

RSF Scholarship Recipient Shares His Success Story

Upon becoming the first member of his family to pursue a college education, Raul Arana Jr. faced several obstacles, any of which could have torpedoed his quest. “My educational journey was shaped by instability, financial hardship, and the constant pressure of being a first-generation student in an immigrant household,” he says. One of these issues— finances—was at least partially allayed by a timely award from the Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation (RSF). “The Rossmoor Foundation scholarship became a turning point, not only easing financial stress but affirming that my story, resilience, and goals truly mattered,” says Arana, one of the many students for whom an RSF award appears to have been a godsend.

Even when he was at Ygnacio Valley High School, Arana knew that his college quest would face hurdles. His parents are immigrants and migrant workers. “When I was growing up, education was always valued, but navigating the system was something my family and I had to learn on our own,” he says. “I often balanced school with work and family responsibilities, which made staying focused a challenge academically.”

The pressure caused Arana to temporarily drop out of high school. “I attended Prospect Continuation High School during my junior year after feeling disconnected and overwhelmed in a traditional school setting,” he says. “At that point, college did not feel realistic. I struggled with confidence and questioned whether higher education was even meant for someone like me.” With the support of a counselor, therapist, and his family, however, “I slowly rebuilt my sense of purpose and returned to a comprehensive high school, determined to finish strong.”

That he did, and moved on to Diablo Valley College. “I worked while attending school full time and often felt the pressure of representing my family’s sacrifices,” he says. “Despite these challenges, I found community through programs like Puente, which helped me feel seen and supported as a Latino student. I began to excel academically and discovered a passion for psychology and social justice rooted in my lived experiences.”

But could he continue financially? An RSF scholarship turned out to be the difference maker, allowing him to stay in school. “It is because of foundations like RSF that the challenges of first-generation students like myself are able to be seen and offered value,” he says. “And through that value my motivation has been able to grow even more.”

Last semester Arana received his associate’s degree in psychology from DVC. After mulling a transfer to a school in Los Angeles, he decided instead to stay on at DVC, where he is now majoring in Political Science and Social Justice. To the latter end, he serves as community engagement coordinator for the United Latino Voices of Contra Costa. “Through ULV, we are also co-founders of the Concord Immigrant Protection Network (CIPN),” he says. “Together, ULV and CIPN work to ensure that immigrant families are informed, supported, and seen—both in policy conversations and in everyday community life.”

Submitted by: Dick Friedman, RSF Trustee