

2010-2011 Annual Report



INVESTING IN KIDS

Because Montgomery County's Future Depends on It

Dear Friends,

Welcome to CollegeTracks. We change lives by giving first-generation-to-college students from Montgomery County the chance to go to and succeed at college.

CollegeTracks was born when we saw a need. For us, the need was personal; it came home with our children. Their friends were capable, hard-working kids, educated in one of the nation's best public school systems—yet they might not get to college. This is because they had no family members who could help them with the complexity and cost of getting admitted and finding enough financial aid. That didn't seem right.

We started CollegeTracks to make sure that all students could “enjoy” the knowledge and nagging we gave our own children. We partnered with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to close this opportunity gap and help every student get to college, regardless of their family's income, college-going history, or ethnicity. We began at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in 2003 and expanded in 2006 to Wheaton, the county high school with the highest percentage of students from low-income families. In 2010 CollegeTracks launched a College Success Program to make sure our graduates *stay* in college and get degrees.

Eight years and more than 2000 CollegeTracks students later, we've built a model that works. Last year, 99% of CollegeTracks' 322 seniors were accepted into college and offered a whopping \$5.5 million in financial aid. **Their success translates into our opportunity**—opportunity for our county to continue to flourish and grow, despite increasing rates of poverty.

We all lose when a growing number of the county's youth are shut out of the American dream and unable to get jobs that pay enough to move families out of poverty, pay taxes, and contribute to the community. Increasingly, good jobs in the county and region—including electricians, auto mechanics, office workers and construction managers—require higher education skills and credentials.

The need for our services has exploded in the last decade. Low-income, first-generation-to-college, minority and immigrant students—those most at risk of not going to and completing college—are among the county's fastest growing demographic groups. This year, there are more MCPS students who are or have been eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals than the *total* number of children in the DC Public School system.

CollegeTracks gives low-income and first-generation-to-college students the chance to go to colleges where they can succeed, helps them obtain financial aid, and provides ongoing support to help them attain the degrees they need to realize their ambitions.

CollegeTracks works because our outstanding staff members and volunteers are in the schools all day every day; because we partner closely with teachers, counselors, and administrators in the schools; because we have individual relationships with students and families; because of our deep knowledge about the college admissions and financial aid processes; and because we care.

We know it takes a village. Montgomery County is our village and it needs you too. Please read through these pages. Learn about our terrific students and the people who help them get to their futures. Then, join us. Make a contribution to help the hard working kids from the neighborhood. You too can change lives.



Nancy Leopold
Executive Director



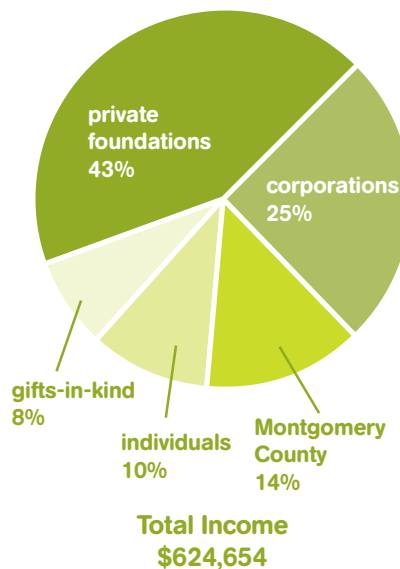
Nancy Zeller
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CollegeTracks at a Glance

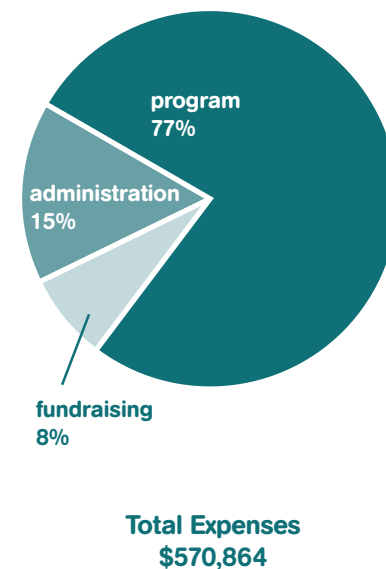
Mission

CollegeTracks works to improve college access and success for MCPS students most at risk of not getting to college—low-income, first-generation-to-college, immigrant, and minority youth.

Income



Expenses



Our staff speaks out about CollegeTracks

CollegeTracks students learn about themselves, defining their goals and interests more precisely. They develop self-confidence. By learning to ask us for help, they become less afraid of asking for help in college, where self-advocacy is critical.

