

THE CHARLOTTE W. NEWCOMBE FOUNDATION

**What Student Letters Tell Us:
The Impact of 2009-10 Newcombe Scholarships
on Mature Women Students and
Students with Disabilities**

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**What student letters tell us: The impact of Newcombe Scholarships
on Mature Women Students and Students with Disabilities
2009-10**

Overview

Each year, hundreds of students write to the Newcombe Foundation offering individual thanks for scholarship support. Some institutions require students to write these letters but most simply encourage students to communicate with benefactors. As far as we know, the content of these letters is not written according to a prescribed text, and so can be read as representing the authentic voices of Newcombe Scholars. The huge majority of letter writers go beyond a perfunctory “thank you,” sharing their stories about the challenges they face while working to complete degrees, their dreams for the future, and telling about how receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship has impacted their academic and personal lives.

We decided to undertake an in-depth study of the 377 letters received from 2009-10 scholarship recipients in the Foundation’s programs for mature women students and students with disabilities, categorizing and tabulating comments from Newcombe Scholars in order to gauge the difference that receiving a Newcombe Scholarship makes in the lives of student recipients. We recognize that data from this study does not represent all Newcombe Scholars from 2009-10; only 50% of all recipients wrote to the Foundation (377 letters from 748 recipients in currently funded institutions). In addition, we recognize that the comments made by students are free expressions, without direction or in response to a survey-style question, and written without any expectation that the Foundation would be charting their words. As such, the data should be read as indicators of student gratitude rather than exact measures of the impact of the Newcombe Scholarship. Also, interpretation of recipient language while collecting this data may also be subjective. However, it is clear from the data collected that although virtually every student commented about the financial benefits provided by the scholarship, the letters contain twice as many comments about the non-financial benefits triggered by receipt of the scholarship.

Most writers speak of the multiple benefits, both financial and personal, realized from receipt of the scholarship. As a result, close to 1500 comments from the 377 student letters received were counted and categorized. The 289 letters from mature women writers include 402 comments about the financial benefits provided by the scholarship, but also contain 806 comments about the personal impact the Newcombe Scholarship has had on their lives. The eighty-eight letters from students with disabilities contain ninety-nine references to different aspects of financial help provided by the scholarship, and 187 comments about the value of the scholarship in providing emotional and personal support. These findings support the idea that receipt of a Newcombe Scholarship provides much more than just money; recipients testify to increased self-confidence, greater motivation to achieve, and affirmation of educational goals.

Letters written by recipients of Scholarships for Mature Women Students

The Foundation received 289 letters from the 533 mature women who were awarded Newcombe Scholarships in 2009-10. Recipients who wrote to the Foundation told personal stories of lives renewed by opportunity, about hope for the future, and about how the scholarship impacted their lives and the lives of their families. No letters were received from recipients at six of the thirty active institutions and, as a result, the voices of 119 Newcombe Scholars from those colleges and universities are not represented in this study.

Two-thirds of the letters received from mature women students refer to **general tuition needs** that were met through receipt of the scholarship. Stories include those of recipients whose family circumstances make it extremely difficult to pay tuition and fees, recipients who have been laid off from or reduced to part-time in their employment, recipients who have been hindered by finances during their multi-year struggle to earn a degree, and recipients who are trying to lift themselves and their families from the limited life of poverty. Although none of the comments made by the scholars can be classified as “typical,” recurrent themes appear among the letters. One student at West Chester University said,

“Thank you so much for helping me earn my college degree. As a single mother it is difficult trying to make ends meet, especially in this economic time. It can be a great challenge for women to go back to school when they have other obligations and duties required of them. Life doesn’t always go as planned. I will finally graduate in December after six years of struggle, and that day means so much to me.”

And, from a student at University of Maryland, Baltimore County:

“It is with gratitude that I write to thank you for the Newcombe Scholarship. I am a mother of three children and a junior at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Please know that the financial assistance you have given me is greatly appreciated. I work full-time and take care of my children, and your scholarship makes it possible for me to continue toward my goal of earning a degree.”

In addition, one-third of the letters mention that the Newcombe Scholarship made the difference in **allowing recipients to remain in school**. Some students even found themselves ineligible for student loans or other financial support necessary to allow them to complete their final year of study. A Hunter College student said,

“I applied for the scholarship last year when I was facing an increasingly problematic financial burden from school tuition and the housing costs of living on my own in Manhattan. The scholarship came at a time when I was working two part-time jobs and considering taking a semester off from school to catch up on some of the mounting debt. The award has kept me in school.”

