



Empowering Futures for 25 Years

*The Boomer Esiason Foundation
Scholarship Program Impact Report*

OCTOBER 2024

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BEF has awarded more than

1,200 scholarships

and over \$6.4 million

to Cystic Fibrosis community members **since 1999.**

Today, BEF awards over

\$500,000 per year

through a **minimum** of

\$10,000 per student.

1999

BEF's support for higher education in the cystic fibrosis (CF) community began with the **Gunnar Esiason Endowed Scholarship at Hofstra University**. This scholarship is awarded to an outstanding undergraduate student at Hofstra who either demonstrates exemplary service and commitment to preventing and curing cystic fibrosis, lives with CF, or has a family member affected by CF. BEF initially contributed **\$256,000** and the endowment has appreciated to over **\$470,000**. The program awards an average of **\$17,000** per student and has awarded roughly **\$347,000** to date.

2003

BEF began to award scholarships of **\$500 to \$1,000** to select people living with CF through an **Ambassador Program**. This program was the basis of the BEF Scholarship Program.

2005

The **Sacks for CF Scholarship** was the first formal scholarship program established by BEF, which awarded **\$180,000** annually through **ten \$3,000** scholarships and **ten \$5,000** scholarships to runner-ups, and **ten \$10,000** scholarships to winners. The Sacks for CF Scholarship Program was generously funded by AbbVie Inc. with additional support increasing for every sack recorded during NFL Monday Night Football games.

2009

BEF reaches \$1 Million awarded in scholarships.

To meet the needs of the growing number of people living with CF pursuing higher education, BEF established the **BEF General Academic Scholarship** in 2009. The program awarded scholarships several times per year in an effort to help mitigate the operational complexity of awarding as many students as possible. The scholarship program then began to rapidly expand over the next decade to include multiple memorial scholarships like the **Bonnie Strangio Memorial Scholarship, Rosemary Quigley Memorial Scholarship, Paul Drury Memorial CF Sibling Scholarship, and the Lea Faraone Memorial Scholarship**. Several additional scholarships were also added to the roster that supported key areas of interest for applicants like the **Exercise for Life Scholarship, Gunnar Esiason OWN IT Scholarship, Jerry Cahill You Cannot Fail Scholarship, Nebraska Regional Scholarship, Rimington Trophy Scholarship, Scholarship for the Arts, and TEMA Scholarship**.

2011

BEF established an endowment at **Boston College**, Gunnar and Sydney Esiason's alma mater. The endowment primarily supports students with CF and nursing students who would like to pursue CF care in their careers. Scholarships from the endowment have been awarded to **seven** students over **twelve** years. BEF initially donated **\$500,000** to the endowment, which has appreciated to **\$713,000**. On average, Boston College awards **\$31,000** per year and has awarded roughly **\$375,000** in scholarships to date.

BEF reaches \$2 Million awarded in scholarships.

2013

2016

BEF reaches \$3 Million awarded in scholarships.

2018

BEF distributed scholarships through the **Johnson & Johnson TRU Heroes Nursing Program**, which awarded scholarships to nursing students who are pursuing careers in CF care or who are living with CF. Scholars pursued programs at the University of Pennsylvania, Cincinnati Children's Hospital/University of Cincinnati, Boston Children's Hospital/Harvard University, Loyola University- Chicago, and the Columbia School of Nursing.

2019

BEF reaches \$4 Million awarded in scholarships.

2020

The scholarship program was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic to reevaluate its structure and goals. BEF conducted a survey of past scholarship recipients to better understand their needs.

BEF reaches \$5 Million awarded in scholarships.

2022

The updated scholarship program was launched with significant changes based on feedback from the survey. BEF increased the scholarship amounts to a minimum of **\$10,000 and up to \$15,000**, and reduced the number of awards to enhance the program's impact on each recipient. BEF awards an average of roughly **\$500,000** per year through the scholarship program.

Additionally, in 2022, BEF introduced an exciting new element to our Scholarship Program: an external **Scholarship Review Committee**. This committee was made entirely of people living with cystic fibrosis. Scholarship applicants would now be reviewed by their peers.

2024

BEF reaches over **\$6.4 million** awarded in scholarships.

BEF now awards these scholarships:

Sacks for CF

The Sacks for CF scholarship is a merit-based scholarship for students living with CF who display exceptional academic achievement.



Paul Drury Memorial Scholarship

The Paul Drury Memorial Scholarship honors a man who achieved so much in the face of cystic fibrosis. Cystic fibrosis is a disease that an entire family must face head on. The condition many times shapes the lives of not only the patient, but their family members. The scholarship program aims to highlight the support system that is so critical to success in the fight against CF. Cystic fibrosis siblings and children are people who share in the daily battle against CF. They help motivate their family members to remain compliant with medications and, ultimately, help carry some of the burden themselves!



BEF Academic Scholarship

In order to alleviate the financial burden on students in the CF community so that they can focus on school, the Boomer Esiason Foundation will award a General Academic Scholarship to 20 students and award them \$10,000 each. Winners will be chosen by a committee that consists of people living with cystic fibrosis. The BEF Scholarship committee considers the applicant's scholastic ability, character, leadership potential, service to the community and need for financial assistance. While a person's health isn't a determining criteria, we will ask that people with CF confirm their diagnosis to us.



In addition to the **minimum award of \$10,000** through the BEF Academic Scholarship, applicants are invited to apply to the following designations to receive **an additional \$5,000** scholarship. During the application process, students will have the option to write a long-form essay answering a specific question pertaining to a scholarship designation. Completing the essay automatically enters the student into the pool of candidates who will be considered for additional financial assistance.

The designations are:

Bonnie Strangio Memorial

Bonnie Strangio Memorial will be awarded to a student, like Bonnie, who has an upbeat personality and “can-do” attitude, and shows a tremendous passion for life in achieving their goals despite battling CF. Bonnie loved life and everything in it. She appreciated family, friends, and people in general.

Rosemary Quigley Memorial

Rosemary Quigley Memorial will be awarded to a student who refuses to allow cystic fibrosis to hold them back. A student who has a passion for academics and an interest in the medical field and or in health policy and law, similar to that of Rosemary’s interests.

Jerry Cahill You Cannot Fail Distinction

The Jerry Cahill designation will be awarded to someone who is on a path to discover their own heroism, embrace the ups and downs of their life’s journey, make a difference by sharing that journey with others, and celebrate the stories that make them unique.

Lea Faraone Memorial

Lea played an important role with BEF through the final years of her life, and was posthumously honored with the Michael Brennan Courage Award. During her life, she loved to travel and was an outstanding advocate for the cystic fibrosis community. With the Lea Faraone Memorial we want to celebrate people living with cystic fibrosis who are willing to live their lives on their own terms!

Team Boomer Distinction

The Team Boomer Distinction will be awarded to a student who values the importance of exercise with CF and participates in athletics.

Exemplary Graduate Student Distinction

Designed to support students with cystic fibrosis studying at the graduate level, applicants should be well-rounded and have a will to learn and achieve at the highest possible standard. Lastly, we hope applicants are open with their disease and willing to discuss it with the people around them.

Methods

To better understand the historical impact of the scholarship program, how the impact of the program has changed over time, and how BEF can better meet the needs of the CF community in the future, BEF issued a survey to past scholarship recipients and conducted follow up interviews to learn more about past recipients' experiences with the scholarship program and higher education experiences. The findings from surveys and interviews were analyzed to identify key themes in participant experiences, how changes in CF healthcare have impacted education and career trajectories, how changes in the BEF scholarship program have impacted recipients' experiences, and what gaps there may be in education and career support for people living with CF.

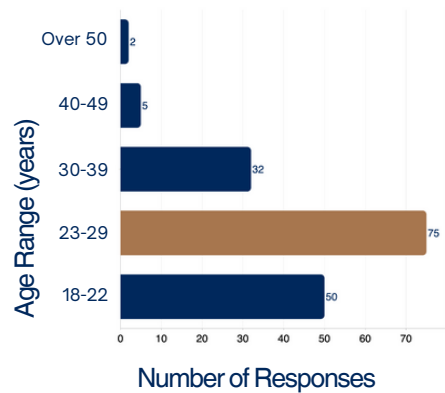
BEF distributed the survey through emails to past scholarship recipients from 2009, when BEF began collecting scholarship recipient emails, to the present. Of the **703** email addresses initially contacted, **127** were inactive or bounced back. BEF then sent out an email blast with the survey link to its general email list (**26,940** emails) and a second follow up email to its patient, caregiver, past scholarship applicants, and broader CF community email lists (**1,798** emails) to reach those whose scholarships predate 2009 or whose recorded email was no longer active. Both email blasts had about **30%** open rates. Responses to the survey were then cross-referenced with BEF's records to confirm that the respondent won a scholarship. Incomplete or invalid responses were discarded. **BEF received 164 complete survey responses from confirmed past scholarship recipients.** Survey responses were then sorted, analyzed, and coded.

The survey asked respondents if they were interested in participating in follow-up interviews. BEF followed up through email with the **132** respondents who responded "Yes" or "Maybe" to completing an interview. For those who agreed, BEF conducted interviews over Zoom, **38** of which are included in this report (**29%** response rate). Interviews were then recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed and coded.

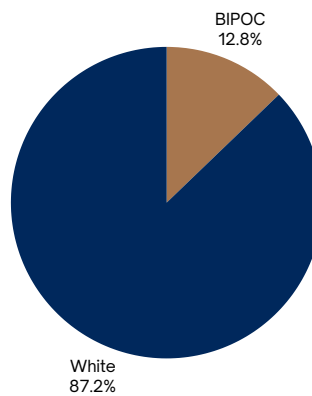
Demographics

Most respondents (**92%**) were people living with cystic fibrosis. The remaining respondents were siblings or other relatives of people living with CF or had another relationship to CF, such as a CF nurse.

Responses to “How old are you?”



Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents

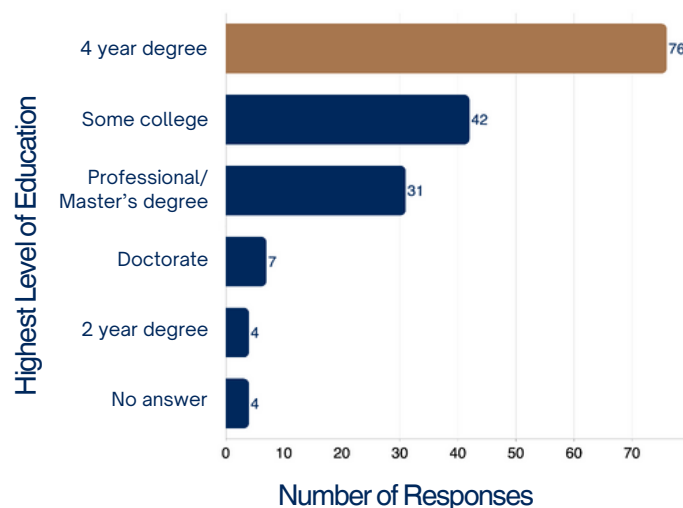


Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents who identified as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC)

- Hispanic or Latino, White (3.66%)
- Hispanic or Latino (3.66%)
- Asian (1.83%)
- Black or African American, Other (0.61%)
- Asian, Middle Eastern or North African, White (0.61%)
- Other (0.61%)
- Asian, White (0.61%)
- American Indian or Alaska Native, White (0.61%)
- Black or African American (0.61%)

Most respondents (**76%**) were under the age of 30. A large majority of respondents, **87%**, identified as white and **73%** identified as female.

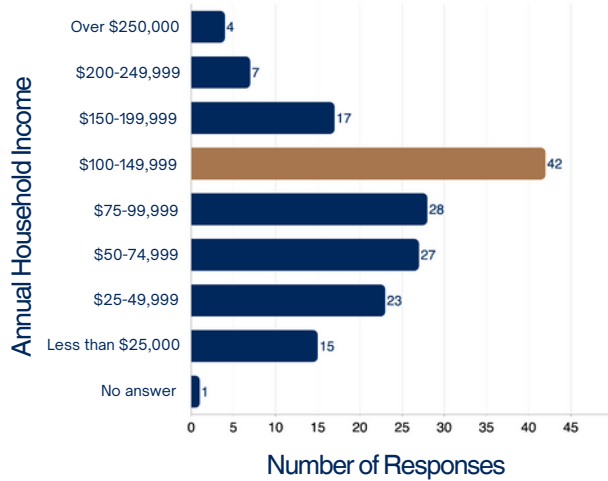
Responses to “What is your highest level of education?”



About **46%** of respondents completed 4-year degrees while about **30%** received their master's or doctoral degrees. Over half (**54%**) of respondents reported being employed full time. Of those who were employed full time, over half (**55%**) had 4-year degrees and about **42%** had a Master's degree or Doctorate degree.

97% of respondents either finished the degree or are still enrolled in the degree program that they received the scholarship for.

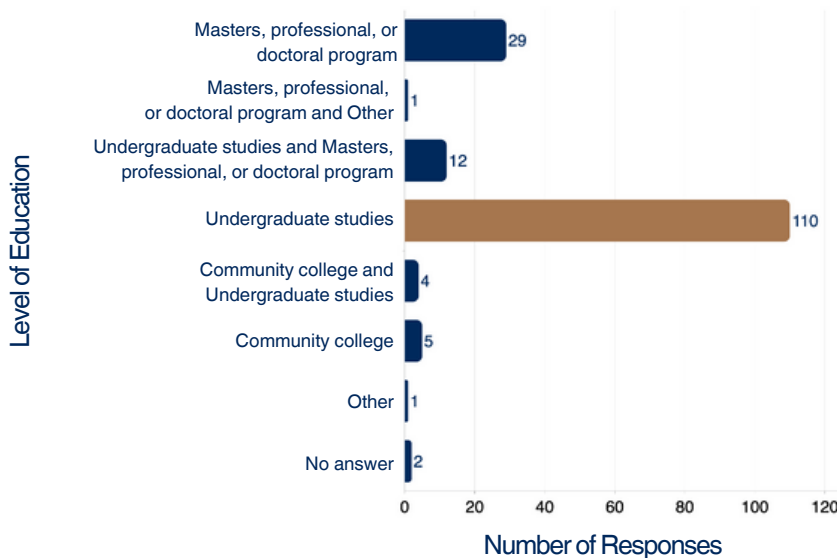
Responses to “What is your annual household income?”



Most respondents (**57%**) had annual household incomes of below \$100,000. **The median annual income range was \$75,000 to 99,999.** This accounts for both professionals and students who may be living with their parents. For people working full-time, **73%** of respondents had incomes in the range of \$50,000 to \$150,000, with the median income range of \$75,000 to \$99,999.

While the survey includes responses from recipients who won scholarships as far back as 2005, most survey respondents (**63%**) received a scholarship at some time between 2019 and 2024. This includes all years that a recipient won a scholarship if they received multiple. There were no responses from people who won scholarships in 2004, 2006, and 2007.

Responses to “What level of education did you put your scholarship award towards?”



About **78%** of scholarship recipients received scholarships while they were in high school, undergraduate studies, or both. Most scholarship recipients received one scholarship (**66%**) and the majority of scholarships went toward undergraduate studies (**67%**).

Career and Education Paths

31% of survey respondents are studying to become or currently work in **healthcare** as:

- Physicians
- Nurses
- Physician assistants
- Physical therapists
- Genetic counselors
- Nutritionists and dieticians
- Public health experts
- Health information managers
- Researchers
- Policy and advocacy experts
- Health marketing professionals
- Sports medicine practitioners
- Anesthesiologists
- Ultrasonographers
- Pharmacists
- Psychologists and psychiatrists
- Veterinarians

“*Living with Cystic Fibrosis and seeing the impact my doctors and nurses have had on my life has made me realize from a young age that I have wanted to work in the medical field.*”

Career and Education Paths

Many respondents' experiences with CF drove their interest in pursuing a career in healthcare. Interacting with CF care staff, such as nurses, social workers, dietitians, physical therapists, and physicians drove scholarship recipients to pursue careers in those fields. In both the healthcare field and beyond, respondents expressed their desire to pursue a career through which they can serve others and give back to their communities.

In addition to healthcare, survey respondents are pursuing a wide variety of education and career pathways in the following fields:

- Academia
- Research
- Law
- Library science
- Communications
- Education
- Social work
- Journalism
- Publishing
- Computer information systems
- Sports marketing
- Mergers and acquisitions, corporate strategy
- Product management
- Geographic information systems
- Graphic design
- Product development
- Accounting
- Venture capital investing
- Engineering
- Government
- Arts, music, and theater
- Agriculture
- Consulting
- Firefighting
- Software engineering
- Human resources
- Data science
- Architecture
- Insurance

Empowering Futures:

The Impact of BEF's Scholarship Program

Relief of Financial Burden

“

The scholarships that I received through BEF significantly reduced my financial burden. I would not have been able to graduate from college debt free without the help of BEF!

”

Pursuing higher education is a significant financial risk for many families, even more so for families shouldering the financial burden of living with a chronic illness like CF. The scholarship significantly relieved the financial burden of higher education for most BEF's scholarship recipients. When asked how significantly the scholarship reduced their financial burden, **86% of survey respondents replied that the scholarship reduced their financial burden in a meaningful way.** The context of each recipient's response varied, as survey respondents all faced different circumstances in their level of financial support and the cost of their education. Many respondents emphasized that the scholarship helped to reduce the amount of student loans they took out, which had a long-term impact on their financial well-being.

Scholarships not only helped to directly alleviate the financial burden of higher education, but allowed for scholars to devote more time to their treatments, studies, and careers. **72% of respondents replied that the scholarship alleviated stress and/or impacted their health either “a lot” or “a decent amount,”** indicating that the downstream effects of the scholarship have long-term effect on recipients health and overall wellbeing. Survey respondents revealed that not only did the scholarship help to relieve them and their families of stress, but allowed them to reduce their work hours, spend more time on their treatments, and devote more time to studying. In one case, the scholarship relieved a recipient of enough financial burden that they could spend less time working outside of school and have time to participate in a clinical trial for a medication that radically improved their health.

“

Without [the scholarship], I don't know how I'd be able to focus on my courses and attend university as a first-generation student whose family did not have the money to afford it all. Now, I can balance my school life while also balancing my health.

”

Education Achievement

73% of respondents replied that the scholarship helped recipients to finish their degree “a lot” or “a decent amount.” The extent to which scholarships helped recipients to finish their degrees varied with the scholarship amount that they received– recipients who thought that the scholarship helped them to finish their degree “a lot” reported receiving an average of about \$13,000, while recipients who thought that the scholarship helped them to finish their degree “a little” reported receiving an average of about \$3,500. This is likely because BEF has increased its scholarship award amounts over time. **Today, BEF awards scholarships of up to \$15,000 per recipient.**

“ *The scholarship allowed me to pursue a specific type of education I would not have been able to afford otherwise, so I would say the impact of this scholarship has been huge from a financial and educational standpoint.* ”

Some survey respondents noted that they would not have completed their degrees without financial aid from BEF. Some decided to pursue their degrees in the first place or go back to graduate school because they knew of BEF’s scholarships. **When asked to what extent the scholarship enabled recipients to achieve their educational goals, 48% of respondents replied “a lot” and 34% replied “a decent amount,” indicating that the scholarship plays a significant role in allowing scholars to reach their full educational potential.** In interviews, scholars discussed how their education experience allowed them to explore new paths and pursue fields that they would not have been exposed to outside of school and **30% of respondents went on to pursue a graduate or doctorate degree after their four year degree.** One interviewee was directly motivated by the BEF scholarship for graduate students to go back to school to pursue a new career after putting it off for financial reasons. Many other respondents described the importance of scholarships for graduate programs, as they are less common than undergraduate scholarships. This is especially relevant as people living with CF live longer, healthier lives and look to pursue graduate degrees to advance in their careers or pursue new ones.

“ *And since I've gotten my MBA, it just opened my mind up to think in a totally different capacity... There are so many things that I learned that I'm applying to my work now.* ”

Comparison to Other Available Scholarships

A large majority of survey respondents felt satisfied with their scholarship experience and connected to BEF. **Most survey respondents (90%) either responded “strongly agree” or “agree” when asked if they felt supported by BEF during their higher education experience and 89% rated their experience with the online application as “excellent” or “good.”**

When asked how the BEF scholarship compared to other available scholarships, many respondents noted that the scholarships provided by BEF were more impactful than other CF-specific scholarships.

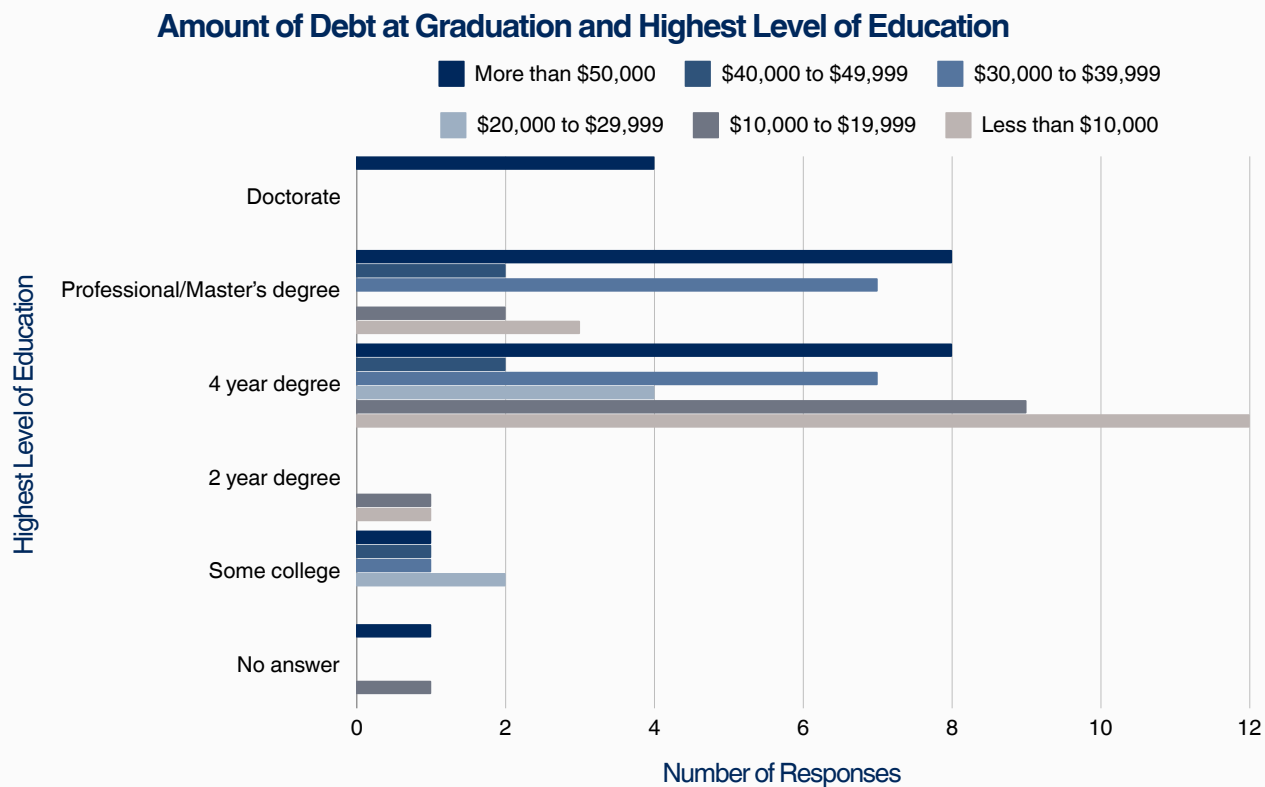
Scholars replied that BEF provided more money and had more varied opportunities to win scholarships compared to other programs. BEF’s application process was described as easier to navigate and respondents appreciated the BEF staff’s kindness and attentiveness during the interview process. Respondents highly regarded BEF’s commitment as an organization to the needs of the CF community and the personalized nature of the scholarship process. Some scholars also noted that BEF was more visible as an organization and effectively advertised their scholarships compared to other organizations and scholarships.

Health Changes

While **92% of respondents living with CF described their current state of health as “excellent” or “good,”** many respondents described struggling with their health throughout their studies. Many survey respondents described completing their schoolwork from hospital beds and finishing their degrees while facing extreme health challenges, which is a testament to the perseverance and determination of the CF community. In interviews, current or more recent students described more flexible and accommodating school environments compared to interviewees that went to school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to more flexible remote work options. However, health remains a significant concern for both current students and working adults, particularly regarding how to prioritize treatments, healthcare, and regular exercise with the demands of living independently.

For many older recipients, the scholarship helped them to achieve dreams that they could only now realize thanks to the development of new, highly effective treatments for CF. In both surveys and interviews, many respondents specifically credited Trikafta and modulators for drastic improvements in their health, which allowed them to pursue their education and career goals. When asked how their health has changed since their time in school, respondents used words like **“dramatically,” “immensely,” “significantly,”** and **“tremendously”** to describe how Trikafta changed their lives. In one case, a recipient received a scholarship in 2005 for their undergraduate degree and pursued a career in education. Crediting improvements in their health, the interviewee decided to pursue a new career in healthcare, for which they received a scholarship from BEF in 2024. This recipient’s career arc not only illustrates the power of the recent developments in CF healthcare, but how BEF’s Scholarship Program has remained steadfast in supporting the education and career pursuits of the CF community for over two decades.

Student Debt



Not all survey respondents graduated with student debt, but for many who did, student loans were a significant financial burden. Over half of respondents who graduated with student debt had 4 year degrees, while about one third had professional, Master's or doctorate degrees. **29% of respondents who graduated with student loans had over \$50,000 in debt**, with some reporting existing debt burdens of over \$200,000. **The median student debt range for survey respondents was \$30,000 to \$39,999, which is slightly higher than the national average student loan debt in America for the 2021-2022 school year, \$29,400.**

Of the 77 respondents that carry student loan debt, 30 replied that student loans negatively impacted their lives. Respondents described student loan debt as “horrible,” “extremely difficult,” “a huge obstacle,” and “suffocating.” The extensive burden of medical costs associated with living with CF and student loans negatively affected the quality of life of some survey respondents. Some also reported that student loans prevented them from saving for future events such as buying a home, pursuing IVF, and retiring. Higher education is a substantial financial investment, which can add onto the already heavy financial burden of living with a chronic illness. BEF scholarships help to reduce this burden for many recipients, but there are still those who strain under the weight of debt. This is likely even more pronounced for people living with CF who do not receive scholarships for higher education.

Practical Considerations

CF was a major factor in many of our scholars' choices regarding their education and career paths. While some respondents highlighted the effect of CF on what they wanted to accomplish in their chosen career field, **many described how CF guided them to make practical considerations in their career choices, like prioritizing job stability and robust insurance coverage.** Insurance coverage was a particularly salient concern for many respondents, as some scholars chose to work for large companies with reputable coverage over start-ups, or made sure to research companies' insurance plans when considering jobs. Medical expenses were important concerns for many respondents, as both standalone expenses and as additional burdens to student debt and cost of living. Many respondents described prioritizing job stability and steady incomes in order to shoulder these expenses. Respondents also referenced needs for job flexibility and remote working conditions to prioritize their health and treatment schedule. During interviews, some respondents expressed a desire for more resources to help young adults living with CF make informed choices regarding their careers and finances to prioritize their long-term health and overall wellbeing.

“

Being awarded the BEF Sacks for CF scholarship helped me overcome some of my fears and gave me the courage to finish my degree. I likely would not have become a doctor had I not gotten that initial scholarship.

”

Living Longer Lives

As people living with CF continue to live longer, healthier lives due to improvements in CF care and the widespread use of CFTR modulators, financial health needs to be a cornerstone of long-term CF care. Respondents highlighted the need not only in college, but in their adult lives, for education and guidance on making strategic financial choices to promote their long-term wellbeing. One-fifth of respondents in a [recent study](#) echoed this sentiment and described fears associated with daily life or financial needs, including insurance expenses. Through its Scholarship Program, Financial Hardship Assistance Program, and IVF Grant Program, BEF is actively and thoroughly supporting many of the needs expressed by the respondents to our survey. Financial wellness should continue to be an integral part of broader outreach efforts by the entire CF community and an area of interest for researchers to ensure that all people living with CF have the best possible opportunities to live their healthiest, fullest lives. Based on the thoughtful feedback of survey respondents and interviewees, BEF is also considering developing a mentorship and networking program for scholarship recipients to provide more opportunities for career development and community-building.

The Boomer Esiason Foundation has played a crucial role in supporting the higher education goals of the CF community by enabling young adults living with CF to pursue the futures of their dreams. The responses recorded in surveys and interviews reveal the immense impact that the scholarship program has had on recipients. Higher education is an expensive investment for any individual or family, especially coupled with the high cost burden of living with a chronic disease. BEF is honored to help shoulder some of these expenses to facilitate the higher education pursuits of motivated, passionate, and resilient individuals living with CF. The indirect effects of the scholarship on recipients' long-term physical health, financial wellbeing, mental health, and career paths have been profound. As more people in the CF community live longer, healthier lives, BEF will continue to provide meaningful support for the aspirations of all people living with CF, as it has done for the past twenty-five years through the Scholarship Program.

We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who contributed their stories to this report.

“Thanks to the invaluable support of the Boomer Esiason Foundation, not only can I chart my path with confidence, but I can also aspire to accomplish goals that once seemed beyond reach. I am profoundly grateful for the unwavering assistance I've received from the foundation, both during my undergraduate studies and now as I pursue a master's degree... Through their scholarship program, the weight of financing my graduate education is lightened, allowing me to focus wholeheartedly on my academic and personal ambitions. To the BEF team, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for supporting me as I continue to make a positive impact on others' lives through my profession, just as you have done for me.”