Susan Spock, Director of Analysis & Special Projects



Some kids can't go away to school because they have to stay and support their family. Some kids can't come after school because they have to work. Normally these would be barriers to success, but CollegeTracks works around barriers.

Nicole Bryan, Vice President, Programs and HR



CollegeTracks doesn't turn any student away. The students we work with are diverse in every way. Regardless of their background, students who have nowhere else to turn come to CollegeTracks for help. They need CollegeTracks. They know that working with CollegeTracks is the first step to fulfilling their dreams.

Georgia Guhin, Volunteer Coordinator



Many programs help students get to college, but CollegeTracks helps them *stay* in college. CollegeTracks students are extremely determined and resilient. They keep going despite all of the obstacles that can get in their way.

Donelle Boose, College Success Coach



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2010-2011 CollegeTracks Impact

Research shows that low-income students don't go to college because they miss simple steps. They DO NOT:

- identify the right colleges for themselves
- apply to enough colleges
- file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

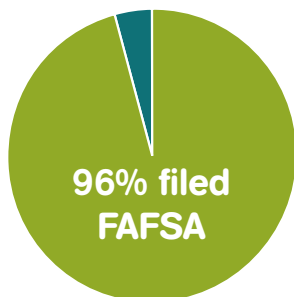
Thanks to CollegeTracks, Montgomery County has a different story to tell. Working with over 600 students and 50 graduates, CollegeTracks results lead the nation.

College Admissions



Our students were accepted at more than 150 colleges; 57% were accepted to four-year colleges.

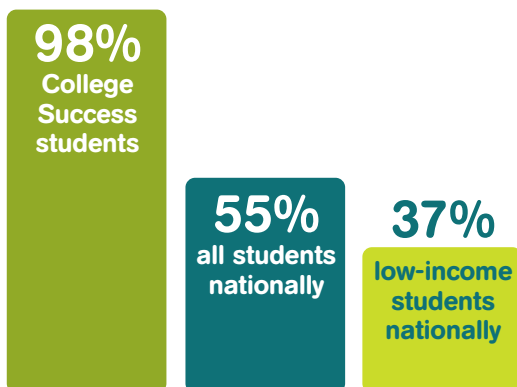
Financial Aid



CollegeTracks seniors were offered more than \$5.5 million in financial aid.

College Enrollment

CollegeTracks' College Success students are dramatically outpacing their peers nationally on college enrollment:



After one semester in college, 100% of College Success students stayed in college.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Our graduates go on to attend some of the best schools in the country. Last year, CollegeTracks seniors were accepted to more than 150 colleges. A short list includes:

- American University
- Bates College
- Bucknell University
- Case Western Reserve University
- Clemson University
- Dickinson College
- Drexel University
- Elon University
- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- George Washington University
- Goucher College
- Guilford College
- Hampton University
- Haverford College
- Hood College
- Howard University
- James Madison University
- Lafayette College
- Loyola University Maryland
- Marquette University
- Marshall University
- McDaniel College
- Miami University of Ohio
- Morehouse College
- Northeastern University
- Ohio University
- Penn State University
- Pepperdine University
- Princeton University
- Rice University
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Smith College
- Spelman College
- St. Mary's College of Maryland
- Syracuse University
- Towson University
- Trinity University
- Tufts University
- Tulane University
- University of Maryland—Baltimore County
- University of Maryland—College Park
- University of Miami
- University of Notre Dame
- University of Vermont
- University of Wisconsin—Madison
- Vassar College
- Virginia Tech
- Washington College



Why Montgomery County students need help getting to college

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Of Course You Know...

Getting to college with enough financial aid is a long, costly, complicated process.

But Did You Know?

No one in Montgomery County is responsible for making sure that all students graduating from MCPS actually get to and through college.



Our Society is Changing

The road to financial stability—for communities and individuals—travels through post-secondary education. To compete for living-wage jobs that enable a family to rise above poverty, one must have a college degree or technical credential. A high school diploma will no longer suffice. Most jobs—including electrician, auto mechanic, and office worker—require high-tech skills and education after high school. We all lose when a growing number of the county's youth are shut out of the American dream and unable to get jobs that pay enough to move families out of poverty, pay taxes, and contribute to the community.

