



REAL STUDENTS. REAL STORIES.

# ThreeSixty

VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 1

JOURNALISM

**Contributors in this issue:** Abdifatah Abdi, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School • Austyn Lo, St. Paul Harding High School • Baher Hussein, Spring Lake Park High School • Bilan Mohamed, Ubah Medical Academy • Bina Lee, St. Paul Johnson High School • Citlali Bastian McClain, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School • Danielle Wong, ThreeSixty Journalism intern • Duniyo Awad, Ubah Medical Academy • Elezebet Mitiku, St. Paul Harding High School • Elisa Lopez, The Blake School • Genesis Buckhalton, St. Louis Park High School • Jocelyn Sol, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School • Kate Xiong, St. Paul Johnson High School • Katelyn Vue, North High School • Kelly Saybe, Roseville Area High School • Lucas Johnson, ThreeSixty Journalism intern • Lucy Kuo, Wayzata High School • Luis Rosas, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School • Maria Navidad Sanchez Resendiz, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School • Marwa Mohamed, Ubah Medical Academy • Melody Vue, St. Paul Harding High School • Mychaela Bartel, Roseville Area High School • Oralyn Weah, Park Center High School • Pa Houa Yang, St. Paul Harding High School • Samantha HoangLong, Burnsville High School • Talia Bradley, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School • Tony Vue, St. Paul Harding High School • Tyler Lee, St. Paul Harding High School • William Bollom, International School of Kuala Lumpur • Zahra Mustafa, Eagan High School

**Special-use photos:** Christina Garner • Darlene Fry • Jabari Holloman • John Gessner/Sun Thisweek • Learning Tree Yoga • Mark Vancleave • Sae Yang • Scott Tinkham • St. Paul Public Schools • University of St. Thomas • Wayzata Public Schools

## ThreeSixty Journalism

Mail 5057, 2115 Summit Ave.

St. Paul, MN 55105

[www.threesixtyjournalism.org](http://www.threesixtyjournalism.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/threesixtyjournalism>

<https://twitter.com/threesixtymn>



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Engagement Coordinator



Chad Caruthers,  
Executive Director



Miles Trump,  
Program Manager

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## Sparking light-bulb moments

BEFORE THE FIELD TRIP, she spoke about how she couldn't wait to go to WCCO.

Now that we were finally there, on the final day of ThreeSixty Journalism summer camp in late July, this particular student couldn't completely contain her excitement. She sat in the front row, leaning in, knee bobbing up and down, gaze locked on WCCO anchor Jason DeRusha, who spoke to our students from the floor of the studio.

I couldn't help but smirk. This is journalism camp, after all, but I hadn't anticipated this level of excitement, enthusiasm.

Ultimately, I hope all of our students manifest the excitement they feel during camp in the form of "light-bulb moments"—those specific instances when students realize, "Yes. Yes. I can do this."

And if they find their light-bulb moment during camp, they'll already be ahead. My light-bulb moment crept up on me when I was a 21-year-old University of St. Thomas student, sitting in a journalism classroom and watching KARE 11 reporter Boyd Huppert's story about Rob Thompson, also known as "The Jazz Man," a University of Minnesota bus driver who greeted his student riders



Miles Trump  
ThreeSixty  
Journalism  
Program  
Manager

with a friendly smile and jazz music through the speakers.

"I could tell that story," I told myself. I just needed the training. But I could do that. I began to see a path forward, developing before me.

If those moments of realization overtake our students during summer camp, then I feel I've done my job. We want students to recognize that yes, they can do this—whatever "this" may be for them.

And I believe it happens.

A light-bulb moment might happen in the classroom, when a student grasps the difference between a weak lede and a strong one, or connects with a guest speaker who has a strikingly similar background.

Light-bulb moments might happen during our college essay week, when students realize their voices are important and their stories do, absolutely, matter.

Several light-bulb moments might happen on campus, when students begin to picture themselves at the

University of St. Thomas—or any other college—next year, or in the years to come.

