



Annual Report

AY 2020-2021



Guardian Scholars

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Introduction

The Guardian Scholars program transitioned to the Division of Student Affairs this year as a University-sponsored student support service for students in foster care. The mission of the program is to promote self-sufficiency while equipping students with tools for a successful transition into college, career and life. The Guardian Scholars program provides a variety of supports for program participants including academic support, success seminars, program and community events, and financial support. Within the Guardian Scholars, students are connected to peers who shared similar childhood experiences and a network of professionals to support their unique challenges on campus.



Program Demographics

This year the program served 16 individuals who fall among the Universities highest risk students. Our students universally face maximum financial need with zero expected family contributions (EFC) and have a large overlap with 21st Century Scholars and Pell Grant recipients. The Guardian Scholars program serves underrepresented students with 56% of program participants this academic year identifying as students of color. All Guardian Scholars are also overcoming trauma backgrounds and the ongoing effects of instability in their families of origin while they are pursuing their post-secondary degrees.



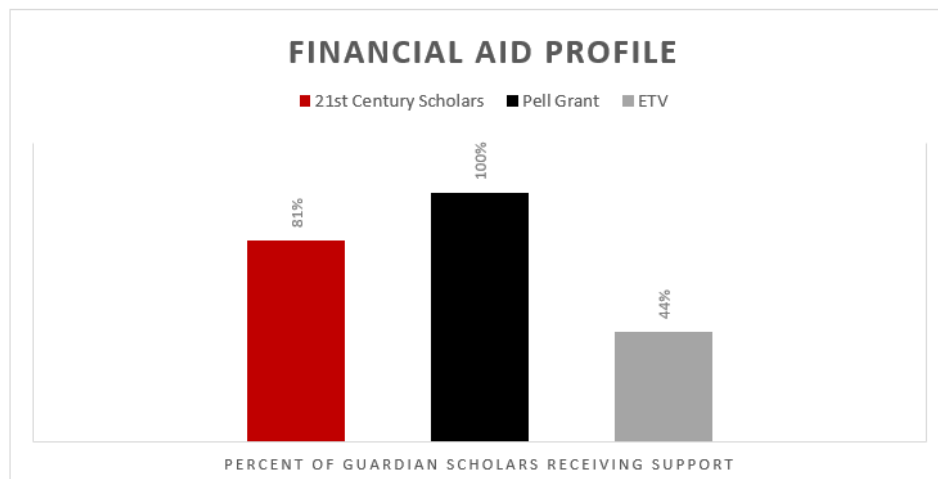
AY 2020-2021 Program Demographics



C= cohort
= program admittance year

* new to program
^ returned to program after period of withdrawal

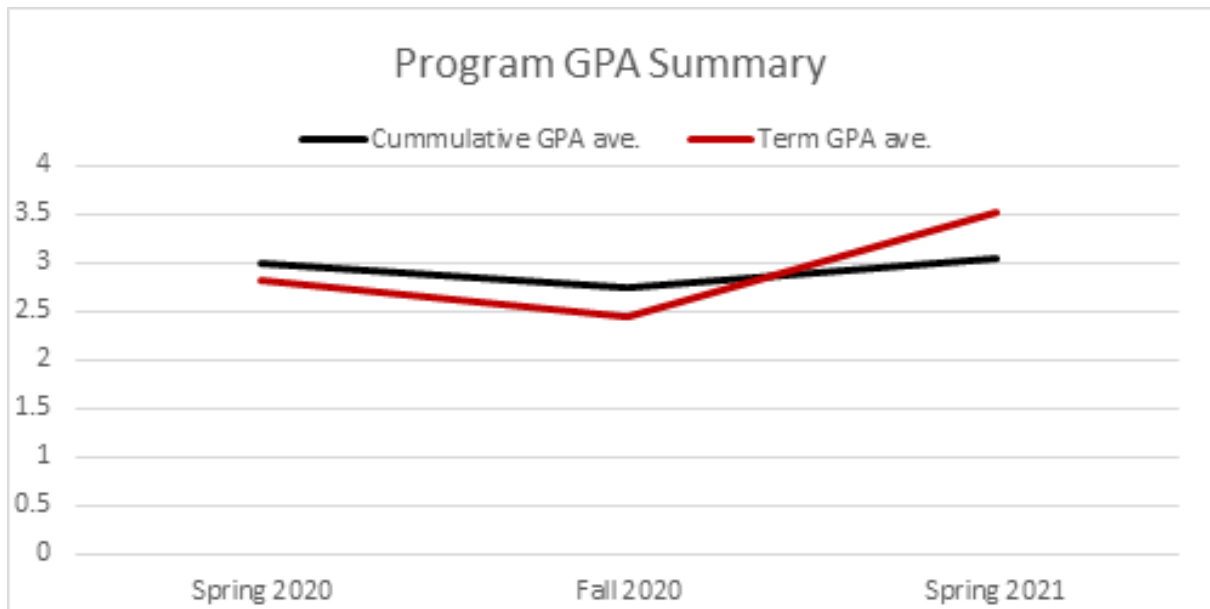
\$ program graduate
advanced class standing



