

# Trojan Guardian Scholars

## 2024 Impact Report

### MISSION

The Trojan Guardian Scholars (TGS) program is committed to supporting current and former foster youth who attend the University of Southern California and to building a regional network that creates new pathways for college-bound students exiting the foster care system. By providing key support services, the Trojan Guardian Scholars program helps enable students who attend the University of Southern California to experience the campus to its fullest and to achieve their goals of academic excellence, self-sufficiency, and successful professional careers in their desired fields.

### ON CAMPUS SUPPORT & SERVICES

Trojan Guardian Scholars provides a variety of wraparound support services for students attending USC. TGS as an organization does not provide direct scholarships; however, it does provide support in navigating, obtaining, and maintaining various forms of financial support available to USC students with foster care lived experience. These include:

- Assistance applying for financial aid
- Help identifying and maintaining scholarships
- Budget workshops and financial counseling
- Potential year-round on-campus housing
- Supplemental academic mentoring
- Registration and enrollment assistance
- Referrals to health and counseling services
- Internship, fellowship, and career counseling
- Peer mentoring and student programming
- Cohort social events and holiday dinners

# Background & History

## Founder

Trojan Guardian Scholars (TGS) was co-founded in 2013 by Wendy Smith, PhD, retired clinical associate professor and associate dean of faculty development at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. She has dedicated her career to providing opportunities for young adults transitioning out of the foster care system and designed the school's first course on transition-age foster youth. She authored the first comprehensive text to focus on youth emerging from care, and integrated multidisciplinary research into practice providing a new foundation for those who work with former foster youth.

## A New Home in Social Work

In May of 2022, Sara Jimenez McSweyn, LCSW, senior lecturer at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, took over the reins of the Trojan Guardian Scholars (TGS) program as it moved to its new home at the school. Formerly under the auspices of the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, the TGS program continues to provide resources, guidance, and a supportive community to any current or former foster youth who is a student at the University of Southern California.

Jimenez McSweyn has revised the TGS program into three tiers: students with the greatest level of need or in crisis; students who are relatively stable, but need occasional help; and students who have developed their own systems of support at the university but want to



***“We wanted to make sure that these foster youth had a place of their own.”***

**- Sara Jimenez McSweyn**

engage in some activities or events within the program. Jimenez McSweyn stressed that those in the third tier are still welcome to seek any assistance they may need.

To further the visibility of the program and provide TGS students with a space to address their needs, the Trojan Guardian Scholars Center was created. Housed within the Montgomery Ross Fisher building of USC Social Work, the center provides a physical meeting place for this community.

## Practicum Experience

Beth Lucas, MSW '98, serves as the instructor for MSW students placed within TGS, and has played a key role in ensuring the MSW placement remains aligned with the mission of TGS. She has worked closely with Wendy Smith Meyer for many years shepherding and guiding the work of the TGS program at USC. Practicum experience is the bedrock of social work practice, and Lucas' keen skill sets are a crucial element of the TGS program's work. MSW practicum student, Edward Ramirez, whose specialization is in children, youth and families, came on board in the fall of 2023, and Jimenez McSweyn says Ramirez has been instrumental in helping the program to mobilize its resources in the service of our student community. More students are reaching out and enrolling, community events are being organized, and assistance with securing emergency financial support for students in crisis continues to be offered.

# 2024 Results

32

enrolled students

The TGS program currently serves a total of 32 enrolled students. This represents 80% of the 40-student population identified by USC Financial Aid as eligible for the program.

80%

of eligible students participate

41%

Graduate Students

44%

Admitted as 1st year students

15%

Admitted as transfer students

The dedicated staff and interns of the TGS program have contributed significant hours towards fulfilling the program's mission

Sara Jimenez McSweyn, LCSW (TGS Program Coordinator) contributed 56 hours per month and the MSW Practicum Intern (1st or 2nd year) contributed 96 hours per month

Program Coordinator

56

hours / month

MSW Intern

96

hours / month

A 2024 survey given to all TGS members, received 20 response with the following results

65%

of TGS students were "Very Satisfied" & 30% were "Somewhat Satisfied"

80%

of TGS students felt "Strongly Supported"

90%

of TGS students felt more connected to the USC community

80%

of TGS students said resources were "Very Useful"

