinator at the Sunnyside Learning Community in Tucson, Ariz., oversees USA Funds Unlock the Future as

In July, the Ragsdales coached a group of inner-city-high-school girls in preparation for the RBI World Series Mid-Atlantic Regional Tournament in Pittsburgh. The coaches drove the girls to the tournament to compete with softball teams from other states.

On the way home from the tournament, the group made a special visit to the Flight 93 Memorial, near Shanksville, Pa., site of the crash of a hijacked airplane on Sept. 11, 2001.

"The tournament was a great time for the girls, but the visit to the memorial was a unique experience for the girls — and for me," says Julie Ragsdale. "That is the great thing about Play Ball Indiana. The kids have a great time playing and learning about baseball, but they get so much more out of it than just baseball."

The team left a signed softball along the wall of hundreds of memorial gifts.

The Ragsdales also volunteered at the annual Pitch, Hit & Run Competition at Victory Field in Indianapolis. This year, 81 kids between the ages of 7 and 14 competed in pitching, hitting and running challenges. The top-four winners then went to a regional competition at U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago.

Julie and Sean Ragsdale's work at Play Ball Indiana also provides them with the opportunity to talk to children about their postsecondary-education plans and give advice and encouragement.

"Sean and I work with the kids to help them learn about college, scholarships and ways to pursue an education," Julie Ragsdale says. "Through my position at USA Funds, I have a thorough understanding of financial aid, and I can share that with these kids. I truly feel we enrich their lives beyond baseball."

Julie Ragsdale joined USA Funds in 2003. As part of USA Funds' legal division, her work spans areas such as intellectual property, finance, litigation, insurance, technology, marketing and philanthropy. Sean Ragsdale has been with USA Funds since 2006, handling daily cash operations and banking relationships and assisting with investment operations. ■

part of the Learning Communities initiative. USA Funds helped spearhead the Learning Communities initiative, which focuses services on six communities to improve higher-education access for low-income students.

"USA Funds Unlock the Future has been well received by both students and parents," says Sarah. "It opened up the discussion, and attendees were very engaged. It showed us that middle school is a great time to start exposing kids to these messages."

For more information about USA Funds Consejos or USA Funds Unlock the Future, visit [www.usafunds.org/access\\_and\\_outreach/early\\_awareness](http://www.usafunds.org/access_and_outreach/early_awareness) on the USA Funds Web site. ■



Sean Ragsdale of USA Funds assists 9-year-old Jay Burton at the annual Play Ball Indiana Pitch, Hit & Run Competition at Victory Field in Indianapolis.

# Encouraging Success for All Students

By Arnold Mitchem

President, Council for Opportunity in Education

Every September heralds a new academic beginning for millions of American college freshmen. Doubtless the vast majority of these freshmen have every expectation of completing college and earning their degrees.

But we know that's not how the story ends for far too many students, particularly if they are low-income.

Consider these statistics: Slightly more than half of all high-income college students earn their bachelor's degrees by age 24. A disappointing 20 percent of middle-income students have earned four-year degrees by the same age. And only a shocking 7 percent of low-income students who enter college complete their bachelor's degrees by age 24.



Turning the retention rate around at any institution starts with knowing who your at-risk students are and what obstacles they face.

Arnold Mitchem

Of course, a variety of factors contribute to the dismal outcomes. The following are among those factors for students:

- ◆ Inability to pay for college.
- ◆ Need to commit substantial time to work, family and peer pressures.
- ◆ Lack of academic preparedness.
- ◆ Initial institutional choice. (Low-income students are less likely than their wealthier peers to attend institutions offering traditional routes to the baccalaureate.)

Those of us in the educational-opportunity sector try to bolster those degree-completion numbers with innovative programs and strategies that help low-income students stay in school. Our programs are effective, but our reach is finite. Federal TRIO programs, outreach initiatives geared toward students from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example, serve only 7 percent of the eligible population.

## Targeting those with most need

That's why we need more thoughtful, aggressive and broad-based retention efforts on behalf of our most-disadvantaged students — the kind of large-scale efforts on which large institutions can take the lead and set a better example for all of higher education.

Recently, the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, the research arm of the nonprofit organization I lead, published an important report based on an in-depth look at 14 large public universities. Aptly titled “Demography Is Not Destiny,” the report

suggests ways that large public institutions can increase the graduation rates of their low-income students.

Funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, the Pell research revealed institutional retention practices vital to student success, including the following:

- ◆ **Personalizing the undergraduate experience**, by making early contact with freshmen; closely monitoring student progress through advising; limiting class size; and providing individualized support in special programs.
- ◆ **Emphasizing the teaching mission**, by acculturating new faculty to the mission and rewarding faculty for supporting it.
- ◆ **Creating a shared sense of community** by promoting student involvement, even at campuses whose enrollment is largely comprised of commuter students.
- ◆ **Developing an institutional culture that promotes success** with strong leadership, clear goals and commitment of resources.

Rather-small details can translate to major obstacles for low-income students. Sometimes students are simply unaware of the available resources. Sometimes seemingly modest special fees for services pose an unintended barrier. And sometimes highly desirable retention services are offered at times when working students cannot take advantage of them. The bottom line is that public universities could do a much-better job of targeting their resources and supporting low-income students.

Turning the retention rate around at any institution starts with knowing who your at-risk students are and what obstacles they face. That is why our Pell Institute, with a grant from USA Funds, is conducting a two-year project to increase institutional understanding of retention barriers and opportunities.

Pell staff, under the direction of retention expert Vincent Tinto, are developing retention “audit tools.” Initially the researchers are working with four-year public universities in Maryland. Institutions will use and refine the tools to better identify and understand their low-income students, and ultimately serve them more effectively.

Some colleges and universities are to be commended for already welcoming low-income students onto campus and working hard to provide the support needed for the students to graduate. But more can be done, and it falls to the American public to demand more from our colleges and universities in ensuring that more students graduate. Join me in urging U.S. colleges and universities to take a new, hard look at student retention, investing more time, energy and resources in helping more students graduate.

Because our country cannot afford to waste talent, and because enhanced retention will put more low-income students on the path to successful lives and careers.

And because completion matters. ■

## For more information

The report “Demography Is Not Destiny” is available on the Web site of the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, [www.pellinstitute.org](http://www.pellinstitute.org).