Graph 1

Academic Support

Academic support provided to program participants included weekly or bi weekly academic coaching meetings, study tables, intercampus referrals and academic awards/recognition. Academic coaching meetings occurred both in person and over Zoom based on student preference and current health and safety requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students received desktop calendars and completed individual comprehensive semester mapping with the program coordinator. This allowed the coordinator to be acutely aware of each students course work in order to provide the appropriate reminders, referrals and encouragements during the semester. Meetings often addressed factors outside of coursework that impacted students' ability to succeed in classes including mental health and wellbeing, boundary setting, unmet immediate basic needs (food, housing/household) and financial need. Academic coaching meetings are of highest importance and are a required component of the Guardian Scholars programming. Program GPA averages and attendance rates are documented in the tables below.



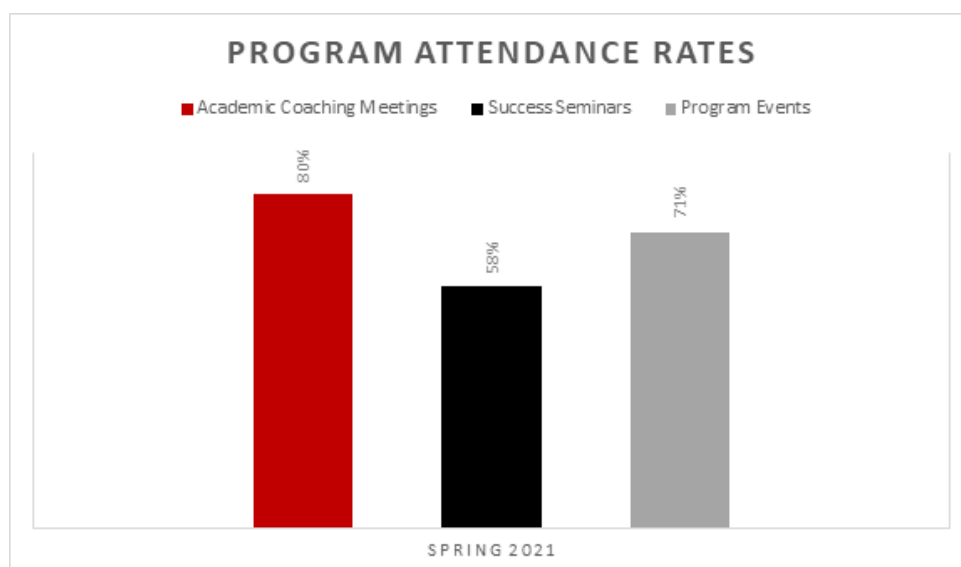
Graph 2

Academic Support

(continued)

Students who were new to the program (2) or who were on academic probation (3) with the program (GPA below 2.5) were required to attend one hour of weekly study tables provided in the Student Center. Study tables were offered three days a week for four hours each day totaling 12 hours of availability per week. Students were encouraged to attend study tables before or after their coaching meeting, held in an adjoining room. These combined interventions positively contributed to all students seeing significant increases in term GPA's in the Spring 2021 and all returning students earning non-probationary status for the upcoming year.

Access to campus supports through program referrals was also an important part of the academic support offered to Guardian Scholars students. Students were provided consolidated access to information about support services through a page in the newly created program Canvas Community. They were also introduced to professionals in support areas through seminar presentations and referrals to supportive services as needed.



Graph 3

This year the program introduced a new awards program including two ongoing award categories: GPA Club and Academic Growth. Following each term students who achieved an overall GPA above 3.0 were awarded certificates identifying them as members of either the 3.0, 3.5 or 4.0 Club. Any student who increased their overall GPA received an Academic Growth certificate recognizing their effort regardless of GPA. Graduates also received framed program certificates as well as miscellaneous gifts donated from the Foundation and partner organization Prevent Child Abuse Council of Delaware County.



