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Moms' degree of support

Scholarships help mothers improve their lives

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During the week Erica Frazier is up by 5 a.m.

She's getting her teenage son up and ready to make the school bus, as well as two daughters whom she shares custody with her ex-husband. She is out of the house by 7:30 a.m. and off to work.



PHOTO/DANIEL COSTON

Erica Frazier is a 2011-12 recipient of a scholarship from the Answer Scholarship Endowment. Frazier is attending the University of Phoenix.

On Tuesdays she's at class for three hours at the University of Phoenix. At night she's cooking dinner, doing homework and helping her children with schoolwork. Sometimes she doesn't hit the bed until 1 a.m.

That has been Frazier's schedule since deciding to return to school in 2009 to earn a bachelor's degree in management.

The 40-year-old is enrolled in an accelerated program at the University of Phoenix.

"I am very proud of myself," she said. "The custom for me was to quit by now but I am determined to walk across the stage in July, but I'll finish school in March. I'm really looking forward to my children seeing me graduate."

Frazier is one of seven mothers who have been awarded tuition from the Answer Scholarship Endowment for the 2011-12 school year.

Racine Totten is also a beneficiary. The single mother of three is a sophomore at Johnson C. Smith University. She is also Answer's Levine

Scholar, an award made possible through a gift from The Leon Levine Foundation.

Totten is majoring in English and wants to be a lawyer. She works a part-time job four to five days a week to support her family.

"It's definitely hard, but I have to support my kids," Totten, 27, said. "That is how I make it happen."

Recipients must be raising children ages K-12, seeking their first degree from an accredited four-year institution or two-year nursing degree, be a U.S. citizen, work full-time or part-time, live in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area and be at least 25 years old.

The scholarship is paid directly to the school or university the recipient is attending and mothers can apply each year as long as they keep their grades up.

"We're helping to break the cycle of poverty," Answer Scholarship founder Susan Andersen said. "You educate a mom and you help

change the destiny of her children.”

The first scholarship was given in 2006. Andersen earned her business degree from UNC Charlotte in 1984.

“When I graduated from high school there was no money to send me to college,” Andersen said. “I was going to UNC Charlotte and I never forgot the generosity from the Charlotte Association of Insurance Women who provided me with a partial scholarship. I made a vow then to help women in my community.”

In 2005, Andersen found herself going through a divorce and decided it was time to make good on her promise to help other women.

Since starting the scholarship, 10 moms have graduated college and two are scheduled to graduate in December. Overall, 37 scholarships have been awarded to 20 women.

“We have a really good track record,” Andersen said. “To help ensure success rates for our recipients we have a mandatory mentoring program. We’re not just handing out scholarships, we’re offering support, too.”

Monies for the Answer Scholarship are provided through individual donors, churches and other organizations. Foundation for the Carolinas provides financial oversight.

“The local people in the area have been very kind to us,” Andersen said. “The Levine Foundation gave us a very nice donation last year.”

Tom Lawrence, executive director of the Levine Foundation, said the Answer Foundation is unique in that it is aimed at helping mothers create their own path.

“The program has been effective and the passion that Susan brings to the organization is clear and we think it’s a big part of the success it’s had,” Lawrence said.

Frazier, who went to college right after high school, left to start working.

“I tried to go back a couple of times and it didn’t work, but this time I really made up my mind that this was something I was going to complete,” she said. “It’s been a blessing all around and now I’m thinking of graduate school afterwards. I needed to complete my education in order to take care and sustain my children.”

Andersen believes that education is a powerful weapon for mothers to be equipped with.

“Moms are the ones that set the tone and example for the family,” Andersen said. “When a child sees a mom sitting at home and doing her homework that child has no excuse to say they’re tired. I just want to help make a difference.”

For women like Totten and Frazier, the scholarships have made an impact on their lives.

“I just really appreciate (Andersen) and what she is doing for women like myself who wish to go back to school. I want to be a role model for my children and particularly the moms out there,” Frazier said. “Susan’s program is awesome because sometimes having that encouraging word and having that person rooting for you is very important for the process.”

Soon Frazier hopes to be wearing her graduation regalia with her children looking on.

On the Net:

www.answerscholarship.org

<http://www.thecharlottepost.com/index.php?src=news&refno=3968&category=Life%20and%20Religion>