They might take place later that day, after students have mustered the courage to approach a stranger and interview that stranger about his or her summer plans. (The looks of gratification on their faces when this is over, and the new-found confidence that some of them leave with that day, is priceless.)

They may happen during the editing process, when a student has realized that yes, against all odds, I really did write a story in just a few days.

They may also be found on a field trip to a local newspaper or TV station, when the veil is lifted and students can picture themselves working in that office, telling those stories, someday.

I want all of the students we work with to fall in love with journalism. I know not all of them will choose this path. At the very least, then, I hope every single student leaves ThreeSixty seeing a path—or several paths—forward, developing in front of them.

It's these light-bulb moments, in ThreeSixty and beyond, that help these kids ultimately make this community, this world, a whole lot brighter.

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Email [threesixty@stthomas.edu](mailto:threesixty@stthomas.edu) with comments, letters and questions about participating in ThreeSixty.

ThreeSixty Journalism is a nonprofit program of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. Donations from individuals like you provide a significant amount of ThreeSixty's operating budget. To contribute, please visit <http://threesixtyjournalism.org/donate>.

# Summer at ThreeSixty Journalism

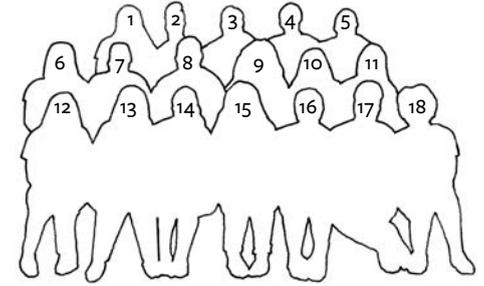


Photo courtesy of University of St. Thomas

Students in ThreeSixty Journalism's June Rookie Journalist Camp pose for a photo at the University of St. Thomas.

1. Jocelyn Sol, 2. Elezebet Mitiku, 3. Luis Rosas, 4. Abdi Mohamed, 5. Austyn Lo, 6. Samantha HoangLong, 7. Baher Hussein, 8. Tyler Lee, 9. Oralyn Weah, 10. Suchin Yang, 11. Pa Houa Yang, 12. Stephanie Ramon, 13. Gisell Castaneda, 14. Viridiana Arevalo, 15. Loveisajoy Pha, 16. Kate Xiong, 17. Amari Graham, 18. Destiny Attigbe.

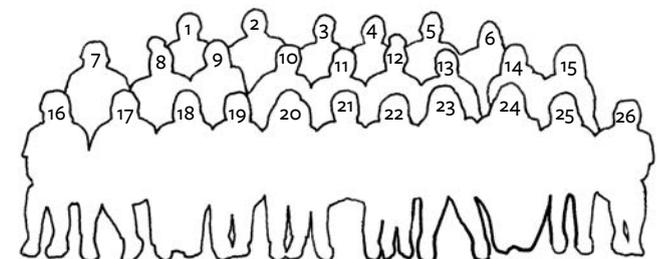


Photo courtesy of University of St. Thomas

## ThreeSixty camp at a glance

- 106 student participants over five summer camp sessions
- 43 college essays, 22 reported stories and 48 blog posts written by students during camp
- 100 volunteers from 40 organizations
- 9 field trips taken
- \$100,000 in scholarships given to eligible students to attend ThreeSixty camp

Students in ThreeSixty Journalism's July Rookie Journalist Camp pose for a photo at the University of St. Thomas. 1. Dominic Hebel-Barreto, 2. Brendan Thor, 3. Abdifatah Abdi, 4. Melody Vue, 5. William Bollom, 6. Marwa Mohamed, 7. Charly Vang, 8. Alex Reeve, 9. Julia Larson, 10. Katelyn Vue, 11. Victoria Vorobyeva, 12. Mychaela Bartel, 13. Genesis Buckhalton, 14. Isra Ali, 15. Bina Lee, 16. Mai Yeng Vang, 17. Zahra Mustafa, 18. Bilan Mohamed, 19. Anjelynt Lor, 20. Kelly Saybe, 21. Maria Navidad Sanchez Resendiz, 22. Duniyo Awad, 23. Citlali Bastian McClain, 24. Najma Mohamed, 25. Liz Sanchez, 26. Lucy Kuo



## About the ThreeSixty Scholar Award

Each year, high school seniors who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholar award—a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas. Here is an update on our recent scholars.