90%

of TGS students are "Very likely" to continue participating

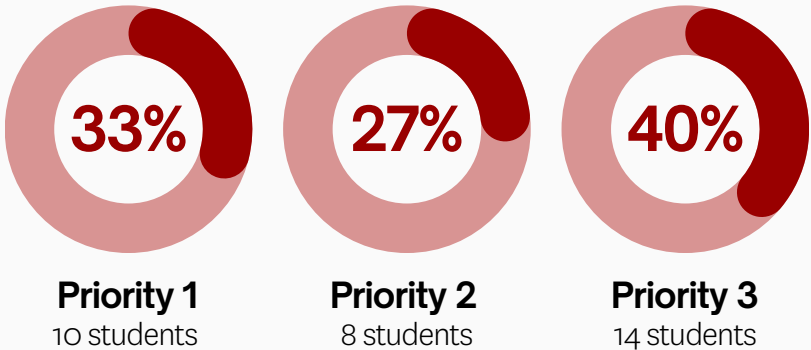
# Trojan Guardian Scholars Priority Needs Assessment

## Student Needs Categories

Priority 1: students with the greatest level of need or in crisis

Priority 2: students who are relatively stable, but need occasional help

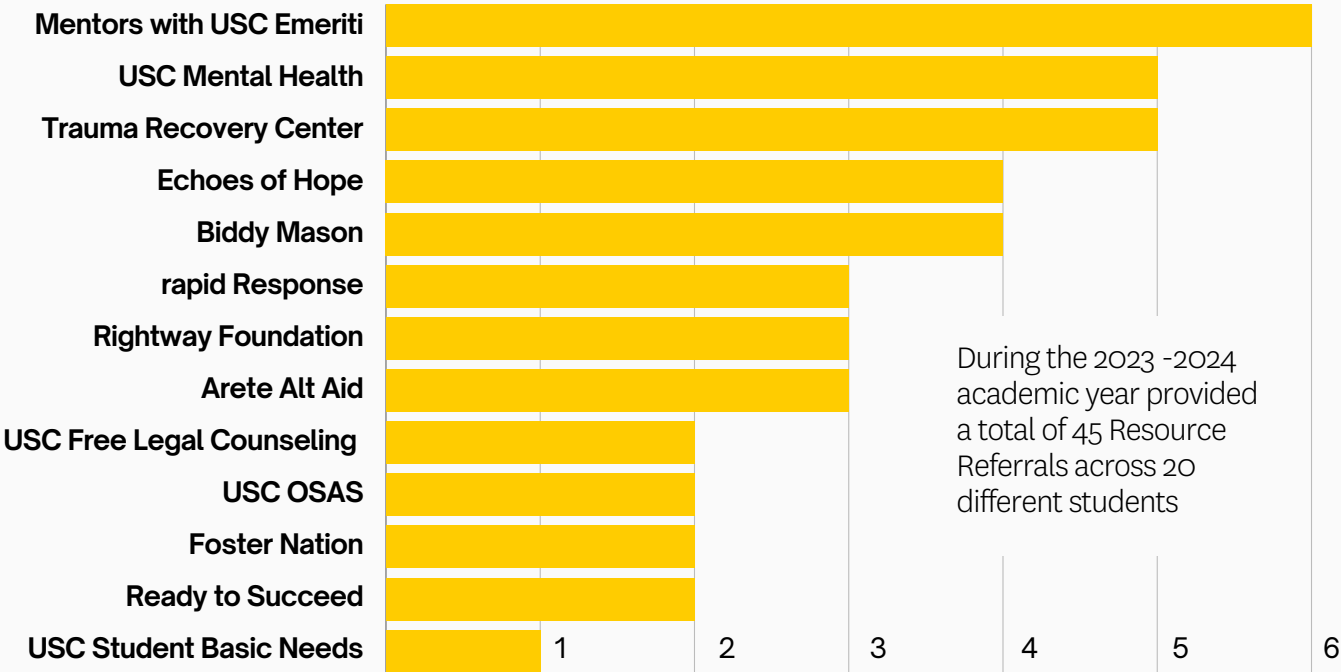
Priority 3: students who have developed their own systems of support at the university but want to engage in some activities or events within the program.



## Priority Needs for Students

Community Engagement      Educational / Financial Assistance      Mental Health Resources      Housing Assistance

## TGS Case Management Contacts & Referrals





# Partnerships & Resources

Though the Trojan Guardian Scholars Program offers a range of key support services, we excel at leveraging our partnerships and resource network to promptly connect students with the assistance they most urgently need. Whether it's navigating, securing, or sustaining different forms of financial aid, or addressing a variety of other challenges issues, TGS is dedicated to ensuring former foster youth access the necessary support to thrive and achieve their educational goals. TGS also hosted 3 guardian scholar community college site visits to USC, in collaboration with USC's undergraduate admissions staff.

