

# GRASP NEWS

Helping students grasp infinite possibilities

February 2015

## FAFSA Season is Here!

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completions are now well underway for our GRASP advisors and the high school seniors they assist. The FAFSA is the basis for each financial aid award offered to a student, so completing the FAFSA is crucial for a student to receive any kind of financial aid. GRASP advisors are meeting with students/family members during school hours as well as during special FAFSA events to help get FAFSAs completed at the earliest date possible. Early filing provides more opportunities for better financial aid awards for students.

Annually, GRASP also hosts several Saturday at the Library events at the Main Downtown Richmond Public Library. These events allow students/family members to complete the FAFSA on a Saturday which might be an easier fit for their schedules.

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*“Please let those at GRASP know that my wife and I found the assistance we received from your services, and from Cookie, incredibly helpful and took a great deal of the stress off the process of completing the FAFSA forms. We had already completed one, but had errors that without the assistance of Cookie we would not have recognized.”*

*-Jose Vivaldi*



GRASP Advisor “Cookie” Jones-Cooke, right, helps a family with their FAFSA

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GRASP Advisor Kathy Davis, right, helps a student and his mother with the FAFSA

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Across the state, advisors host or assist with FAFSA events. GRASP advisors are also encouraging students to apply for scholarships, including the GRASP Last Dollar Scholarships. This “free” money requires student effort through the application process, but the results can make the financial cost for postsecondary education more achievable.

## Insights from the GRASP CEO

Here at GRASP, our interactions with students and parents generate an enormous amount of satisfaction. Helping students, especially those who are overcoming steep odds against success, has been one of my greatest joys since joining GRASP. What can be more satisfying than knowing that in someone’s time of need, you were able to help? When I was an in-school advisor, I often felt that the biggest gift I had was the gift of listening and then, following up, taking action on someone else’s behalf.

In January, I had a chance to return to my roots as a GRASP Advisor and personally help a student. An Advisor in one of the Central Blue Ridge area schools reached out to me about a student with whom she had worked, who is homeless and, because of her help, is enrolled as a freshman in college. This student was unable to gather the resources to pay for his spring semester books. After reviewing the student’s background, I picked up the phone and dialed the university’s Office of Financial Aid. I managed to speak directly to the Director of Financial Aid and explained that the student is overcoming very difficult circumstances and further would not be successful in the spring semester without additional financial resources. The Director of Financial Aid, on a pretense, made a lunch appointment with the student. The college’s financial aid award for the student was subsequently increased to cover the student’s books for the spring semester. It was tremendously rewarding to have made a personal difference in this young man’s life. The student will continue to stay in touch with his high school GRASP advisor, and we will encourage him to enroll in the College Success program.

Those 48 hours were a great couple of days for me. They reminded me of exactly why I so enjoy the work I do. Our advisors experience this same joy every day, as do those in our office. It was fun to share once more in helping students directly. When you support GRASP, you too are helping all of us at GRASP make a difference in students’ lives. Thank you for taking this journey with us.

- *Betsy Heggie, CEO, GRASP*

## Contact Us

Please contact us with any questions, comments, or suggestions.

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Visit us on the web at [www.grasp4va.org](http://www.grasp4va.org). GRASP also has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn. A non profit profile is available on Guidestar.

# The Universal Leaf Foundation

Last year, GRASP was able to provide in-school advising services to Lunenburg County's Central High School because of a grant from The Universal Leaf Foundation. Recently, the Foundation renewed its support for next year! Central High School has about 461 students, of whom about 100 are seniors. According to the Virginia Department of Education's website, approximately sixty-five percent of those who attend Central High School are economically disadvantaged. The College Board reports that low-income students are at greater risk of missing admission and financial aid deadlines because of lack of informed support, complex aid applications, and the overwhelming aid offer notification process.

Due to the generosity of the Universal Leaf Foundation, GRASP Advisor Gail Benjamin helps students overcome these issues. This year, Gail has already met with about half of the high school's seniors and has seen all of the seniors in their classrooms. Gail is helping students assemble financial aid packages for their future careers in nursing, farming, mechanical engineering, criminal justice and more.



Gail Benjamin, Lunenburg County GRASP Advisor

Thank you to The Universal Leaf Foundation for your commitment to the future of Lunenburg County!