MCPS is Changing

We have two Montgomery Counties—one that conforms to the stereotype that ours is a rich county and the other where families are struggling financially. Remarkable changes in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) student demographics provide clear evidence of this change:

- Two in five MCPS students (41%) are or have been eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals, a 57% increase from ten years ago. (*A family of four must make less than \$41,000 to qualify.*)
- A majority of MCPS students are non-white.
- Students come from 164 countries speaking 184 languages.

With these changes, the numbers of students at risk of not getting to college grows. One MCPS guidance counselor for every 300 students isn't enough. Students and families who are unfamiliar with the US higher education world need more intensive help and there are few resources at county schools and in the community to supply it.

College Admissions has Changed

Getting to college is vastly more complex and costly than it used to be. There are thousands of colleges to learn about: in- and out-of-state, public, private, and for-profit. Each SAT or ACT costs almost \$50. Test prep, now considered essential, costs hundreds if not thousands. Federal and state aid applications all require separate forms submitted online and application fees have climbed. There are fee waivers for low-income kids but they don't know how to get them. For low-income families with little college-going experience, these can be insurmountable obstacles.



CollegeTracks Works

What We Do

CollegeTracks is the only organization in Montgomery County that works full time in the high schools to give low-income, first-generation-to-college students the chance to go to colleges where they can succeed—with enough financial aid and continuing support to help them attain the degrees they seek.

How We Do It

Each year, we recruit and train more than 50 community volunteers to give one-on-one attention to our students. Together, we help students achieve:

College Admissions

Using our *Milestones to College Student Workbook*, we work one-on-one with students to break down, step-by-step, each critical milestone in the college application process. Staff tracks each student's progress through the milestones and uses that information to check in frequently with those who may be behind in the process to ensure that they meet important deadlines.

College success depends on choosing a college that fits the student's abilities, interests and goals. Most students have never had the opportunity to explore college and career options. We work one-on-one and in groups with students to help them identify and articulate their academic and career interests and goals, prepare for their exams, and find colleges that fit.

Financial Aid

Finding a way to pay for school is just as important as choosing a school, so we educate students and their families about all financial aid options available to them. Most low-income students do not know about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). We work with students and families, step-by-step, to help them complete and submit the FAFSA online. We help students apply for state grants and we work with them to identify and apply for scholarships.

Once students receive their financial aid award letters from colleges, we help them analyze their packages to make the best decision for their families. This includes: advocating with colleges, providing additional data, and counseling parents.

College Success

Once students have been admitted to college (and after we've celebrated), we immediately begin preparing them for success in college. CollegeTracks offers a host of workshops throughout the spring and summer that teach critical college success skills and links students with campus supports. We work with each student to create a four-year plan, which is especially important for students attending community college, so they remain on track to earn a bachelor's degree.

Once in college, our support continues. Staff check-in on students twice a semester, monitor academic performance, and connect students to help if needed. We track their progress against their four-year plans and keep them on top of critical deadlines to renew financial aid.

Why It Works

Research-Based:

Low-income students often fail to navigate all the critical milestones required in the college process. Our *Milestones to College Student Workbook* provides tools and checklists to ensure nothing gets missed.

School-Based:

