



HARVESTING SCHOLARS

Just over five years ago, Gloria Calhoun noticed a disconnect in her rural northern Georgia community.

She works in professional development, focusing on adult education, degrees, and certificate programs. She saw that a lot of what she spent her days doing was the same information college-bound high school students needed, but no one in her area was talking about it.

"It just kind of spilled over. Just taking that experience and helping students learn the difference between a technical college and a certificate program, an associate's or bachelor's degree, it just spilled over," Calhoun said. "I saw there was a need. There was a gap there and that's just kind of how this really got started."

In 2015, her vision came to life and Harvesting Scholars was born.

"First of all, I want to change the mindset of students and families. I'm sure others who work

at CBOs and others who work in this industry have noticed that families like to wait until the very last minute. Typically, they'll wait until their high school graduation, until they're waiting to walk across the stage to say, 'Oh yeah. What am I supposed to do next?' There is no plan," Calhoun said.

"My goal has been education and to increase the number of low-to-moderate income students that apply and get accepted into colleges."

She started by hosting college fairs for her community. The first fair featured six local colleges, but nearly 200 students and their families showed up.

The turnout proved the need and the desire to change the college-going culture in her community.

"We're called Harvesting Scholars because we're sowing the seeds of information to get people thinking. My main goal is to ensure that there is equal access to information for college admission and to be that added support in the



community," said Calhoun, the founder and president of Harvesting Scholars.

"I know the counselors are busy in the high schools, so my team at Harvesting Scholars, we've just been working diligently to increase that number. We're starting to see some movement."

By this past February, her college fair had grown to 30 colleges and more than 400 students and families in attendance. Harvesting Scholars also hosts college tours and offers a college and

career mentoring program, connecting students to leaders in various careers. The organization offers resources for finding scholarships, applying for financial aid, and athletic recruitment.

Harvesting Scholars also stresses the need to start thinking about college well before your senior year of high school. The group offers resources for middle school students as well as high school students and parents.

Calhoun said she finds it incredibly rewarding to hear from total strangers in her community that her organization has inspired them to start thinking about college and creating a plan. Those encounters are a real measure of success for her.

But a couple of stories really stick out to Calhoun, who is better known as “Miss Glo” or “Mama Glo” to the students she works with.

This year, there were two low-income students she worked with. Both of these students hold a special place in Calhoun’s heart and she met them when they participated in a college tour funded by a NACAC Imagine Grant. The Grant paid for the tour transportation and for one of these students, it changed his entire outlook on the future.

Neither one had done well on the ACT nor had any support or guidance in the areas they excelled in and were passionate about.



One was an athlete, but no one was videotaping his track meets or knew how to walk him through the athletic recruitment process. Calhoun, who had been through the process with her own children, was able to help him get a full-ride athletic scholarship to Tennessee University.

The other didn’t even have college on his radar until he attended the Harvesting Scholar college tour.

His grades improved after seeing his college options and gave him a goal—to attend college and to play in the band. Calhoun worked with him through the audition process and helped him secure a scholarship to Albany State University (GA).

Now, nearly five years since her organization’s inception, Calhoun is looking to keep the momentum going to grow Harvesting Scholars and reach even more students.

She still works as an online professor at Geneva College (PA) in the adult degree program but wants to make Harvesting Scholars her full-time career.

She’s hoping NACAC and its members can help her reach two of her biggest immediate goals—to get more schools to her college fairs and to find a mentor that can help her expand the reach of Harvesting Scholars.

“I’m dedicated to the cause, to whoever I can reach, and however many people I can reach. The sky’s the limit and I’m willing to do the work,” she said. “It’s really needed and I get so much fulfillment and joy out of doing it.” □

—Ashley Dobson