Amira Warren-Yearby

### Amira Warren-Yearby, 2015 Scholar

Warren-Yearby, a sophomore at the University of St. Thomas, taught eighth-grade social studies on race at the Blake School through LearningWorks at Blake this summer and then participated in a paid internship with Urban Mass Media as a production and programming assistant for WCCO's Urban Perspectives show. Warren-Yearby also took a filmmaking class at St. Thomas. This school year, she will continue her work with Urban Mass Media, will be the marketing and PR chair of the St. Thomas Black Empowerment Student Alliance, will instruct dance with Twin Cities Mobile Jazz at Humboldt High School and will be in the campus swing club.



Deborah Honore

### Deborah Honore, 2014 Scholar

Honore, a junior at St. Thomas, will study journalism and new media in Morocco with Round Earth Media during her fall semester. Later in the year, she plans to travel to South Africa with the St. Thomas Theology Department to study the adverse effects of AIDS and apartheid on South Africans. Honore worked as a campus videographer during the summer and edited her documentary, which she shot last January in Ethiopia.



Simeon Lancaster

### Simeon Lancaster, 2013 Scholar

Lancaster, a senior at St. Thomas, spent half of his summer working as an intern reporter for Sun newspapers, covering several communities but mostly Brooklyn Park, and spent the other half as an editorial production intern at BringMeTheNews, bringing the day's top stories to people's news feeds. During his final year of school, Lancaster will work as a production editor for TommieMedia, the University of St. Thomas' student-produced news organization, and will intern for PBS NewsHour's The Under-Told Stories Project.



Grace Pastoor

### Grace Pastoor, 2012 Scholar

Pastoor, a 2016 graduate of St. Thomas, is working as a full-time reporter at the Bemidji Pioneer. Pastoor, who started at the Pioneer after graduating in May, covers crime, courts and social issues.

## Danielle Wong is the 2016 ThreeSixty Scholar

THREESIXTY STUDENT Danielle Wong has been selected as the 2016 ThreeSixty Scholar. Wong has received a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Communication and Journalism at St. Thomas starting in the 2016 fall semester.

Each year, high school seniors who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholar award—currently valued at more than \$34,000 per year, or more than \$130,000 over four years. This year, there are four ThreeSixty scholars attending St. Thomas.

Wong's journey with ThreeSixty began when she attended the 2013 Introduction to Journalism summer camp at St. Thomas. Since then, she participated in the 2014 Intermediate Camp and school-year student News Team where she served as a senior reporter. She also interned at ThreeSixty this past summer. Wong has won two College Better Newspaper MNA Awards with ThreeSixty: first place in the Human Interest category and second place in the Business category. She was one of 42 high school students chosen to attend the Asian American Journalist Association's J-Camp in 2015 at the University of Minnesota. Wong was also one of two students chosen to speak at the J-Camp All-Star Reception at WCCO-TV.

Michael O'Donnell, chair of the St. Thomas Communication and Journalism Department, said the university has been richly rewarded by its ThreeSixty Journalism scholars. "ThreeSixty does a great job of setting up these students for success," O'Donnell said. "Our past and current ThreeSixty scholars are among the best and brightest in our department, going on to become leaders in the classroom and in student media. We are delighted to welcome Danielle to St. Thomas and to our department."



Danielle Wong

Wong's love for storytelling is illustrated by her roots as an actor. She has performed at her school and theatre companies around the Twin Cities, including Stages Theatre Company and Mu Performing Arts. At the 2015 IVEY Awards for Minnesota theatre, Wong was the first-ever teen to present an award. Now, she combines her love of theatre and writing as Mu's blogger.