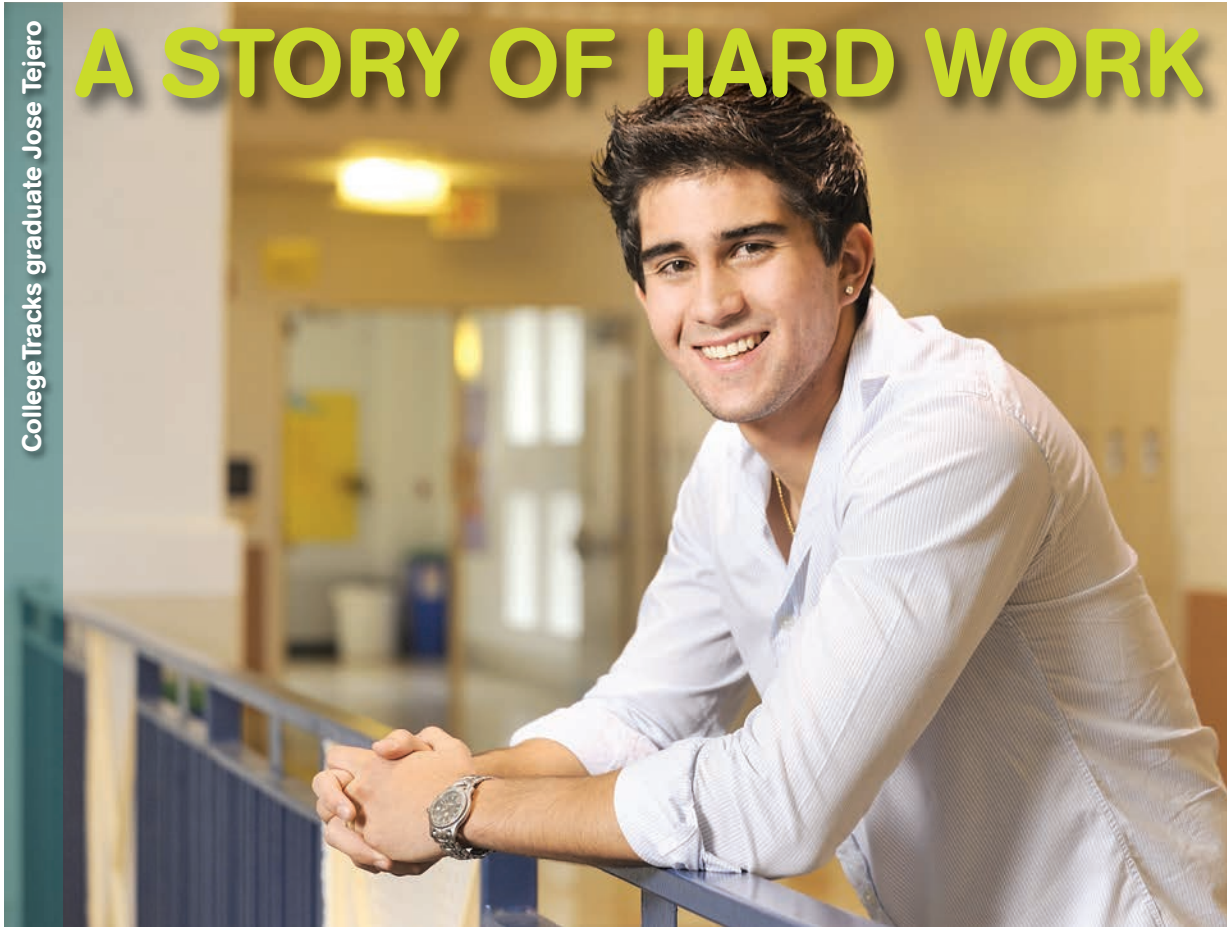
Experienced CollegeTracks staff and volunteers partner closely with school counselors and teachers and they are present in the schools all day, every day.

Relationship-Based:

One-on-one counseling builds strong personal relationships with students and parents.



A STORY OF HARD WORK



Jose Tejero Sophomore at Montgomery College Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School Class of 2010



Jose Tejero arrived in the United States reluctantly, when he was 16 years old. Because he left his father and many relatives in Peru, Jose convinced himself that his stay in the U.S. was temporary. As a result, “I took school lightly,” Jose explains. “I didn’t apply myself, because I didn’t think it would matter.” Jose earned only Cs and Ds, even though he had been an excellent student in Peru. He says, “My English wasn’t that good. I had a hard time keeping up, except for in math, which was actually easier than in Peru.”

After a while Jose started to settle in, make friends, and enjoy his new home. Visits to Peru made him less homesick for family. By then Jose was a senior.

“I’ve been here three years now, and I guess I’m staying,” he recalls thinking, “so I might as well try harder.” But at that point it was too late to bring up his grades. While he started doing better in his classes, the damage had been done to his GPA, which was too low for him to apply to a selective four-

“My mother always encouraged me, but she didn’t know how the system worked here. I had no idea about financial aid. CollegeTracks clears those doubts 100%.”

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year university. His road to a bachelor’s degree would have to start at Montgomery College.

“I knew that for college I needed to apply myself and be the way I was back in Peru,” he said, but first, Jose needed to improve his English. “I knew some English when I got to the United States, but I had to catch up,” Jose explains. “Especially in high school everyone’s speaking slang. CollegeTracks gave me packets to help me prepare for the English and math placement tests required by Montgomery College. Twice a week I went there to study and

complete the packets, and someone from College Tracks helped me practice for the English test. When I took the tests, I placed into English 101 and Math 101 so I didn’t have to take non-credit classes.” When he started at Montgomery College, he did his homework, studied for tests, and got good grades, even while working 30 hours a week at a part-time job. Now he is proud of his 3.5 GPA.

