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## Nursing student aid plan grows

**Fund gives \$3 million so community college trainees can make it through hard times.**

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***Published 12:00 am PST Monday, January 7, 2008***

The Foundation for California Community Colleges has given a major boost to a fund that helps nursing students facing financial emergencies.

The fund is called Flo's Cookie Jar, after Florence Nightingale, the nursing pioneer. Nursing students hit with money troubles can get one-time grants of up to \$2,000.

The community colleges foundation started Flo's Cookie Jar about 18 months ago, relying on donations from nurses, health care companies and hospital associations. In 2007, the fund helped 89 students, dispensing about \$115,000.

Convinced the need is far greater, the foundation has decided to funnel \$3 million from an endowment into the effort, dramatically increasing the number of students who can get help.

"There is a huge need," said Kristine Yahn, director of health care programs with the Sacramento-based foundation.

No student should have to abandon the dream of becoming a registered nurse for want of a few hundred dollars, especially when the state is facing a nursing shortage, Yahn said.

According to a 2007 report from the state Legislative Analyst's Office, California has 230,000 registered nurses. By 2014, the report said, the state will need 40,000 additional nurses to meet the demands of a growing – and aging – population. By comparison, the state's nursing ranks are expected to grow by just 28,000.

Though small in relation to overall college costs, Cookie Jar grants can make a difference.

The money might be used for car repairs, a child's day care, textbooks or other expenses critical to a student's ability to stay in school.

Lisa Attles, 42, nearly dropped out of the nursing program at Sacramento City College when hit with a series of setbacks.

Following a divorce, Attles worked in a library, then in the funeral business while putting savings aside for the nursing program.

But once in school, it was one obstacle after the next: unexpected car trouble; rising health care premiums; then failing eyesight.

Her eyes clouded by cataracts, Attles underwent surgery; insurance deductibles and doctor's office co-payments ate up her savings.

A \$2,000 check from Flo's Cookie Jar allowed Attles to keep up with the bills and stay in school. She is now five months from graduating.

"I think it is wonderful," Attles said. "I'm very grateful."

Nursing student Nakia Hayes, 32, was \$2,400 behind on her rent and considered dropping out of college so she could work full time. A \$2,000 grant from Flo's Cookie Jar allowed her to continue her studies at Contra Costa College in San Pablo.

"It was such a relief to not have that hanging over my head and go into my last semester without worrying," Hayes said.

Diane Welch was director of the nursing program at Sacramento City College for a dozen years before retiring in 2006. She said many students have small financial problems that put their education in peril.

"I remember a young lady, a single parent with three children, who needed tires for her car," Welch said. "She had no way to purchase them. Without tires she was not able to go to clinical (rotation) or even drive to school."

The student dropped out of the college program.

"We had no way to help her and that just broke my heart," Welch said.

Small and large donations came in after Flo's Cookie Jar was set up, some of it money collected when cookie jars were passed around at nursing association meetings.

Florence Nightingale's efforts to improve wartime medical care sparked a fund in her own era. By the end of the Crimean War, the English nurse had become a legend for her service.

A fund collected in 1860 for her work with wounded soldiers was used to establish the Nightingale School and Home in London to train nurses.

Patricia McFarland, head of the Association of California Nurse Leaders, said Nightingale would be proud of Flo's Cookie Jar.

"We think Flo would challenge us to ask the business community and ask those who will need nursing care to contribute to this effort," McFarland said. "And she would say: 'Job well done.'"

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