From a student at La Salle University:

“Without this scholarship, I would have had to drop out of school in my senior year. I have attended school part-time for the past seven years to get to this point in my education and I was notified at the beginning of this semester that I had exhausted all my loan eligibility. My dream of earning this degree would be dead without the Newcombe Scholarship.”

Nearly 10% of the recipient letters mention that receipt of the scholarship **reduced the student's dependence on loans**. As mature women, many have family responsibilities and children who need financial support as they grow and especially as they approach college age. Reducing the amount borrowed can have a significant long-term impact on a family. One example of a comment from a Misericordia University student:

“As the mother of five children, four of whom are still at home, it is difficult to budget money for daily living expenses, much less pay for me to earn my degree. As I look forward to the future, I realize that any debt will hinder my children's future education. This scholarship allowed me to reduce the amount I had to borrow and so gave me peace of mind when thinking of my children.”

In addition, reducing reliance on loans benefits mature women whose degrees qualify them for professions (such as social work, teaching, or nursing) that typically offer salaries that exceed their current earning potential, but that would not provide enough, in an entry level job, to support a family while being burdened by a large debt. As so aptly related by a La Salle University recipient,

“I am so thankful that because of the scholarship, I do not have to take out as much in loans to pay for my classes. I have been through a terrible divorce and have three children to support and the financial strain is great. I know that by becoming a nurse I will have more options for work, but I also know that it will take a while to get myself on my feet and catch up with all the debt I've already accumulated.”

Since many adult women must continue to work as they pursue their degrees, this financial necessity often requires sacrificing time that scholars should spend focusing on their studies (as do traditional students) or on their families. According to nearly 15% of the Newcombe Scholars who wrote to the Foundation, receipt of the scholarship allowed them to **reduce their work hours**, providing them the opportunity to participate in internships, provide better care for their families, and indulge in focused study. As one Newcombe Scholar at Douglass Residential College of Rutgers University said,

“Your aid allows me to focus on school, on learning what will help me become what I want to be, instead of worrying about the cost of living. When I began this degree, I was working 20-35 hours a week on top of a full course load. I questioned my decision to return to school many times. My husband took the burden of supporting our family upon his shoulders and I feel guilty each time I see his tired face. With your scholarship, we have been able to reduce my student loans and he no longer has to work all the overtime he was doing, and I no longer have to work so many hours. As a result, my GPA has seen a healthy increase.”

And another from Cedar Crest College:

“I am currently working two jobs; one full-time and one part-time to make ends meet. I am also a single mother. Receiving the scholarship from the Newcombe Foundation will allow me to cut back on my work hours and apply for an internship next semester that will give me valuable work experience that relates to my course of study. I know how important this time will be for my future and I am grateful for the opportunity.”

An additional 11% of letter writers expressed gratitude for the **help in financing childcare, transportation, books or other necessary expenses** related to attending a college or university. Finally, about 6% of the letters identify receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship as key to helping them stay on track to graduate or move up an expected graduation date, providing enough funding to take additional courses that, without Newcombe help, would have been beyond the student's financial ability. An example of the dilemma experienced by these recipients:

"I had been out of school for four years because, even though I missed being in school, I could not afford the tuition. Finally, I was able to return but could only afford to take nine credits a year. With the Newcombe Scholarship, I matriculated for eighteen credits this year and am looking forward to graduating and celebrating this long haul. This would not have been possible if not for the generosity of your Foundation. I can now begin fulfilling my lifelong dream of becoming a teacher." (Fordham University)

Within the 289 letters written by recipients in the Scholarships for Mature Women program, there are 806 comments that refer to the personal and emotional support scholars enjoyed on receiving a Newcombe Scholarship. Nearly 54% of recipients cite the **sense of pride, encouragement, and/or affirmation** they experience that carries them forward as they worked to complete their degrees. The importance of the Foundation's faith in the academic ability, career goal, and determination of each Newcombe Scholar translates into increased enthusiasm for the educational path being navigated. Among the most common statements were those that said, "I have never gotten any recognition before and for that reason, this means so much to me." And, "Your belief in me has made me so proud of my decision to finish my degree. The knowledge that someone out there thinks I can do this makes me determined to accomplish my goal."

