“Preparation plus opportunity equals success,” is a saying that Mark Harper lives by. When his daughter Lyndsey was struggling in grade school in Las Vegas, Mark decided that it was time for a change. The decision to pull his family closer ended up having a profound impact on their educational pursuits.

In the 1980s Mark enrolled at Grossmont Junior College in California, “to pursue a career in the NBA.” With basketball, not academics, taking precedence, Mark ended up dropping out. Eventually realizing that his dream of playing in the NBA was “getting too far out of reach,” Mark joined the working ranks for the next 30 years.

Mark’s passion for the sport led him to coach club basketball for the Colorado Miners. During this time he discovered his passion for working with at-risk youth. The majority of the kids he coached were Latino and African American and, in many cases, came from single-parent homes. As a coach, Mark witnessed the impact he could have on these families as he watched the kids, whom many people had pushed to the side, shine. Mark knew that in order to fulfill his passion, he’d need a college diploma.

In 2010, Mark enrolled at the Community College of Denver (CCD) and began shuffling full-time work and school, quickly realizing that at the rate he was going, he might never earn his degree. At the same time, he made the decision to move his daughter Lyndsey to Colorado because her academics were suffering and she was in one of the most underperforming school districts in the country. Mark left his corporate job and devoted his time to school and his daughter’s education. “My daughter received a new lease on her educational life and I was able to lead by example,” Mark says. “We were both in school at the same time, Lyndsey was in high school and I was in college.”

During his second year at CCD, Mark learned about the Reisher Scholars Program, managed by The Denver Foundation. He applied and was accepted to join the Reisher Scholars cohort. This catapulted his college career, allowing him to transfer to Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSUD) and major in Sports Industry Operation with minors in Human Services and Marketing. Mark says, “Roger Reisher had a vision for students to be able to attend college without accruing any unnecessary student debt… and I was honored to be selected to achieve his vision.”

To stay on track, Mark took 15+ credit hours per semester and built a network of friendships within his cohort.
learning that “Through dedication and hard work, all things are possible.”

May 2016 marked a very special month for Mark and Lyndsey. Mark graduated as a first-generation student from MSU Denver. Lyndsey graduated from Gateway High School in Aurora as a member of the Honor Society and Student Council. Mark is currently working in student retention with CCD, piloting a program at four DPS schools that work with high school future centers to help the minority, male population understand how to engage and enroll in college and fine tune their higher education plans. Lyndsey is in her first year of college at Trinidad State Junior College on a volleyball scholarship, while pursuing a degree in Social Work. Mark says, “It was challenging for a while, but she turned things around. It wasn’t from me telling her she needed to get better in school, but by watching her dad succeed in school.”

THE REISHER SCHOLARS PROGRAM

1. Founded in 2001 by Roger and Margaret Reischer, a founder of FirstBank, and their daughters, Mary and Nancy Reischer

2. Grants of $4,000 to $11,000 per year beginning in sophomore year

3. Six participating universities in Colorado

4. Between 2001 and 2016, more than 1,100 students received $16.5 million in Reischer scholarships

Learn more at www.reisersherscholars.org

SVP DENVER

Social Venture Partners Denver is transforming individuals, businesses, and nonprofits. In fact, we’re transforming, philanthropy.

You have skills, talents, and a wealth of experience. Put them to work—join SVP Denver today!

For more information, visit svpdenver.org or call 303.996.7324.