Nonprofit promotes women’s equity

Scholarships provide access for Santa Cruz County women and girls

By Kara Guzman
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SANTA CRUZ » UC Santa Cruz student Alexandra Goncharova wants to become an art professor, and the local AAUW chapter is helping her get there.

The American Association of University Women is a national nonprofit organization promoting women's equity through scholarships and lobbying. Goncharova, a Russian immigrant and former high school dropout, received a $1,000 scholarship from the Santa Cruz AAUW chapter last spring, which she used toward summer classes.

"It allowed me to go in the direction of who I’m trying to be in the future," said Goncharova, who earned her GED at 18.

After years of community college, Goncharova, now 26, is one quarter away from receiving her art degree.

“I already knew what I was trying to do when I came here,” she said.

Judy Cavin Brown, Santa Cruz County AAUW president, said increasing educational access for women and girls is the key to fixing workplace inequities.

“No matter what you say about breaking the glass ceiling, there’s still a great deal of work to be done,” said Brown, who said to teach students about the pay gap.

AAUW GALA
What: Fundraiser to support the Santa Cruz County chapter of the American Association of University Women, a women's equality nonprofit.
When: 5 p.m. April 11
Where: University Center, UC Santa Cruz
Details: Cost is $40. To register or join the association, visit santacruz-ca.aauw.net.

Alexandra Goncharova is a reentry student at UCSC being helped by Judy Cavin Brown and Jeanne Jorgensen of AAUW, and Jannet Ceja, STARS program coordinator at UCSC.

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Equity

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the local chapter hands out cookies: whole ones for boys and three quarters of one to girls.

Each year in Santa Cruz County, the AAUW provides four UCSC scholarships for female reentry students — those who are over 25, veterans, parents, or have dropped out of college for four years. Around six Cabrillo College women each year also receive scholarships.

For county middle school girls, five $850 scholarships are available each year for a Stanford University summer engineering camp.

The Santa Cruz County AAUW chapter, the product of a July merger between the Santa Cruz and Watsonville chapters, will host a gala fundraiser in April to celebrate its 130 members and 80 years in the Santa Cruz community.

For $84 each year, members can take part in luncheons with guest talks on human trafficking, women's voting issues and health. The group also hosts social clubs such as walking and reading groups, Brown said.

Nationally, the group is involved with the United Nations and White House policy discussions, she said.

“If you want to be a part of something that's really making a difference in the world for women and girls, this is an organization,” Brown said.

Scotts Valley resident Jeanette Burke, 27, was a Cabrillo College AAUW scholarship recipient last year, when she was homeless and working three jobs. The single mother was also the honors society president and a full-time premedicine student, she said.

The $600 grant, which Burke received after a competitive selection process, allowed her to afford commuting to classes, she said.

"It wasn't necessarily just the funding that made the difference for me," Burke said. "It was that someone actually showed me that they believed I could do it."