## Internal Partners at USC

- USC Trauma Recovery Center
- USC Emeriti Center
- USC Admissions
- USC Credit Union
- USC VITA
- USC Financial Aid

## Partnerships we hope to strengthen at USC

- USC Housing & ResEd
- USC Student Basic Needs
- USC Career Center
- USC Engemann
- USC OSAS
- USC Enrollment Services
- USC Parking

## External Partners

- Biddy Mason Foundation
- Echos of Hope
- FosterLove: Rapid Response
- Ready 2 Succeed
- FosterNation: CareerX
- Right Way Foundation
- Stepping Forward
- LA John Burtons Advocates for Youth
- Living Advantage
- Arete Alt Aid

## USC Schools Enrollment

- 12 Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Science
- 7 Suzanne Dworak Peck School of Social Work
- 2 Marshall School of Business
- 2 School of Dramatic Arts
- 2 School of Cinematic Arts
- 1 School of Architecture
- 1 Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
- 1 Price School of Public Policy
- 1 Bovard College
- 1 Keck School of Medicine
- 1 Alfred E Mann School of Pharmacy
- 1 Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

# Programs, Campaigns, Events & Goals

The Trojan Guardian Scholars program has made significant strides in fulfilling its mission of supporting USC students with foster care lived experience. By providing essential resources, organizing various programs and events, and fostering a supportive community, TGS has positively impacted the lives of its enrolled students. The program continues to make a difference in the educational journey of these students, ensuring their success and well-being at the University of Southern California.

## > Trojan Guardian Scholars Student Orientation/Welcome

At the start of the Fall 2023 semester, the program organized an orientation/welcome event to introduce new students to the TGS community and provide them with the necessary information and support for a successful academic journey.

## > Monthly Trojan Guardian Scholars Student Community Events

Throughout the Fall and Spring semesters, monthly community events were organized for TGS students. These events aimed to foster a sense of belonging and connection among the students, providing them with opportunities to engage and build relationships within the TGS community.

## > Holiday Celebrations

The TGS program organized various holiday celebrations to ensure that students feel supported and included during special occasions. These celebrations included Thanksgiving, December holidays, and an end-of- academic-year celebration/debrief at the conclusion of the Spring semester.

## > Graduation Gala

A highlight of the reporting period was the Graduation Gala, which honored six Trojan Guardian Scholars students, and their families and friends, who graduated from USC in 2024. This event recognized the achievements of these students and celebrated their successful completion of their academic journey.

## > Event Participation

Throughout the reporting period, the TGS program witnessed active participation from its student population; an average of 12 to 15 Trojan Guardian Scholars students attended monthly community events and holiday celebrations, fostering a strong sense of community and engagement.

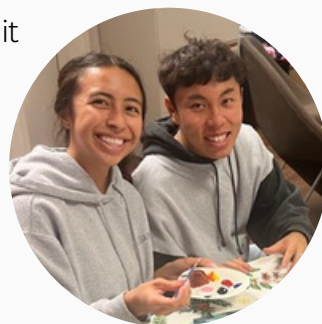


# Anonymous Student Testimonies

"I like the fact that the TGS program is available to students as needed. The staff at TGS are always willing to answer questions and sit down with you, and have a meaningful conversation about your course work, USC progress, and overall life circumstances that might affect effective participation as a student at USC. TGS makes every effort to help students in need and to provide each student with an individual experience that leaves you feeling like you matter and belong to the Trojan family. I am very grateful for the services and opportunities that have been presented to me because I am a Trojan Guardian Scholar."

"Our community events generally had an aspect of education, whether it was financial, or scholarship, that I found incredibly helpful and enlightening."

"It was wonderful getting emails and newsletters. It was also great to stop by the TGS center and get snacks on occasion. I also benefited significantly from the textbook resources. That was a HUGE help and it allowed me to feel prepared for my clinical training."



"I appreciate how supportive the TGS Program has been in helping me as a student with whatever I need. I feel like I found a safe place of people that I can lean on and feel comfortable in which is amazing and so helpful. One thing I hope for is to see TGS grow and have more students because I feel like so many more people can benefit from this amazing program."

The TGS team make me feel like their my family because we are all in this together. Also, I have never had a program in my life where they let me involve my son in activities such as TGS."

"The resources and support that was provided have been super helpful. The free textbooks, access to mentorship, and the super fun social events to have a community"



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Or visit our website:

<https://dworakpeck.usc.edu/clinical-programs/trojan-guardian-scholars>