



CONNECTIONS

Growing in Strength, Leadership, and Vision



Unlocking Doors to a Brighter Future

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Conntac's Forty-Seventh Annual Breakfast

By Karen Touch



From left to right: Donna Hardaway, Dr. Peter Rosa, Cecilia Nugent and Kenneth Armstrong

In concluding her report, Mrs. Nugent told the audience that, "Everyone comes to us from different walks of life," and asserted in the end, "We pounded the pavement!"

Following the Executive Director's presentation, was the introduction of the keynote speaker, Dr. Peter Rosa, who was described as a legacy himself. Dr. Rosa took the stage humbly and continued to highlight the importance of education at any age or location. He stated he was "Not ready to give up on any generation" as he continued to stress that every entity was important; using statistics of nearby regions such as Hartford to support his point.

This year's Friend of CONNTAC Award was graciously accepted by Dr. Elsa Nunez, President of



Photo Above: Dr. Elsa Nunez

On Friday, October 17, 2014, CONNTAC, Inc. held its 47th Annual Breakfast Meeting. This year's theme was Mobilizing Access and Success, Through Education. The theme was delightfully emphasized by keynote speaker Dr. Peter Rosa and Friend of CONNTAC, Dr. Elsa Nunez. Old and new friends with a common goal of signifying the benefits of education as a means of opportunity gathered to congratulate ten CONNTAC scholarship recipients from across Connecticut. At the beginning of the event, a musical selection titled "I believe I can fly" performed by Kecia Holden filled the room with grace and encouragement as the audience listened

intently.

After the program welcome and invocation, Executive Director, Cecilia F. Nugent delivered the program's Educational Access Update Report. This report brought to light many accomplishments and challenges the organization faced during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. As reported, during the period of September 2013 – August 2014 CONNTAC, Inc. served:

- A total of 3,096 students
- 85% of individuals assisted were from low income first generation backgrounds
- 65% of individuals advised were enrolling or reenrolling into post-secondary education

Conntac's Forty-Seventh Annual Breakfast

Mobilizing Access and Success

Eastern Connecticut State University, as she captivated the audience with her story of coming from a family that could not give her much, materialistically. But as a result of her family's moral sup-

port and love while growing up, she was motivated to become academically successful. Dr. Nunez's narrative of her personal experience was heartfelt and relevant for many of the scholarship recipients

as she ended with the statement, *"Do things for your family."*





Conntac's Forty-Seventh Annual Breakfast

Mobilizing Access and Success



Photo Above: 2014-2015 CONNTAC Inc. Scholarship Recipients

*Back Row: Edna Velasquez, Deneen Kelly, Jeanette Pacheco, Umar Shahid, Bhunikaben Patel
Front Row: Ginamarie Mazzucco, Katy Scotella, Evangelista Himely*



Photo to the Right: CONNTAC, Inc. Board of Directors

*Back Row: James L. Williams, Mashal Ebadi, Ceylon Cicero, Ana Gonzalez, Anita B. Schmidt, Kenneth G. Armstrong, Lawrence Hall
Front Row: Dian Brown-Albert, Donna M. Hardaway, Lordes Cruz, Cecilia Nugent*



Conntac's Forty-Seventh Annual Breakfast

Mobilizing Access and Success



Photo to the Left:
CONNTAC, Inc. Staff

Back Row:

Margarita (Daisy) Aiken,
Laura Balckwell,
DeShayla Shelley,
Jay Holley, Karen Touch,
Erica Coleman,
Taisha Ayala

Front Row:

Jacqueline Perez,
Arlette Taylor, Ruth Baez,
Daila Hunt, Cecilia Nugent



2013-2014 Scholarship Recipients

Evangelista Himely, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College

Field of Interest: Criminal Justice

CONNTAC Representative: Karen Touch



Evangelista is a Criminal Justice major at Housatonic Community College. She is one of four children raised by a single parent, and she plans to be the first in her family to graduate from college. She has remained on the Dean's list while juggling a full-time job and being a single parent herself. Upon completing her Associate's degree, she plans to transfer to Sacred Heart University to pursue a Bachelor's degree and ultimately become a Probation Officer. Evangelista gives thanks to her CONNTAC Counselor, Karen Touch, for helping her with financial aid documents and scholarships. "Karen has been so helpful, understanding, and caring. I appreciate her taking the time out to answer all of my questions." Evangelista shares that the scholarship will

assist her with purchasing books and other necessities that are needed for college.