"The idea of pursuing journalism sprouted from my love of reading and stories, and how stories provide ways to see the world through different lenses," Wong said. "ThreeSixty inspired me to become a story writer who gives a voice to those who are rarely heard. The program provided a safe place to hone my skills and find my voice, so I can make an impact in my community and beyond."

At St. Thomas, Wong hopes to continue her passion for telling stories by studying to become a multilingual international journalist. She is grateful for the opportunity to represent ThreeSixty in the Class of 2020 and is excited for the journey ahead.

## Dorsey & Whitney attorney joins ThreeSixty board

EXPERIENCED JOURNALIST-turned-attorney Jack Sullivan was recently elected to the ThreeSixty Board of Advisors.

Sullivan has 14 years of experience in the journalism industry as a copy editor at The (Fargo) Forum, a regional political writer in Washington D.C. with The Associated Press, and a local news team leader at the St. Paul Pioneer Press. He earned his bachelor's from the University of St. Thomas in 1993 and his law degree from the University of Minnesota in 2010.

"I'm very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to ThreeSixty," Sullivan said. "I believe in the work: Newsrooms are stronger when their reporters and editors have roots in all communities that they cover, and ThreeSixty helps makes that happen by giving students the confidence and

experience to start down the path to a journalism career."

With six years as a practicing lawyer under his belt, Sullivan has been helping corporate clients and human-resources professionals effectively manage employees, comply with state and federal regulations, and investigate and resolve complaints and disputes at Dorsey for a little over a year.

"As I've experienced in my second career, the skills that serve a journalist well apply everywhere, in any profession," Sullivan said. "I'm excited to be part of the conversation as ThreeSixty continues to find new ways to help students learn those skills and apply them in their lives."

Fellow St. Thomas alum and former MinnPost news editor Don Effenberger pointed out the opportunity is a



Jack Sullivan

great fit for Sullivan.

"As a local-news team leader at the Pioneer Press, he worked extensively with young journalists in helping develop their reporting and writing skills on both breaking news and in-depth projects," Effenberger said.

Sullivan lives in St. Paul with his 10-year-old boxer, Chelsea. In his free time, he enjoys scuba diving, traveling, trying out new restaurants and taking pictures.

# Remembering Toni Randolph

## Colleagues, mentees reflect on MPR editor's life and legacy

MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO award-winning journalist Toni Randolph, a longtime ThreeSixty Journalism supporter, a champion for diversity in newsrooms and a mentor to young journalists, died July 3 after being hospitalized for a medical procedure.

Randolph, 53, joined Minnesota Public Radio in 2003 as a reporter before becoming editor for new audiences in 2010, a position created to connect with diverse Minnesotans. She was a champion of diversity at MPR and beyond, using her years of experience as a journalist to inspire and mentor the next generation of journalists through programs such as MPR's Young Reporters Series and ThreeSixty Journalism.

In 2014, ThreeSixty awarded Randolph the Widening the Circle Award, given each year to an individual who has made "extraordinary contributions to the next generation of journalists, particularly while promoting inclusion and diversity." Randolph also joined the ThreeSixty Board of Advisors in 2016.

Many have found it hard to believe a woman filled with so much life could be gone. Here's how colleagues, friends and mentees reflected on Randolph's life and legacy.



**Danielle Wong**  
ThreeSixty  
Journalism  
intern



Photo submitted

Toni Randolph

"When I was in high school, I was not a fan of school. I hated school, and Toni knew that. And when I was working with her in the Young Reporters Series, I'd come and practically run through the skyways—because I went to school downtown—I'd run through the skyways to get to MPR and she would let me in. And she knew I wasn't doing super great, and she'd ask me like, "Oh, how's your homework doing, how's school, are you doing good?" And I was like, "Oh, there's this test tomorrow that, you know, I haven't really studied for it, but it's okay, I'll be fine." And she sent me home to go study for the test. ... I will never forget that.