Success Seminars

A new format for supplementary seminars was introduced this year. Seminars were delineated into three tracks including campus, life skills and career prep tracks. Guardian Scholars students worked with the coordinator to determine their individual needs for program seminar content. Students were offered hybrid tracks based on their personal interests, needs and availability. Students were required to attend all seminars offered in their track and were welcome to attend any seminar of interest. Seminars were interspersed throughout the semester and attendance was offered either in person at the Student Center or via Zoom as a virtual option. Most seminars were also recorded allowing for a playback option to be posted in the Canvas Community. All students had four required seminars in their tracks.



Program Events

We were excited to hold four annual program events this year with the purpose of celebrating holidays and student accomplishments together. We also launched a new format for celebrating student birthdays. Program events are an important part of creating an environment within the program that fosters a sense of connection and friendship among the students and professionals involved. The following summaries provide a detailed look at the program events held this year.

Fall Kick Off Event

This event was held at Games & Frames in the Student Center and included an opportunity for socialization while bowling. The program was in the midst of transition at the time of this event and student morale had yet to be fully restored, but we were pleased to have provided this opportunity for connection in the midst of both the transition and pandemic.

Winter Break Bash

This holiday party was held at the Student Center before the students left campus at Thanksgiving for an extended time away due to COVID-19 precautions taken by the University. Students enjoyed catered appetizers, snacks, desserts and holiday drinks while playing games and doing holiday related crafts together. We also recognized our two program graduates with certificates, gifts and stoles. All students also received Winter Break Boxes again this year. These tote bins full of food, household and winter necessities, gifts and gift cards totaled nearly \$300 in value per student, including over \$150 in gift cards.



Program Events

(continued)

Spring Open House

Students were invited to drop in to an open house style event upon their return to campus at the onset of the Spring semester. Those who attended enjoyed snacks, socially distanced games and camaraderie with others.

End of Year Celebration

We ended the year with a fully catered meal and awards celebration held at the Alumni Center. Students were entertained by an interactive superlatives slideshow while enjoying their meal. We also recognized our 2021 Scholarship Recipient and the four program graduates with certificates, gifts and updated stoles.



Birthday Meals

During the Spring semester we implemented a new program tradition of celebrating student birthdays with a corporate meal at the student-run university restaurant Allegre. Quarterly birthday meals occurred in the months of March and April recognizing the eight students who had birthdays in Jan-March, and Apr-June respectively. Students enjoyed the fine dining experience, casual lessons in meal etiquette and a birthday card with a \$25 gift card.

*see Funding section regarding funding sources for program events

**see Graph 3, page 6 for Program Event attendance rates

Partner Events

The Guardian Scholars program is fortunate to have several community groups who have been committed to investing in our students for many years. Upon program transition, considerable attention was given toward reestablishing and maintaining the relationships between the program and the two most significant partner organizations: Prevent Child Abuse Council of Delaware County and Tri Kappa sorority.

To maintain the health and safety of our students and community the program restricted student exposure to outside groups and did not hold any partner events on or off campus this year. We are currently redefining and evaluating the role and scope of partner groups for future years. We look forward to maintaining continued partnerships in the Muncie community for the benefit of our program and students.

*see Funding section for partner organization funding roles

Financial Support

Deficits in financial support are among the most common and debilitating obstacles faced by students overcoming foster care in pursuit of post-secondary degrees. Each student's needs and qualifications for supportive measures are unique. The Guardian Scholars program coordinator worked closely with professional staff in the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships, Office of Retention & Graduation and Office of Student Financial Services to provide individualized financial support for each student.

Many students in the Guardian Scholars are eligible to receive substantial funding through the Department of Child Service's Education & Training Voucher (ETV) program and the 21st Century Scholars program (refer to Graph 1, page 3). Students received supportive services from the Guardian Scholars coordinator as they sought to maintain these primary funding sources. Students were provided information and counsel on additional resources such as SNAP/TANF, stimulus money/taxes, completing their FAFSA, filing appeals, housing subsidies, and other scholarship opportunities. We also had an emphasis on financial literacy in our success seminars in the spring semester.