Deneen Kelly, Wethersfield, CT • Attending Charter Oak State College

Field of Interest: Health Information Management

CONNTAC Representative: Erica Coleman



Deneen is an adult learner who has worked in the medical field for 30 years. After her divorce, she worked two jobs and volunteered in the community all while being a single mother. She is also working on overcoming bankruptcy, foreclosure, and rebuilding her credit. Deneen's goals are to earn her degree, save for retirement, and help improve the efficiency and safety of the healthcare system. She is grateful to her CONNTAC Counselor, Erica Coleman, for providing her with a fee waiver and introducing her to this scholarship opportunity. Deneen explains that the scholarship will help ease the financial burden for her to further her education, including the cost of books and school supplies.



2013-2014 Scholarship Recipients

Ginamarie Mazucco, Wallingford, CT • Attending University of Connecticut

Field of Interest: Human Development and Family Studies/ Psychology

CONNTAC Representative: Widelyne Moise



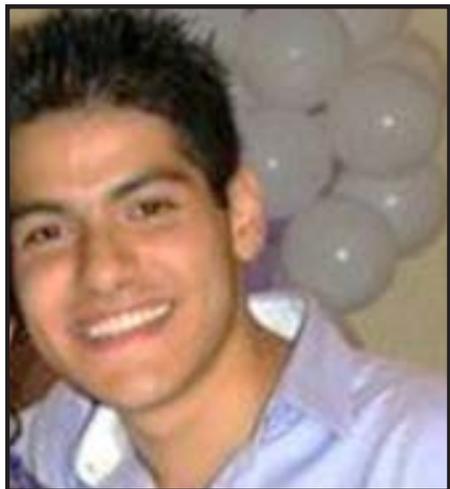
Ginamarie is currently double-majoring in Human Development & Family Studies and Psychology, at the University of Connecticut. She plans to go on to graduate school to study Social Work upon completing her Bachelor's degree. Her ultimate goal is to work for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and then the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), investigating violent crime or civil rights violations against young children. Ginamarie is a participant in Project Academic Advancement, a member of the Future Educators' Club, and she holds a job on campus as a fitness/ kickboxing instructor. She credits her CONNTAC Counselor, Widelyne Moise, for assisting her with completing her financial aid application. "Many of my scholarship and grant opportunities would not have been as easily accessible without Wide-

lyne's assistance. My family has greatly benefited from the 'miracle work' of Widelyne." Ginamarie shares that the scholarship will help her avoid taking out another student loan.

Alejandro Ortega, Prospect, CT • Attending University of South Carolina

Field of Interest: Chemistry

CONNTAC Representative: Arlette Taylor



Alejandro transferred from Naugatuck Valley Community College and is now in his first semester at the University of South Carolina. At the age of fifteen, his late father and his mother were divorced. Following the divorce, he moved back to Mexico with his mother and his brother in hopes of a fresh start. Unfortunately, his mother began to battle with depression, so Alejandro worked full-time at a night club at 15 years of age to provide for his family. Once he returned to the United States, he completed his high school education at Waterbury Adult Education and graduated as the Valedictorian of his class. While at Naugatuck Valley Community College, he was a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, President's Circle, and he worked in the Tutoring Center. He thanks his CONNTAC Counselor, Arlette Taylor, for waiving his application fees. Alejandro says that the

scholarship will bring him one step closer to being able to fund his education and pursue his dream of becoming a Chemist.

2013-2014 Scholarship Recipients

Jeanette Pacheco, Bristol, CT • Attending Naugatuck Valley Community College

Field of Interest: Respiratory Therapy

CONNTAC Representative: Arlette Taylor



Jeanette dreams of becoming a Respiratory Therapist, making a difference in the lives of others on an everyday basis. She admits that although her single mother tried her best to give her and her brother a good life, she hung out with the wrong crowd and got into trouble a great deal. She became a teen mother, and subsequently dropped out of high school. Later, Jeanette attended Waterbury Adult Education and earned her high school diploma in 2006. She has also done volunteer work at New Britain General Hospital. She expresses gratitude to her CONNTAC Counselor, Arlette Taylor, for helping her with her financial aid application and for encouraging her to continue her education and earn a degree. "Ms. Arlette Taylor is a fantastic woman. She gave

me tips and support on solving problems and making good decisions." Jeanette explains that the scholarship will assist with the cost of tuition.

Bhumikaben Patel, Berlin, CT • Attending Tunxis Community College

Field of Interest: Nursing

CONNTAC Representative: Erica Coleman



Bhumikaben "Bhumi" Patel migrated to the United States with her family from India. She plans to make her parents proud and be the first in her family to graduate from college. She describes being a Nurse as her dream career because she will make a difference in the lives of others and provide miracles. She expresses extreme appreciation for her CONNTAC Counselor, Erica Coleman, for helping her with the college application and financial aid processes, step by step. "Erica is patient, delightful, and she helps students like they are her own children. She has encouraged me and helped me plan for my future." Bhumi shares that the scholarship will assist her with college expenses.