Looking back at his high school experience, Jose realizes he made other mistakes. “There are things I regret from high school,” he says, “like not joining the soccer team or getting involved in clubs. That’s why my first semester at Montgomery College I joined the Latino Student Union and the Nutrition Club.”

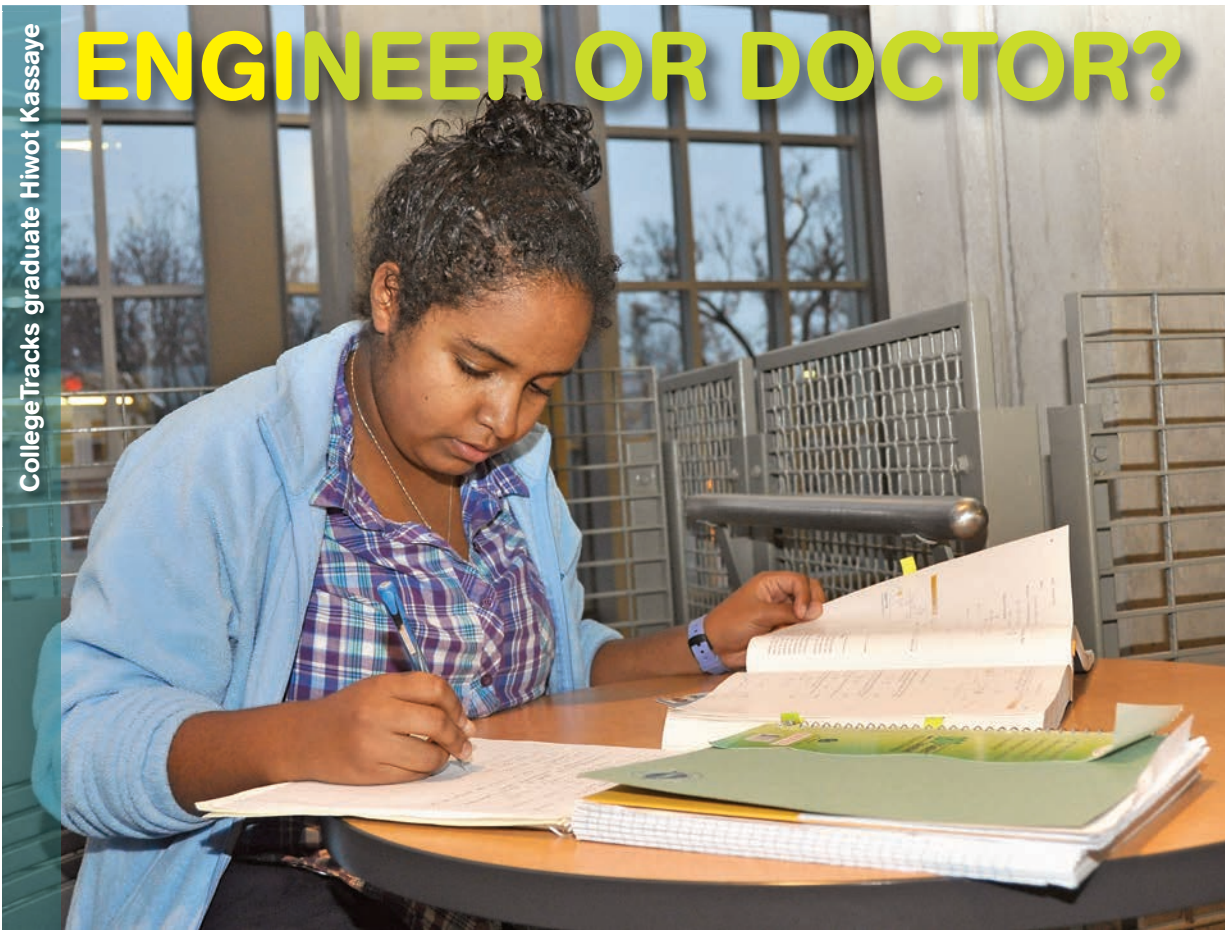
During his freshman year, after taking a fitness and nutrition class, Jose discovered a passion for nutrition. He had been working out a lot and reading up on health and fitness, learning that exercise and nutrition are closely linked. “Everything about your health has to do with the food you eat,” he says. “So I watched what I ate and felt changes in my

body.” He plans to major in nutrition now. He’s not sure yet exactly what career awaits him, but he knows it will be in the field of health and wellness. “I might be a dietician, a high-level personal trainer, or a physical therapist,” he says.

