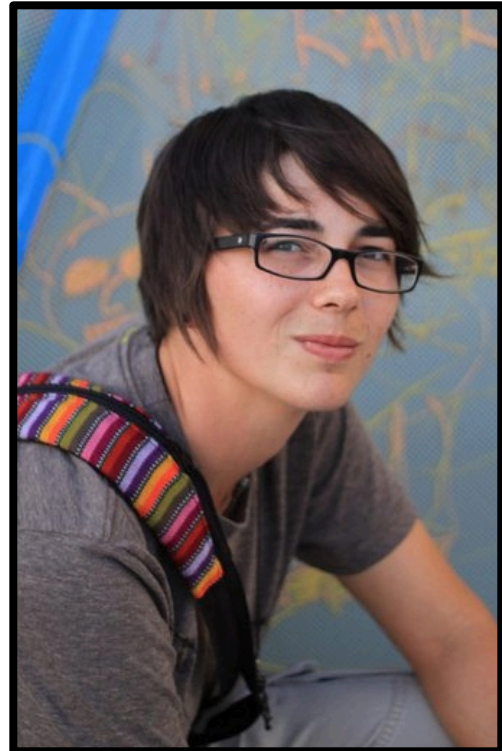


Dear Sponsor of the Naples Garden Club Fellowship Endowed Fund:

I would like to begin by thanking you for your generosity. I think it is great that folks and organizations like you find it worthwhile to make a contribution to another person's success, it is very admirable. It is my personal philosophy that things like this help to build better communities, which aligns with my long term goals. It is difficult to imagine that someone else would want to help another person when there is no direct payout. Perhaps you've been in my shoes before and understand the difficulty of juggling school, work, and family obligations? Either way, the impact of your contribution is substantial.

Since I started at FGCU I have had to work at least full time. My family is not in a position to offer me much financial assistance, but help out where they can. There have been a few semesters I've had to come part-time, because I couldn't afford tuition. Last year, my mom became disabled, which has served to increase financial stress.



On several occasions, I've considered quitting school, but my family, especially my grandfather (who we all call Pa), has been very supportive in my ambition as I will be the first in my family to attain a Bachelor's Degree. It is honestly crazy to think that I have pushed this far. Statistically speaking, most students who don't enter college directly from high school never finishes a four-year degree. This December, I will become one who has.

My college experience is reminiscent of a position I took in Baltimore over the summer working for a non-profit organization working with inner-city youth. These kids really believed (and in many ways had been shown) that there were no options beyond their circumstances; It was foreign to them to hear about opportunity. After working with them for a short period, I realized that they shared some of the same limitations I faced growing up: single parent homes, limited income, the necessity to work at a young age, etc. These kids only needed a chance, and they were more than happy to rise to the occasion. This experience helped me to clarify where I see myself in the future.

The days I spent in Baltimore teaching these youth about conservation pushed me beyond where I had been previously, into a space well outside my comfort zone. One of my professors (Dr. Everham) has always said that true learning occurs in these spaces. I know that my degree will read 'Environmental Studies', but I had wondered what it really meant. It's the application of what I've learned so far that is the real definition of my education.

Many people view themselves as being separate from the environment, which couldn't be further from the truth. Environment, as most broadly defined, is any space which supports life. Where you're sitting, right now is an environment, however altered or unnatural it may be. I feel it is important to bridge this gap between the perception of environment and ourselves. I have gained much insight into the complex relationship between a person and the space they occupy through my experiences. It is necessary to begin making positive changes in the places we neglect most.

By working with the youth in Baltimore, I really saw that the most impact is made when you can help another see beyond what they know. Opportunity is the window into many things: by helping those who have never peered through, everyone is the benefactor. Writing this has made me realize we probably share many ideals about the importance of a person's impact on another as well as the environment.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

Take Care,

Heidi Marie Stacy