2013-2014 Scholarship Recipients

Katy Scotella, Plainville, CT • Attending Central Connecticut State University

Field of Interest: English/ Creative Writing

CONNTAC Representative: Erica Coleman



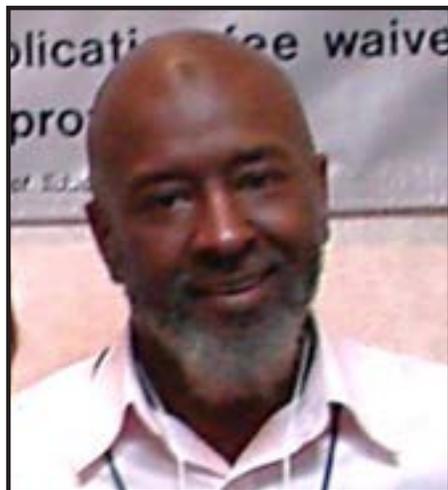
Katy graduated from Tunxis Community College last year, and she is currently attending Central Connecticut State University. During her years at Tunxis, she was Theater Club President, Editor-in-Chief of the school newspaper, and President of the Student Government Association. Katy also experienced numerous health scares throughout her college journey that still remain present today. These health issues include Kidney problems, Fibromyalgia, Interstitial Cystitis, and a head-on collision that resulted in back and leg pain. Additionally, her mother is battling health issues as well, is unemployed, and unable to drive, so she works hard to take care of her too. Through all of her hardships, Katy holds school as her number one priority. In the future, Katy hopes to become a writer and also have her own column in a newspaper. She credits her CONNTAC Counselor, Erica

Coleman, for assisting her with the financial aid process along with any concerns that she has had. "Erica has been assisting me for many years, and I am thankful for her and for all of the help that she has provided me." Katy explains that the scholarship is a blessing, and it will help her with health bills, college textbooks, and supplies.

Umar Shahid, New Haven, CT • Attending Gateway Community College

Field of Interest: Legal Assistant

CONNTAC Representative: Shontisha Kinchen-Askew



Umar is a student at Gateway Community College who has plans of ultimately becoming a Legal Assistant. He has made the Dean's list and holds a commendable 3.7 GPA. Since being released from incarceration, Umar has been engaged in educational programs that provide information on adapting to social change. He understands the need to be informed and competitive in this diverse world and that the whole climate of learning and communicating has changed. He appreciates his CONNTAC Counselor, Shontisha Kinchen-Askew, for assisting him with filing the financial aid paperwork, waiving fees, and encouraging him to pursue his dream of earning a degree. "Shontisha helped my transition from the jail cell to the classroom go smoothly." Umar shares that the scholarship will help him purchase a computer that will be an essential component in obtaining information.

2013-2014 Scholarship Recipients

Edna Velasquez, Stamford, CT • Attending Norwalk Community College

Field of Interest: Social Work

CONNTAC Representative: Laura Blackwell



Upon earning her Associate's degree at Norwalk Community College, Edna plans to transfer to a university and earn a Bachelor's degree. She aspires to become a Social Worker so that she can provide professional help to those in need. She has overcome many obstacles, including a language barrier and having to work hard to support herself after moving from her parents' home due to family problems. However, she is determined to keep pushing forward and working hard to accomplish all of her goals. She expresses sincere gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Laura Blackwell, for guiding her through the application and financial aid processes. "Mrs. Blackwell has told me to stay focused on what I want in life. She has been very supportive, and I want to make Mrs. Blackwell proud and for her to know

that her time spent with me was worth it." Edna explains that the scholarship will help her financially because she is on her own with her academic pursuits. She also plans to purchase a computer to aid in completing her homework and projects.

CONNTAC, Inc. Alumni Spotlight

Sania A. Beckford is a native of Bridgeport, Connecticut, who graduated from Harding High School's International Baccalaureate Program and is the eldest of five siblings. She was awarded a CONNTAC Scholarship in 2007.

Upon receiving her scholarship, Ms. Beckford pursued her educational goals in pre-medical studies and graduated from Boston College's Connell School of Nursing with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing in 2011. During her time as a student at Boston College, she was recognized and awarded with the Boston College

Connell School of Nursing's Jean A. O'Neil Achievement Award and the Boston College Connell School of Nursing's Keys to Inclusive Leadership in Nursing (KILN) Award.

Ms. Beckford is currently a registered nurse at Bridgeport Hospital in the cardiology/telemetry unit. In addition, she is a member of Bridgeport Hospital's Nursing Shared Governance: Quality & Safety Committee and Bridgeport Hospital's HUSH (Help Us Support Healing) Campaign. She has also been recognized as an Honorable Mention at the Patient Experi-



ence Conference in October 2014, and as an Honoree at Bridgeport Hospital's 2014 Annual Employee Recognition Dinner.

