

Women get assist in college,

is to advocate for a change in policies related to homelessness, which is intertwined within the scholar program curriculum as well. Through "flexible" grants of up to \$11,000 per year, leadership workshops, mentoring, and caseworker assistance, the program offers tools for success to 125 mothers across five sites in Massachusetts. Eleven scholars come from the Dorchester-Roxbury area, according to One Family's Development Director, Debra Ferrar-Parkman.

One of the program's sites is located at Dudley Street's Project Hope, which co-founded the scholars program in 2000 with Wellspring House in Gloucester. "The thing I think is so important is supporting women to get their education and to get jobs that pay a living wage," said Sister Margaret Leonard, Project Hope's Executive Director. "[It's] not only as a critical agenda for them, it's a critical agenda for Boston and Massachusetts." All women in the program have custody of one or more children under the age of 18 and

fall within 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Site coordinator Sara Lewis, who works one-on-one with the scholars, indicated that women enrolled in the program also met other criteria, such as academic standing and aspirations. The program, Lewis said, seeks to "prevent obstacles from becoming barriers to their success and their family's success." She said that the flexible grants they offer "fill in the gap," where the money is needed, adding that it may not always be for tuition, but also for housing, childcare, and other needs as well, depending on each scholar's particular situation.

She stressed that the program is much more than money. "They gain everything from confidence to a support system." Scholar Nicole Flynt, 35, says she has connected with the "sisters" she never had growing up. "It was really nice to be around a bunch of women who are all striving for the same thing. All of us are in there to get an education to better our lives and our family's

lives," Flynt says. She sees the two weekend-long retreats as well as the "day-treats" as opportunities to foster bonds with women who are going through the same obstacles. Besides bonding time, Flynt said, scholars are encouraged to influence policy-makers by sharing their stories of "what it feels like to be homeless or be a paycheck away from homelessness." Finishing up her undergraduate degree in human services at Springfield College's Charlestown campus in May, this mother of two has seen herself as having three full-time positions: "Full-time mom, full-time student... full-time job."

She refers to the "cliff effect" to illustrate the stress that comes with three hectic roles; yet she now knows she has a support system. She explained that as you go through school, you work your way up from the bottom of a mountain to the top, step by step. "And let's say, you know, one of your children gets sick. You're the only one, you have to go to the hospital. The same day you go to

life from One Family



One family scholar Nicole Flynt, left, with Sr. Margaret Leonard. Photo by Sonia Essaiibi

the hospital, the same day you miss your final exam."

That's when those involved with the One Family scholars program, she says, "find what you need to make you be able to get back on that mountain and climb back again," whether it be daycare, money, or a compassionate ear. This year, more than 40 scholars—nine from Project Hope's site—who have successfully made it past that cliff will be graduating from colleges

across Massachusetts. On April 10, the organization will recognize these scholars in the annual celebration and fundraiser, *Mothers of Inspiration*.

It will also be the first year that One Family, Inc. will present the *Legends Among Us* awards, which will honor Sr. Margaret Leonard, Nancy Schwoyer of Wellspring House, and the Red Sox Foundation, for their dedication to making a difference through their nonprofit work.