Other Newcombe Scholars said:

"I am so honored and grateful to have been selected to receive the prestigious Charlotte W. Newcombe Scholarship. This scholarship not only provides financial support, but the encouragement to continue my studies, no matter how difficult, is worth so much to me. This scholarship is my positive beam of light that shines over me. I want to make everyone at the Foundation proud." (Georgian Court University)

"While the funds provided by the scholarship provide some relief, this scholarship is, for me, mostly about encouragement. I am raising my children here alone, with no family around. It is so heartening to me to find people who extend a hand in support along my journey toward successful self-sufficiency. I feel renewed and encouraged, with a new determination to succeed." (University of Maryland, Baltimore County)

"I appreciate the faith the Foundation has in me as a student. It makes me very happy to know that a vital organization like yours would consider me worthy. I face many challenges, but it is so nice knowing that even at the most difficult moments I have people that believe in me." (Gwynedd-Mercy College)

The Newcombe Scholarship is also valued among recipients for its **recognition of academic accomplishments**. Comments from over 30% of these letters reflect pride in achievement and growing self-confidence on receiving the scholarship and cite increased understanding of the connection between academic performance and ambitions for the future. For many mature women, finding academic success has been difficult, given the years many have been out of school, and given the time-consuming distraction of family and work. A large number (12%) also refer to the **recognition of their hard work** by family members who supported the scholars through the process of returning to school. Among those who are the first in their families to go to college, academic accomplishments offer encouragement and hope to other members of their families. A representative excerpt reads:

“Receiving this scholarship has been not only a recognition of my academic performance but also a testimony to what can be accomplished through hard work and perseverance. I am a single mother trying to balance it all and although this has been truly difficult, working to finish my degree has been the most rewarding experience of my life. I know that through hard work and determination, anyone can reach a dream.” (Misericordia University)

Another scholar said,

“I just graduated Magna Cum Laude from Rider University. My entire family came to see this momentous event. It made me so proud to be the first person in my family to receive a bachelor’s degree. This was a long and rough journey for me but being awarded the scholarship made me think that I could do it. It feels so good to make my family proud.”

Over 25% of the letters received by the Foundation indicate that receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship **provided incentive to complete degrees**, and over 25% give credit to Newcombe Scholarships **for improved academic performance**. Since many mature women are attending college for the first time and others are returning to campuses after a long absence, it is not uncommon to hear a Newcombe Scholar speak of fear, uncertainty, and lack of self-confidence as she engages in this new endeavor. Many mature women struggle to achieve the level of success of their younger counterparts and few accolades come their way. The Newcombe Scholarship offers affirmation of purpose and worth, as well as a tangible incentive. The most common comments from recipients refer to the “honor” of receiving the scholarship and express commitments such as, “I will make the Foundation proud.” Some additional comments:

“This is a tremendous honor for me and has made me all the more determined to finish my undergraduate education, something that at one point in my life I did not believe I could accomplish.” (Rider University)

“This is the first time I have been awarded such a scholarship. I feel awed, validated, and responsible for ensuring that I make the very most of my educational opportunities, so as to properly steward the honor you have given to me.” (Hunter College)

“I see this scholarship as an obligation to perform and ultimately succeed. As someone with life experience and maturity, I can assure you that I will apply myself to my coursework with the same dedication my future career will require.

The investment you have made in me will not be forgotten.” (Fordham University)

“As an older, returning student, I did not know exactly what to expect when I made the decision to return to school, though I knew there would be challenges to face. The support and encouragement of the Newcombe Foundation has given me increased confidence to surmount all obstacles. Our first week of classes just ended – I can honestly say that I find myself walking a little taller around campus with the knowledge that my academic efforts have been recognized.” (Columbia University)

More than 50% of Newcombe letter writers comment that receipt of the scholarship helped **reduce stress** caused by difficult family or employment circumstances. Although many of these concerns are rooted in limited finances, the psychological impact of dealing with ongoing difficulties can negatively affect academic success. Within this group are single mothers struggling to meet the needs of their children while advancing their own careers, as well as women who have been laid off, are stricken by illness, or who have become family caretakers. Because of the Newcombe Scholarship, comments from these letters claim that the reduction in stress has lifted their spirits, allowing for a healthier, more focused personal and academic experience. For example:

“This scholarship has been a godsend. I was extremely stressed out and worried about how I would stay in school and finish my education, which has been a dream of mine for years. My husband was laid off from his job and I work two part-time jobs. In addition, I care for my mother who has Alzheimer’s disease. The scholarship will allow me to focus on what needs to be done.” (La Salle University)

“I am currently without full-time employment due to a layoff. Although this life-changing event gave me the chance that I needed to go to school full-time, it has left me with some challenging financial concerns. Your generosity has given me peace of mind that my courses are paid for this semester. I cannot thank you enough.” (Rider University)

To many letter writers, the opportunity to be **a role model for children** is very important. Over 20% commented that receipt of a Newcombe Scholarship has not only motivated them to become exemplary students, but has sent a message to their children about the importance of succeeding academically. These recipients invite their children to join them in studying and encourage them to earn a college degree in the future. Many of these Newcombe Scholars are first-generation college students themselves; they are realizing the power of education for the first time, and understanding the significant impact a role model can have in the life of a child.

Some sample quotes:

“I have always tried to teach my children through example. Samantha and Quinn are now in ninth and tenth grades and this is really true since I started my college career. They observe me studying diligently and earning high grades while still being responsible for many of life’s duties. I believe that my education will not only help me but will encourage my children to know that all things can be accomplished if you work hard enough.” (Georgian Court University)

“When things get tough and I talk about quitting school, my children are the ones who encourage me to go on and that things will be better soon. Without them, I would not have made it this far. Because I involved them in my college experience from the start, they now understand the importance of getting an education.” (La Salle University)

“My daughter tells me that I’m her inspiration and her hero because I received Dean’s List honors and am able to balance school as well as home and work. She has written a paper about me for school. This brings tears to my eyes. I know I not only have to earn my degree for myself, but for my children and my husband.” (Misericordia University)

According to over 27% of Newcombe Scholars who wrote to the Foundation, the scholarship **provided an incentive to “give back,”** to get involved in their communities, and to assume the mission of making life better for others. Inspired by Mrs. Newcombe’s story and in gratitude for the gift made to them, these scholars appreciate their good fortune in being made part of the Newcombe family and want to be generous in turn. Some examples of statements made by scholars:

“This scholarship will allow me to move forward with peace of mind and a deep sense of support. This invaluable asset will help to ensure personal success and growth as well as provide the inspiration for humanitarian service in the years to come.” (American University)

“In whatever I do, I will persevere with an even greater determination knowing that the light of inspiration that Mrs. Newcombe carried in her life has fueled my flame of making changes in the lives of those less fortunate throughout the world.” (Kean University)

“Your generosity exemplifies the value of giving to others who may be less fortunate. I realize the importance of reciprocating such a good deed and I will work diligently in order to make a difference in the lives of young women.” (West Chester University)

Finally, over 25% of all letters received expressed delight that receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship was instrumental in **fulfilling a lifelong dream** of earning a college degree. Use of the phrase, “dream come true,” reverberated through these letters, suggesting that earning a degree was an accomplishment that lived only in their imaginations until Newcombe Foundation support helped make it real. For example:

“I have dreamed of attending college ever since I was young and now that I have been named as one of the recipients of the Charlotte W. Newcombe Scholarships, my dream has become a reality.” (La Salle University)

“It was wonderful to receive this scholarship that celebrates those of us with a bit of life experience. I want to earn a degree to work with people with autism. This has been a dream of mine for years. Many thanks for supporting the dreams of those that hope to make a difference in the world.” (Hunter College)

“It is and always has been my goal to turn this dream of receiving my degree into an accomplishment.” (Towson University)

(See appendix on page 16 for more details.)

Letters written by recipients of Scholarships for Students with Disabilities

Of the 215 students who received scholarships in the Students with Disabilities program, eighty-eight addressed the Foundation with a written letter or note expressing gratitude and sharing their stories. No letters were received from two of the eight active institutions in the SWD program in 2009-10. As a result, a significant portion (27%) of scholarship recipients is not represented in this analysis. We are working to remedy this in the future.

Typically, letters from students with disabilities are often less fluent, less extensive, and less personal than those from mature women students. This may be attributed to the disabilities suffered by many of the students, to the fact that many of these recipients are male, or to the more specific and practical nature of some of their scholarships. (If, for example, a Support Scholarship was awarded for purchasing software or another assistive tool, thanks may be offered simply for the purchase of the item.) Since the Newcombe Scholarships for Students with Disabilities can be awarded as either a general cost-of-attendance scholarship (Newcombe Tuition Scholarship) or as a Newcombe Support Scholarship, letters contain comments about the financial impact of the type of scholarship received.