The Guardian Scholars program also provided its own program funds for scholarships this year. In a typical year program scholarships are merit and application based annual scholarships of \$2,500 that are renewable from the onset of the prize award for up to four years. Prior to the transition to Student Affairs, the Guardian Scholars program committed to providing every eligible program participant up to \$5,000 in scholarship funds as a one-time award. Based on current donations, this is not a sustainable level of giving for the program to maintain. The practice of giving program participation scholarships also failed to reinforce the types of positive academic behaviors and active program participation that should be demonstrated by scholarship recipients. For those reasons we implemented a competitive application and interview process for scholarship determinations for the upcoming year.

With the support of a Scholarship Review Committee, we selected an outstanding sophomore student as the 2021 Scholarship recipient. This student will be joining two others as our ongoing scholarship recipients.



COVID Adjustments

Like the rest of the campus and world, the Guardian Scholars program learned how to implement new practices in order to prioritize the health and safety of our students during the COVID-19 pandemic. At all times, the program acted in compliance with state, local and university policy regarding recommended and required health and safety measures. The program was able to provide uninterrupted, high quality student support and programming, while using creative strategies to engage with students both virtually and in-person.

We were proactive in providing the most current options and accommodations to continue holding safe, meaningful and engaging program activities within the context of the pandemic. Some of those accommodations included offering both virtual and in-person options for program activities including utilizing Zoom, outdoor meeting spaces, wearing masks and making room reservations and catering selections which would allow for socially distanced meetings and events.

As it becomes safe to resume pre-COVID activity, we will be making decisions on which aspects of virtual attendance will be retained as an exception but will encourage in person connection in the future for the emotional well-being of students and relationships formed within the program.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Initiatives

The Guardian Scholars program, as a student support service, reflects Ball State University and the Division of Student Affairs' commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Foster care disproportionately affects families with low socioeconomic status and of underrepresented groups, as such we understand that program participants face significant barriers to post-secondary degree completion. The growth and continued success of the Guardian Scholars program supports the campus *Inclusive Excellence Plan goal 1: Recruitment* as more students exiting foster care make Ball State their school of choice because of this program.

All program services are designed to support the campus *Inclusive Excellence Plan goal 2: Retention*. Each graduate who exits the Guardian Scholars program is overcoming tremendous odds. Current statistics indicate that only 61% percent of students exiting foster care in Indiana have earned a high school diploma or GED by age 19 (National Youth in Transition Database Survey, 2019). Though 61% of youth would be eligible to pursue post-secondary schooling, only 1% reported being enrolled in college. Nationwide it is estimated less than 2% of foster youth graduate from college. This year our program recognized five graduates. Each graduate of the Guardian Scholars represents the University's commitment to providing the highest level of care and support to marginalized students and the incredible resiliency demonstrated by the student.

Cohort 19 (8) Retention		
Freshmen	5/6	83%
Upperclassmen	1/1	100%
Transfer	1/1	100%
Overall	7/8	88%

Table 3

PROGRAM TRANSITION RETENTION RATE

100%

16/16 STUDENTS CONTINUED
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION
POST-TRANSITION

AY 2020-2021 PROGRAM GRADUATES

5

GRADUATES LENGTH OF TIME
REQUIRED TO EARN DEGREE:
20% IN 4 YEARS
60% IN 5 YEARS
20% IN 5+ YEARS

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Initiatives

(continued)

Inclusive Excellence Plan goal 5: Culture and Climate of Inclusion is also supported through the Guardian Scholars program. Students who previously felt or feared feeling neglected on campus find a place of belonging, acceptance and support within the program. Their gratitude for the services and community provided through the program translate into a larger feeling of inclusion on campus.