Are You An Independent Or Dependent Student?

By DeShayla Shelley

Early in December 2014, a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) workshop was hosted by CONNTAC, for New Haven Adult Education Students. During the workshop, the students who were expected to graduate at the end of that month, were guided through the FAFSA application process as a group. One of the main issues in filling out the FAFSA is determining one's dependency status, especially in the confusing dependency eligibility section.

Often times, students are uncertain about whether they are an Independent or Dependent student. If you classify yourself as an Independent student, then you do not need to provide your parents'

income information. However, if the student is a Dependent, then she/he will have to provide that information.

In the dependency eligibility section of the FAFSA, if the student answers yes to any of the following questions, the student is an Independent:

- If you are 24 years of age or older, in the military,
- Have dependents that you provide more than 50% financial support
- Are married the day you submit your FAFSA
- Was at one point since turning

13 or is currently in legal guardianship or a ward of the courts

If a student cannot say yes to any of the criteria listed, they are indeed a Dependent student. Whether the student lives with their parents or if the parents claim them as a dependent, does not qualify or disqualify the student's dependency status.

For example, a single 22 year old student who lives alone, with no children or dependents of their own, who files their own tax return, is still considered a Dependent and will need to provide their Parents' tax return.

However, a single 22 year old student who lives alone, no children or dependents of their own, who files their own tax return, but has been in foster care at one point of their life after the age of 13, is considered an Independent because they would be able to say yes to one of the dependency eligibility questions.

Knowing the correct dependency status can result in a successful FAFSA completion. This would result in a smooth admissions process.

Photo to the Left: Educational Counselor, DeShayla Shelley guides students step by step through the FAFSA



2014 Veteran Stand Down Event

The Veteran Stand Down Event took place on September 12, 2014, at the Connecticut Veterans Home in Rocky Hill. CONNTAC, Inc. – EOC was represented by Educational Counselor Margarita (Daisy) Aiken.

The Veteran Stand Down event is an annual event and this year's gathering had over 1,500 veterans. There were many organizations represented; for example, Connecticut Social Services, Connecticut DMV, and Judicial Courts. Services provided during the event included

medical screenings, Veteran Benefits both State and Federal, Employment and Educational Assistance. Transportation was provided from all over the state by chartered buses. The veterans and service providers were sumptuously fed with great tasting warm food and great beverage choices as well.

Many veterans stood in lines for hours at The Stand Down for free clothes and blankets that were handed out.

CONNTAC's table and banner was spread and covered

with giveaways. There were CONNTAC brochures and flyers, free canvas bags, t-shirts, coffee mugs, and travel mugs. About 45 veterans came to the table interested in learning about CONNTAC and the services it provided. Many of the veterans weren't aware of the Federal Pell Grant for which many of them could be eligible.

There were a few veterans who felt very comfortable disclosing some of the struggles they endured while they were in military service and after their service ended. The 2014 Veteran Stand Down was a touching and memorable experience.



Photo to the Left: Commissioner Linda Schwartz, Department of Veteran Affairs & Margarita (Daisy) Aiken, Educational Counselor



Connecticut's College Goal Sunday

College Goal Sunday (CGS) is a national event held annually for students and their families who seek assistance in completing the nerve-wrecking "Free Application for Federal Student Aid" (FAFSA). In addition, individuals are able to receive in depth explanations and advice on the financial aid process, state and federal financial

aid programs and scholarships. This year, on Sunday, January 25, 2015, Connecticut hosted 15 College Goal Sunday sites throughout the state with student and professional volunteers from educational programs within the communities. CONNTAC, Inc. – Educational Opportunity Center has had the pleasure of being a part of the

CGS event every year, as staff and counselors volunteer their time to assist in creating a well-organized and resourceful experience for students and families.

*Photo Below:
Volunteers at the Meriden Center of Middlesex Community College*



What's New In CONNTAC?

Board Members Welcome **Ana Gonzalez**, Community Education Liaison from Albertus Magnus College
CONNTAC Support Staff..... Welcome **Nausica Vargas**, Administrative Assistant
Educational Counselors Welcome **DeShayla Shelly**, servicing the New Haven area
..... Welcome **Margarita (Daisy) Aiken**, servicing the Middletown/Meriden area
..... Welcome **Ruth Baez**, servicing the Windham area
..... Welcome **Shoshannah Henry**, servicing the Hartford area
CONNTAC, Inc.'s 2014-2015 Scholarship Application is now available online!.....DUE DATE: May 15, 2015