Letter writers included ninety-nine references to several financial benefits realized on receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship. Over 50% made specific reference to the financial support supplied by the scholarship in **helping to pay for tuition, fees and other necessary expenses**. Some scholars tell stories of financial challenges originating in their disabilities (such as inability to work to help pay for tuition). Some have parents who have limited financial means and who have struggled for many years to accommodate their special needs. Others are independent and grateful for the Foundation's help in providing the resources necessary to allow them to strive towards a college degree. For most disabled students, as with mature women, the scholarship provides multiple benefits. Some sample comments:

“I have been very hard hit by the recession but I can breathe a little easier now that I know I can afford tuition and will have access to a tutor who will help me with any academic difficulties I encounter. As a disabled student, I cannot adequately express the value of your assistance.” (Temple University)

“I am so grateful for this tuition aid. I am excited to say that I am now able to afford the summer class that I needed to take with the help of this money. Paying for my education is one of the biggest stress inducing problems I have since starting college.” (Penn State)

“I am so grateful for the financial support. I am working hard and trying to support myself but this is difficult because I am deaf. I am financing my education with loans and help from charitable foundations such as yours.” (LIU)

“After my right leg was amputated, I wondered exactly how I would be able to finish my degree and graduate. I had been supporting myself by working in landscaping. With the help of your Foundation and Penn State's disability services, I can and will graduate.” (Penn State)

Many letter writers (11%) expressed gratitude for the financial assistance that allowed them to **stay in school**, avoiding being forced to drop out due to insufficient funds. Without the ability to get a job to supplement income, and with the increasing cost of

special services necessary for daily life, the financial burden of seeking higher education can be devastating to students, especially in this economic climate. In addition, 8% of recipients give credit to the Newcombe Scholarship for allowing them to focus on their academic work or their health issues rather than financial concerns.

A few sample comments:

“My family, like many others, has been really devastated by the economic downturn in the economy. Without the help offered by your Foundation, I would have been unable to finish my degree. I will always be indebted to you.”
(Temple University)

“This Scholarship means so much to me and is the difference between affording an education and pursuing my dreams and interests and the other undesirable, unthinkable alternative of not being here because I simply cannot afford it.”
(Temple University)

“I have had many family and personal emergencies in the last few months but I have been able to deal with them, partially because of your Scholarship. My worries are less thanks to your generosity. I can focus on other things like maintaining my family, my health, and my grades.” (Brooklyn College)

Newcombe Support Scholarships offer aid to students whose success as college students depends upon special assistance in the form of assistive technology, tutoring, internships and other disability related expenses that go beyond what must be supplied by the institution. Forty-two percent of the letter writers mention the significance of this scholarship support, citing such things as purchasing electronic aids that help with coursework, participating in internships that advance their employment readiness, using tutors who translate routine course material into information accessible to a disabled student, and purchasing necessary personal equipment, like “a new set of ear molds for my hearing aids.” Some sample comments:

“I have been granted a 10 week internship with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. I am studying mechanical engineering and this internship will be a great experience for me now and after college. The Newcombe Scholarship allowed me to take this internship, providing enough money for my first month’s rent, a suit that I need to wear, and some food and gas money. I could not have done this without your help.” (Temple University)

“As a result of this Foundation’s financial assistance, I was able to hire a typist to transcribe several interviews that I conducted for my master’s thesis in urban studies. As I have Duchenne muscular dystrophy, I have practically no use of my hands, so there is no way that I could have performed such a task on my own.”
(Temple University)

“The Newcombe Scholarship has provided money that can be used on my eyes and ears, without which I would be unable to function well in class. This includes fees for hearing aid repairs, one of which can cost a few hundred dollars. I was also able to buy a handheld telescope that allows me to see blackboards better. Finally, it helped me buy books, which are quite expensive but necessary for my success.” (Brooklyn College)

The 187 comments made by letter writers about the personal and emotional support experienced on receipt of the scholarship provide additional insight into the auxiliary

benefits triggered by the financial award. Forty-two percent of letter writers claim an increased **sense of achievement** that provides them with the **incentive to do well**. Newcombe Scholars are introduced to the mission of the Foundation and Mrs. Newcombe's life through distribution of the Foundation's brochure, and, judging by the numerous comments made about "honoring Mrs. Newcombe's legacy," are motivated by the standards established by scholarship criteria. This idea is expressed in the following excerpts from student letters:

"It is apparent that Mrs. Newcombe valued higher education. I, also, have a thirst for knowledge that has helped me throughout my college career. Although this has been very difficult and stressful for me, especially because of my disability, receipt of the Scholarship will help me make it through. I hope to honor Mrs. Newcombe's legacy." (Temple University)

"Over the period of time that I received a Newcombe Scholarship, my GPA has improved. I continue to be motivated to work hard and I am very happy." (LIU)

"I am so honored to represent Mrs. Newcombe at Penn State. I promise to give school my best efforts both academically and socially while continuing to be the kind of person who is deserving of such an honor. Education is a powerful tool, and a means to turning a disability into many abilities. I will make the Foundation proud." (Penn State)

"After my battle with cancer, I knew that there was a lot more that I wanted to accomplish in life. This scholarship helps to give me reassurance that I am on the right track." (Penn State)

In addition, 27% of letter writers feel more **confident in their ability to complete their degrees** upon receiving a Newcombe Scholarship, citing the faith expressed in them by the Newcombe Foundation and the staff at their universities as a morale booster. Almost as many scholars, or nearly 23%, comment that receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship provides affirmation that individuals with disabilities are **capable of accomplishing** a high level of education. In addition, 33% **feel honored** to receive the scholarship, indicating the importance that this award plays in supporting the aspirations of these students, many of whom are not accustomed to receiving honors. Stories of struggles, both physical and academic, ranging in intensity from despair to discomfort, are prevalent in the letters received from these students, with few indications of prior recognition of their efforts. In the words of the students:

"Because of the overwhelming level of my disability, it is very expensive for me to attend college. Life is very difficult for me every day, so it means a lot to me when someone notices. I would not have this opportunity without someone like you offering support." (Edinboro University)

"One of the most important aspects of this scholarship is that it recognizes excellence in light of conditions, be they mental or physical, which for the most part have been a hindrance to many lives. This encourages students to go forth and not be limited by a handicap. This Scholarship made me realize my full potential as a student." (Penn State)

"I am truly grateful to the Newcombe Foundation for standing with me and for your support through the years as I worked for academic success. Your support gave me the courage to go on." (Temple University)

“To be chosen to receive this Scholarship not only means that I can further my education to better my abilities for my career, but gives me more confidence that I can fulfill my academic calling.” (Brooklyn College)

Among recipients of Newcombe Scholarships who wrote to the Foundation, 11% comment that receipt of the scholarship encouraged them to “**give back**,” to work to make their communities a better place and to contribute to the success of others. Several claim that their goal is to follow the example set by Mrs. Newcombe, offering generously of their abilities and resources to others. Student recipients clearly see the scholarship as a valued gift that has offered them the opportunity to give to others, to “pay it forward.” Some quotes from student letters:

“I would like to think that I share Mrs. Newcombe’s dedication to leaving this world a better place than she found it. I intend to donate the proceeds from a book that I have written to an organization that helps those with muscular dystrophy.” (Temple University)

“I promise that I will work very hard to impact the world. Your generosity inspires me to continue my volunteer work, to help others, and to give back to the community in the spirit of Mrs. Newcombe’s legacy. I hope one day I will be able to help students achieve their goals as you have helped me.” (Temple University)

Another 11% of letter writers use the word “**dream**” in thanking the Foundation for the scholarship support. “You’ve made my dream of attending college come true” is a common expression. These comments seem to go beyond the practical and touch the deepest aspirations of students, creating reality out of what was once thought to be impossible for individuals with disabilities. Students who write these words seem to use them sincerely and often refer to years of disappointment and discouragement, falling prey to the limits of their disabilities. A few students said:

“Being an adult student with multi-physical disabilities is extremely challenging. Thanks to the Scholarship, I have the support to complete my dream of earning a college degree.” (LIU)

“When I received my scholarship letter in the mail I was overjoyed. When I presented it to my mother, she cried. I have been struggling with a disease all my life and I never thought I could get a college degree, much less a scholarship. This Scholarship has encouraged me to work hard and to reach for my dream of having a college degree that will lead to a fulfilling career.” (Penn State)