Professional Development & Recognition

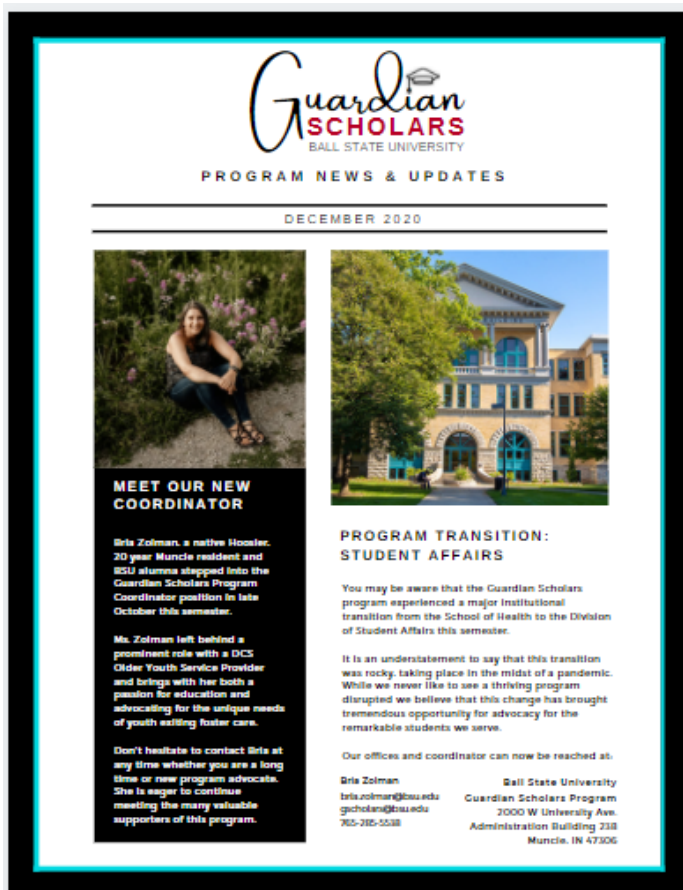
- Mental Health First Aid certification, January 2021 (Bria Zolman)
- *Understanding Implicit Bias & Microaggressions: Everyday strategies for success* workshop, April 2021 (Bria Zolman)
- New Professional Staff of the Year Award Winner, Division of Student Affairs, April 2021 (Bria Zolman)
- Inclusive Excellence Award Nominee, Division of Student Affairs, April 2021 (Bria Zolman)
- *Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization* book club, Division of Online and Strategic Learning, June 2021 (Bria Zolman)

Funding: Donors & Grants

The Guardian Scholars program has a robust network of passionate donors and partner organizations. Donors receive quarterly e-newsletter and can invite the program coordinator to speak at events or meet individually. Efforts were also made to update and enhance the program website for improved recruitment and donor relations. The program was also an engaged participant in One Ball State Day fundraising efforts.

Speaking Engagements

- Prevent Child Abuse Council of Delaware County, February 2021 Board Meeting (Bria Zolman)
- Delaware County Probation Office, April 2021 (Bria Zolman)
- Exchange Club of Muncie, April 2021 (Bria Zolman)



Funding: Donors & Grants

(continued)

Gifts that are received into the program are categorized as in-kind or monetary donations. The program coordinator also applies for grant funding to support programmatic initiatives when applicable. Grants received in AY 2019-20 were granted extensions and allowed repurposed allocation due to the timing of the program transition and student needs by the partner organizations Prevent Child Abuse of Delaware County and Tri Kappa. New grant applications for both of these organizations were also submitted for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Monetary donor gifts represented 79% of external program funding, 13% came from in-kind gifts and 8% of contributions were grant awards in AY 2020-2021. Monetary gifts were assigned based on donor choice to support either general programmatic expenses supporting student supplies and event costs, or the program scholarship fund. In-kind donations supported gift cards for student birthdays, graduation gifts, Winter Break Box donations and other miscellaneous gifts.

New Initiatives

AY 2020-2021

Upon program transition to Student Affairs, much attention was given to understanding former program components through capturing student voice and communicating with the previous program coordinator. It was our intent to retain program components of significant value to students while introducing new or improved services to program participants. The following list summarizes the new elements of programming introduced this year.

- General Program Administration
 - Canvas Community created for comprehensive program administration and ease of student participation
 - Remind App classroom established for program communication (texting) among program participants
 - New program logo designed and all marketing and files updated to reflect rebranding
 - Complete website redesign
 - New program application process/qualifications launched
 - Program merchandise including t-shirts, long sleeve dry-fit shirts and decals purchased for student immediate need and community building
 - Personal donor communication and mailings via quarterly e-newsletters, Scholar Spotlights and thank-you cards.
- Academic Support
 - Semester Mapping project with program provided desktop calendar
 - Virtual option for coaching meetings
 - Study tables offered 12 hrs a week in the Student Center
 - Academic award/recognition program established: 3.0-4.0 Clubs, Academic Growth
 - Miscellaneous student care packages coordinated
- Success Seminars
 - Seminars differentiated into tracks to provide smaller, relevant learning experiences
 - Virtual option for seminars implemented with playback option for non-attendees
 - Negotiated with catering to provide sustainable option for refreshments being provided

New Initiatives

(continued)

- Program Events
 - University compliant catering utilized for food and beverage needs at all events
 - Alumni gifts provided to program graduates by donation from Foundation
 - Alumni Board holiday encouragement mailing campaign
 - Graduation gown closet established
- Financial Support
 - Database of DCS, campus and community financial and immediate need support services provided via Canvas Community.
 - Guardian Scholars Scholarship funds issued to all eligible program participants as a one-time gift of up to \$5,000 based on need.



