

Scholarship helping women in need of career lift

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A little-known scholarship program is helping women get back on their feet here in Gainesville and around Alachua and Marion counties by offering them the first step.

“We help women who have fallen on hard times to get their GED,” said Patricia Khan, director of Radiant Hands. “Some dropped out of school to have children; others had to go to work to help their families; all of them are looking for a foothold back into society where they can start their education or get a job that provides enough money to feed and support them.”

GED courses don’t cost much through Santa Fe College’s or Alachua County’s adult education programs, but even the \$30 to \$35 each semester can be tough to cover when people have to choose between education and rent. Most of the scholarship money goes toward paying off the final test at the end, which can cost upwards of \$180.

“Most women get through all the coursework and find themselves at the end of the program and stuck,” said Hanan K. Bilal, the director of the Radiant Works Scholarship committee. “They are ready to go and can’t afford the test.”

These women can apply for funding through the Radiant Hands website by downloading the application and sending it in to the address given. The money is not just for high school education either.

“The process is so easy and quick,” said Yvette Watson, a woman who received \$300 toward a semester of her LPN coursework. “I sent in my application, and they got back to me within one day.”

Watson was already a CNA but couldn’t find regular work with that title. When she finishes school this semester, she plans on working at a school or a nursing home and making a livable wage.

“Right now I’m on disability,” she said, “but I’m working hard to better myself so I can be self-sufficient, and Radiant Hands really helped me.”

Last year, the program gave money to 10 people in need, and it has helped 40 people since its inception in 2011.

“I love this program because it’s very empowering for women,” Bilal said. “It promotes self-efficacy and education in the sector that needs it most.”

Barbara Bailey will graduate with her GED this week, and will apply to train to be a phlebotomist soon after that. She said she could not have done it without help from Radiant Hands.

“Last semester, I was able to take and pass three of my four GED exams, and I have the fourth one scheduled for January 9th,” she said. “I’m already enrolled in classes for the spring semester to prepare for my CPT exam.”

If you would like to apply for a scholarship through Radiant Hands or know someone who would be a good candidate, you can log on to the website at www.radianthands.org and click on Radiant Works Scholarship Fund.

“I can’t thank Radiant Hands enough,” Watson said. “This will really help my career. They weren’t judgmental; they understand your situation. And when I get my feet under me, I’m going to pay it forward.”

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