

School of Life grads win scholarships

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School of Life Foundation co-founders Jack Rolfe, left, and his wife Lexie Rolfe, far right, celebrate Monday with scholarship recipients Jonas Christensen, second from left, Jessica Chatwin, Alec Perez and Nick Dallas.

An after-school life skills course is being credited for helping some Washington County high school students to beat the odds.

Four local students were rewarded with scholarships Monday after graduating from the School of Life Foundation, a program that has been proliferating across southwest Utah as a way for students to recover lost school credits and get back on course.

They'll each have an extra \$500 to use as they head to college, each having made it through high school despite some unusual obstacles.

Nick Dallas, who graduated in May from Millcreek High, said his counselors had told him he had little chance of graduating before he started his senior year, having fallen behind on credits and lacking much motivation to catch up.

A teacher recommended him for the School of Life program, and Dallas said it was during those eight hours of extra classes that he realized it was time for an attitude adjustment.

“I got a lot more out of it than I would have thought,” he said. “I thought I would just go in there and get the credit done. I actually really appreciated what they did.”

Dallas ended up speaking at the school’s graduation ceremony, and he said he surprised himself by being able to stand up in front of a large crowd and speak comfortably.

Finding comfort with one’s self was a common thought among the students.

Jessica Chatwin was one of the four inaugural graduates at Water Canyon High School in Hildale.

Home-schooled through grade eight, Chatwin said she had to learn to step out of her comfort zone to make the transition to public school, and the School of Life program helped her to learn how. She went into the program as a sophomore and set a goal for herself to work through high school in time to graduate a year early.

She accomplished that goal — having become student body president and valedictorian in the process — and now she said she plans to study communications at Dixie State University and work toward a career in journalism.

“I just have always wanted to write, and I really wanted to write about my experiences growing up in the community I did,” she said. “I want to write books.”

Alec Perez, from Desert Hills High, and Jonas Christensen, from Hurricane High, spoke about similar experiences, each saying the School of Life program helped them to find focus and set themselves on a course for success.

Examples like these are why the Washington County School District has gone all in with its partnership with School of Life, implementing the program throughout each local high school as part of a larger trend toward more individualized education and targeted “interventions” built around the specific needs of each student.

The program started in one school four years ago, but quickly expanded to 14 in the last school year. In 2015-16, there are 25 schools slated to use it, including schools in Iron, Davis and Utah counties, said Kip Kent, director of training services for the foundation.

School of Life participants have seen their overall GPAs jump an average of 16 percent, and teachers report major improvements in dispositions toward attendance, peer pressure, homework completion and overall attitude, Kent said.

Funding for the scholarships was secured through a partnership with the Washington County School District Foundation, the fundraising arm of the school district.

Pam Graf, the WCSD Foundation director, said she was excited to have seen the School of Life Foundation come so far in such a short time frame.

“It’s amazing the progress we see in these students,” she said.



School of Life Foundation CEO Jack Rolfe speaks Monday during an event at the Washington County School District offices. (Photo: David DeMille/The Spectrum & Daily News)