SCHOLAR Spotlight

SENIOR ~ PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR

FUN FACT: ASHLEY WILL BE ATTENDING GEORGE MASON FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE IN INDUSTRIAL & ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Describe the path that brought you to Ball State:

I was always told that I would go to college, but I never had any direction as to how I was going to get there. I am a first-generation college student who managed to get to where I am through sheer dedication and resilience. This is some of my story:

I was just a baby when my parents divorced. When that happened, my dad moved back to Cincinnati and my mom stayed in northwest Indiana. I spent most of my childhood with my mom and lived with my dad on and off throughout the years. It can be difficult for me to recall what my childhood was like, but there are some things I do remember.

I remember living in a seven-person home with my mom, my grandma, my grandma's boyfriend, my two aunts, my uncle, and myself. Every night I would go to sleep, but my mom wasn't there to say goodnight to me. I would wake up in the morning and she still wouldn't be there. She worked as a nurse at that time, but I had no idea that when she wasn't at work she was partying. I cherished the time that I did get to spend with my mom, but at the end of the day she was not actually raising me. In fact, my grandma was the one who took care of me the most aside from myself. At a young age I did my best to meet my needs on my own, but there are just some things you have to be taught. Unfortunately, I've found myself playing "catch up" in my adulthood to make up for the neglect I experienced in my childhood.

When I was in high school my mom began to abuse narcotics so bad to the point where my siblings, my stepdad, and I would watch her fall asleep mid-sentence. She would drive my siblings and I around under the influence, speeding and nearly getting into accidents. I would find needle caps, empty alcohol bottles, and the remnants of plastic drug baggies all over our home. I became obsessed with investigating my mom's addiction. In a time when I needed to focus on discovering myself and what my future warranted, I was co-parenting my siblings and trying to get my stepdad out of denial about my mom's drug use.

That's when DCS intervened. My mom was removed from the home, and I had to step up and take on the role of a mother at 17 years old. I cooked for my siblings, told them when they needed to bathe, and put them to bed at night because my stepdad worked nights. However, during this time I decided that I would go away to college – which ultimately landed me here at Ball State University. At the end of the day, I'm thankful that DCS intervened because my status as a ward of the court opened up many doors (such as financial aid, grants, and scholarships) that I previously wouldn't have had access to.

My mother and father are both drug addicts who were never fit to be parents, and that resulted in a very traumatic upbringing. Nonetheless, I have come out on top. I learned how to survive so that I could someday get out of my terrible situation. Now I focus on healing the emotional damage that was given to me by my parents, completing my undergraduate degree in Psychology, and making plans to pursue graduate studies at George Mason University this coming fall.





How has your experience in college been different or similar to your peers?

Luckily for me the hardships that I faced allowed me to file as an independent on my FAFSA. This gave me more access to grants and loans than a lot of my peers. However, I don't think sacrificing my teenage years to my parents' addiction was necessarily a "win" by any means even if I did receive more financial aid.

What role has the Guardian Scholars played in your life on campus?

Unfortunately, I joined Guardian Scholars a little late in my college career. I did not know about Guardian Scholars until I was a junior. I have only been a part of this program for about a year. Although I haven't been around long, there are so many aspects of this program that have helped me.

The best part about Guardian Scholars for me was the connection that I made with my program coordinator, Bria. It's been really nice to have someone in my corner who understands my struggles and who I feel like I can talk to about anything. Bria has been very supportive of me and my goals, and she is great at encouraging me.

Guardian Scholars has also given me access to a lot of resources that I otherwise would have not known existed. For example, through Guardian Scholars I learned about Foster Care to Success and the ETV program that provides funds for students who were in foster care. Also, thanks to Bria, I was made aware of Indiana's food benefits being extended to college students. I applied for SNAP benefits and it has made my life so much easier being able to afford something as simple (but necessary) as groceries.

I wish that I had known about the program earlier on, but I have made strong connections that I know will last for years regardless. Hopefully, once I leave Ball State, this program will continue to grow and help other students who grew up with similar hardships to mine.