A significant number of student writers (over 20%) state that one of their goals for the future is to find a career or volunteer organization through which they can **help other individuals with disabilities** similar to their own. Quite a few speak about becoming counselors or therapists, using their personal experience as a resource for helping others deal with issues related to disabilities; some also mention offering themselves to organizations that have helped them cope with their disabilities along the way. Receipt of the Newcombe Scholarship, according to the comments within the letters received, has triggered altruism and generosity among these recipients, allowing many to identify themselves as individuals who have something of value to give, changing from being needy to being needed. Some relevant quotes from student letters:

“I suffered a brain injury that resulted in serious and ongoing learning disabilities. Because I never stopped pushing myself, I enrolled at Temple University and I will graduate next fall. Because I was lucky enough to complete my schooling, I plan to dedicate the rest of my life to others who have suffered brain injuries.” (Temple University)

“My goal in life is to become a counselor and to work with survivors of traumatic brain injuries. I know what it’s like to struggle with this issue and I want to share what I’ve learned with other victims of this injury.” (Edinboro University)

“So many people have helped me along the way. I want to use my education to return that gift to others who have challenges in life.” (Edinboro University)

“I would like to become a school counselor, working with children with disabilities. Being able to give back what was freely given to me would be so rewarding. I believe that by living the life of a student with a disability I can understand the needs of other children faced with the same challenges. I feel that everyone should be given the chance to reach for the stars.” (Penn State)

Finally, over 44% of letter writers expressed gratitude for the assistance the Newcombe Scholarship has provided them in their **quest for a fulfilling career**. Although many scholars recognize the obstacles they face, from taking longer than four years to complete a degree to finding an employer who will hire them and accommodate their special needs, there is a hopeful determination and enthusiasm within these letters for eventually finding meaningful employment and a fulfilling career. Although many of the mature women scholars who wrote to the Foundation refer to their career aspirations as a means of lifting themselves and their families financially, students with disabilities are more likely to connect their struggle for higher education to a career that will provide them great personal satisfaction. Quotes from student letters say:

“I have always loved animals. It has always been my aspiration to become a veterinarian. I plan to graduate with a degree in biology and then fulfill my dream and continue my education. I would like to show that with effort, everything is possible. Thank you for believing in me.” (Brooklyn College)

“I am in school because I want to be one of those people that makes a difference, a person that leaves this world a little better off. I want to teach, and to go even further by becoming an advocate for the arts. I don’t want to be defined by my disabilities.” (LIU)

“I have always been interested in technology and how it can help people understand and perform better. I am so grateful that this Scholarship will provide me with the means to earn my degree in this field. I see my success in earning a degree and getting a job in IT as success in overcoming my disability.” (Penn State)

(See appendix on page 17 for more details.)

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to document what Newcombe Scholarship recipients have told the Foundation about how the scholarship impacted their academic and personal lives. The unscripted expressions of thanks have, for many years, provided insight into how individual recipients react to receipt of a scholarship, but the process of categorizing comments made by letter writers has allowed the Foundation to get a better sense of the specific financial and personal benefits they identify.

Perhaps the most striking observation from this study is the extent to which recipients mention the emotional benefit they realize – in the form of encouragement, recognition, and affirmation – and how essential that is in motivating them to work hard and to continue on the path to earning a degree.

Other observations:

- When reading through a large number of letters from a particular institution, subtle characteristics of the students who attend that institution become apparent. For example, letters from Hunter College recipients portray urban, independent women; letters from Cedar Crest tend to reflect more suburban, family centered recipients.
- The individuality and diversity of Newcombe Scholars is represented in these letters, unique in their expression and content. Finding quotations that reflect the whole group is a difficult exercise, since each letter tells such an individual story.
- In comparing the letters received from mature women to those from students with disabilities, there are many more similarities than differences. However, one striking contrast becomes evident when recipients comment about career goals. Mature women recipients often mention that they hope to use their college degrees to find a job or career that will provide financial benefits to themselves and/or their families. Some also refer to moving to a career that is more fulfilling than the job held now, but even those ambitions seem to be measured by the potential for financial gain. However, the overwhelming number of recipients in the Scholarships for Students With Disabilities program who mention career aspirations (44% of letter writers) speak of their hope of preparing themselves for a career that will allow them to function as respected, independent, and contributing members of society.

What is most heartwarming about the vast majority of the letters is their authenticity. Together, the unique expressions of hundreds of individuals convey a heartfelt mosaic of gratitude combined with affirmation, inspiration and commitment to succeed.