Jose is currently in the process of transferring to a four-year school. Working closely with his CollegeTracks College Success Coach, he identified colleges that met his interests and needs. They plan to work during winter break to complete the applications and find scholarships. With the good grades he’s earned at Montgomery College, he hopes to secure financial aid so he can work fewer hours and devote himself to his studies.

Jose says he always believed he would go to college, but still there were questions. “Every senior in high school always has some doubts about how college is going to be. My mother always encouraged me, but she didn’t know how the system worked here. I had no idea about financial aid. CollegeTracks clears those doubts 100%.”

ENGINEER OR DOCTOR?



Hiwot Kassaye Sophomore at Smith College Wheaton High School, Class of 2010

Like many CollegeTracks students, Hiwot Kassaye is a “striver”—a first-generation-to-college student from a low-income family who overcame the odds to do quite well despite serious disadvantages. Hiwot and her father left Ethiopia in 2008.

Hiwot entered Wheaton High School as a junior when she arrived in the U.S. “I was new,” she says. “New to the school, the country, the language, the whole system. My parents were encouraging but didn’t know how to help.” Hiwot learned English quickly and enrolled in challenging courses. She was determined to get to college but had no idea how to get there, so she sought out CollegeTracks. “CollegeTracks was absolutely my main source of information,” she recalls.

During the intake process, CollegeTracks staff learned that Hiwot was serious about science and passionate about both medicine and engineering. “Pre-med is a way for me to help people,” Hiwot explains. “For a long time I’ve wanted to work for Doctors Without Borders. But math and physics are also my thing, so

also I wanted to study engineering.” CollegeTracks helped her understand that she need not make a final decision while still in high school. Instead, she could use her college years to explore all of her areas of interest.

“CollegeTracks is like family. They are always checking in on us. It makes me feel better to know they are there.”

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Hiwot took advantage of every type of assistance CollegeTracks offered. With free ACT prep, Hiwot improved her test scores to more accurately reflect her abilities. CollegeTracks helped her register for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) to demonstrate that she had mastered English well enough to do college-level work. CollegeTracks helped Hiwot find and apply to Smith College’s 2009 Summer Science Program. During her four

weeks on campus taking classes in robotics, computer programming and writing, Hiwot realized she wanted to study engineering through a multidisciplinary lens.

CollegeTracks staff helped Hiwot identify and apply to 15 colleges that would meet her needs. When each college incorrectly classified her as an international student unable to receive significant financial aid, CollegeTracks worked with Hiwot to supply the documents proving she was a domestic student permanently eligible for federal aid. She received acceptances and generous scholarship awards from nine colleges including Syracuse, Occidental, Northeastern, Drexel, Virginia Commonwealth University, Goucher, University of Maryland—College Park’s honors program, and University of Maryland—Baltimore County’s honors program.

“I went back to Smith to visit,” she recalls. “I saw what it was like for the students, and I got offered a very nice scholarship, so I chose Smith.” If not for CollegeTracks, Hiwot believes she would likely have gone somewhere

closer to home and not as competitive.

After she was admitted to Smith, Hiwot registered for CollegeTracks’ College Success Program. That spring and summer she sought the advice and counsel of CollegeTracks staff and attended success skills workshops. “I learned a lot about time management, note taking, talking to your professors, and finding someone close to you on campus that you can talk to about problems,” she says. “The College Success program is the best. It helped me to make the transition from high school to college and to tackle the problems I faced as a first-year student.”

Now in her second year at Smith, Hiwot has declared an engineering major but is still taking pre-med classes. “CollegeTracks helped me arrange my pre-med studies with the engineering,” she explains. “CollegeTracks is like family. They are always checking in on us. It makes me feel better to know they are there.” Thanks to CollegeTracks, Hiwot is thriving at a college that will provide her with many options for her future.

Donors

\$150,000

TG Public Benefit

\$50,000–\$149,999

Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS Educational Foundation
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\$25,000–\$49,999

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Phyllis Zeller
Jean & William Zietz

Volunteers

CollegeTracks volunteers help us give all of our students the time and attention they need and deserve to complete the critical college admissions and financial aid milestones. Volunteers are trained and work under the close supervision of CollegeTracks staff to help students identify colleges, register and prepare for standardized tests, write essays, complete applications, submit financial aid forms, and identify and apply for scholarships. Thank you to all of our volunteers.

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