## Board of Directors

GRASP is fortunate to be led by this dedicated team with Chairman Dr. Bob Holsworth at the helm. **Vice-Chairman:** Kenneth M. Dye, **Treasurer:** Thomas M. Denson, III, Jane Alford, Dr. David L. Bailey, Jr., Kenneth D. Barker, Congressman David A. Brat, David W. Didawick, Edward L. Flippen, Esq., Dr. Raymond Gargiulo, Robert B. Maxwell, III, Andrea McDaniel, Dr. Robyn McDougale, Elsie Rose, Dr. Sarah H. Scarbrough, Secretary of the Commonwealth Levar Stoney, and Stacey Strawn.

WILLIAM BOSHER, JR., PH.D.  
(1946 - 2014)

All of us at GRASP are saddened by the sudden loss of Dr. William C. Boshier, Jr., a great man, faithful board member, and friend to GRASP. Our thoughts and prayers remain with his family, friends and colleagues. A committee has been formed from the Board of Directors to determine how best to honor Dr. Boshier.

## First in Family

There hasn't been a day since I started working for GRASP that I haven't had an "aha" moment at helping a student or parent with the steps needed to fulfill their dream after high school. Just the other day, a mom came in to the high school for help with the FAFSA. She was delightful and SO PROUD of her daughter. She told me that she had her daughter when she was in high school, that she's been a hard-working single mom ever since (works in a school cafeteria), and that she's struggled at times to make ends meet. She was determined that her daughter would have the opportunity for college that she didn't have. Grandma was willing to help with her savings, too. Once we filled out the FAFSA and she realized that her daughter was eligible for the Pell Grant (community college was one of her daughter's choices), her eyes filled with tears. Mine did, too. Joy at such good news is contagious! I am proud to work for an organization like GRASP.



- Retsy Kitchen, Henrico County GRASP Advisor

# On the Lighter Side

Bath County GRASP Advisor Jamilyn Fussell



Bath County Advisor  
Jamilyn Fussell

writes about a recent meeting with a group of students. "This past Wednesday, I met with my a group of seniors. We went over time management strategies and practices to employ

in college and the remainder of their high school careers. We talked about individual deadlines, as well as upcoming school events, scheduling study time, work, sports/extracurricular activities and their social lives. The importance of writing down tasks, breaking down bigger projects into smaller pieces, not procrastinating, etc.

At the end of our meetings, after we go through the scheduled curriculum, we usually just sit around and talk about whatever is on their minds as far as the future, college, whatever comes up. This week we had two really great discussions. The first was "How

do you decide?" I have a two students that asked me and their classmates the question, "I got into my top 2 schools. Now how do I decide?" Both were really torn. They'd gone through the process of making a list of Pros and Cons for each school to help them decide and were still uncertain. Speaking as a group the general advice was to take all practical matters into consideration (cost, location, school size, atmosphere, etc.) then, go with your gut. It was nice to see peers giving one another good sound and thoughtful advice.

The next big question/concern posed to the group was by one of the guys in the class. He said, "I know this might sound stupid, but I don't know who to ask. I don't know how to do

I don't know how to do laundry.

laundry. Like at all. I don't even know where to start. And I know I'm going to need to know next year. So, I need some help."

After some good-natured ribbing, we walked Max through each step of the laundry process. Now, he's set to tackle dorm life and a future of washing one's own clothes.

I never really have an idea of what turn conversations will take, but I'm always impressed and happy to be a part of helping these young people grow into adulthood and further their education!"

## Thank You

Throughout 2014, GRASP was again blessed with wonderful donor support. We appreciate your generosity, as do the students we are able to support through our advising services and our GRASP Last Dollar Scholarships. We hope that you will continue to see the value in our goal of helping students GRASP infinite opportunities. If you would like to make a pledge or donation, please contact Paula Buckley at [pbuckley@grasp4virginia.com](mailto:pbuckley@grasp4virginia.com)



## College Success Connections



College Success Advisor Sarah Powell, left, with GRASP College Success Student

The College Success Program had another great FAFSA pizza party for current college students on January 7. Twenty FAFSAs were submitted. The event is a fun way to get the FAFSA completed with GRASP assistance (and pizza)! Many of the students who participated will be applying for GRASP College Success scholarships in the spring.

### Save the Date

**Monday, May 4, 2015**

Toast Restaurant fundraiser night  
7007 Three Chopt Rd., Richmond.

GRASP receives a portion of all food sales from the entire day!

**Reach for the Stars**

Saturday, October 9, 2015  
Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens