

Irene Keyes Memorial Fund/NCCWSL
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The work begins early January. Most of the work is done via email. I usually update the application, article for the Branch, press release, etc and send them out for approval. Each member of the committee deals with a college in the area. Most committee members have established some relationships at colleges. I send out e-mails to **many** people, many non AAUW members, who have written for or recommended young women in the past, who lead activities for young women, and previous recipients.* E-mails are followed up by phone calls. As applications come in, I respond. As letters of recommendation come in, I send "Thank you and confirmation e mails" Usually, I have to call or email young women to get all the pieces in line. (2 letters plus application). The committee receives the applications via e mail from me. We then rank the applicants. If there are great differences we have a meeting. If not, we handle our discussion via e-mail. If there are many applications (like 2 years ago), everyone gets a hard copy from me... driving around Dutchess County... and we meet to select. I then inform the first choice. If she accepts, we take turns notifying the others. Sometimes we invite them to reapply the following year. Finally, I arrange a meeting with the recipient and some of the committee members, to present the check and put a face to the name. I am also the one who "checks in" on the young women and reminds them of their obligation. This year we invited our very first recipient and now member, Domonique Garrett, to join the committee. I write articles for the Branch, get the web site info to the right person, and **write** thank you notes for donations throughout the year. I encourage all board members who do not know Irene to read about her on the web site. Committee members: Mary Coiteux, Mary Lou Davis, Betty Harrel, Pat Luczai, Domonique Garrett and me.

*This year's recipient was encouraged to apply from last year's choice!

The following is from Qadan Mohamed's reaction to NCCWSL. Through our members and her family's generosity we are able to offer a scholarship from The Irene Keyes Memorial Fund to send talented young college women to the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders held each year. We wish to remind our members that contributions to this Fund are always welcome!

By Qadan Mohamed - Marist College student

I am beyond grateful that I was selected and awarded this scholarship. Opportunities like this scholarship make a significant difference in the lives of driven and passionate women.

My experience at the NCCWSL 2017 conference was simple but powerful. I learned a lot from listening, observing and engaging. Understanding one's self worth was a crucial theme I was constantly reminded of at this conference. Growing up, there were countless times that I went to bed wishing I could wake up different. (Note: Qadan was born with one arm)

I did not like how I looked or felt when I was teased. Being different is not “normal” in the eyes of others and I wanted to feel “normal.” It was not until I graduated from high school that I started to love and accept myself. I am still learning to build my confidence. It has only been a few years since I started to not focus on the need to feel “normal” to reach my full potential and Jessamine Stanley’s journey was a perfect reminder that it is never too late to realize your own value. Small things like going out for shopping can be challenging for me because I have to think about what to do with the empty sleeve or how to wear a sleeveless dress or top. I always thought that my trouble of loving myself fully was about my missing arm, but now I know it has always been about my lack of self love and respect. Stanley could have quit the second time she tried yoga just like she did before but the difference was persistence and positivity. Even though I did not have the chance to talk to Stanley in person, I am grateful that I was introduced to her and for the great cause she stands for.

The 2017 Women of Distinction Event was a very eventful and empowering aspect of this conference. I had the opportunity to meet and talk to people like Amanda Nguyen. It is one thing to meet an inspirational person, but it is another to look beyond their success to realize that their change did not happen overnight. I had a few minutes to talk to Amanda Nguyen to thank her for her bravery and persistence for her foundation “Rise.” In many communities sexual assault survivors are blamed for what happened to them. Some girls are married off to their rapist to save her and her family's reputation. So seeing and meeting Nguyen was a perfect reminder that we need to persist and accept challenges that come our way to make a difference.

My experience from this conference gave me a better vision of what lies ahead in college and after. As an international student and first in my family in college, I am committed not only to creating opportunities for my future, but also for other girls and women in my community. I have met strong, educated, and transformative women at NCCWSL, and I want to see more women like them. So, I feel like my experience at this conference will go a long way, and I will continue to advocate for creating more leadership opportunities on campus.