... I think for Toni, what was really special about her was, she was always being my professional mentor, she wanted to see me do well in the field, but she also cared about how I was doing in the rest of my life. She wanted to make sure that I was successful, that I stayed out of trouble and all of those things. ... For me, graduating high school, getting into college and all the success that I have, it's all because of her."

—Simone Cazares, University of St. Thomas sophomore and ThreeSixty Journalism graduate who became a student Randolph mentored.

*"I knew nothing about journalism. I took some classes, but that was it. I didn't know how to do reporting or anything like that. But here was Toni, telling me about how people do this work and she was very helpful. She was someone who was there caring (for) young people, especially young people of color who were interested in this profession. And that really touched me."*

—Mukhtar Ibrahim, former reporter at Minnesota Public Radio News and current Bush Fellow who is now attending graduate school at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

"She just had every quality that you'd want in a mentor. She was kind, she was passionate about the work she did, and she really believed in the qualities and skills that I had. She constantly told me how great of a job I was doing and how much she believed in me. So to answer that, I believe she embodied everything you want a role model to be. She had every quality that you'd want your role model to have."

—Chad Faust, University of Wisconsin-Madison freshman and ThreeSixty graduate who became a student Randolph mentored.

*"Toni was a great ambassador to the community. She embodied all of the things we want to stand for—integrity, openness, wisdom. She was a great journalist and she had a great care for the people that she dealt with, and she's just an outstanding representative for Minnesota Public Radio—both as a journalist and as someone who reached down, supported and mentored so many journalists and aspiring journalists in the community."*

—David Kansas, chief operating officer of Minnesota Public Radio.

"I think she took that element of being a role model seriously. That she understood that our young people need to see examples of people who look like them and examples of people who come from a range of backgrounds in leading roles in our society. ... I think that she made investments in lots and lots of young people, but she was also a great example of what was possible.

... I just think she's going to be a loss for us, on so many levels. I'm glad to have known her, I'm glad that we had the chance to become friends, and I'm glad that she made so many contributions to this community—both to journalism and the Twin Cities."

—Duchesne Drew, community network vice president at Bush Foundation and former journalist who knew Randolph through the National Association of Black Journalists.

"Toni joined the ThreeSixty Board of Advisors in February and was active with ThreeSixty for a number of years, always eager to arrange our summer camp visits to MPR, lead those tours and mentor ThreeSixty students. As well, several recent ThreeSixty students participated in her Young Reporters Series at MPR.

In November 2014, we presented Toni with our Widening the Circle Award, which honors individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the next generation of journalists, particularly while promoting inclusion and diversity. She was the perfect choice. In the time that followed, I was privileged to learn first-hand just how deep and genuine her dedication to those tenants was. Toni was a smart, warm and thoughtful person who was deeply committed to her craft as well as to the principles that ThreeSixty and its mission encompass."

—Chad Caruthers, executive director of ThreeSixty Journalism.

# ThreeSixty Alumni Spotlight: Damon Maloney

## A local reporter covering the Flint water crisis

LIKE MANY OTHERS, Damon Maloney had seen presidential jet landings on television before.

But in May, Maloney stood on the tarmac of Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan, where Air Force One had just landed with President Barack Obama inside, to report a live play-by-play of the president's visit to Flint, a city crippled by a water crisis.

It's not every day that a young



By Lucas Johnson  
ThreeSixty Journalism intern

journalist is given the opportunity to report such a momentous occasion, and Maloney was making sure to soak it all in.



Photo submitted

Damon Maloney, a 2001 ThreeSixty Journalism alum, reports in May from the tarmac of Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan, where President Barack Obama was making a visit amid the city's water crisis.

When the president arrived in Flint, Maloney took some time out of his hectic schedule to call his parents, who he says have made his journalism journey a reality. Standing on the tarmac, Maloney reflected on how far he'd come, and that reporting a presidential visit "was symbolic of my journey to be able to cover such a historic event."

Maloney, who was part of ThreeSixty Journalism back when it was dubbed the Urban Journalism Workshop, has been reporting stories for WJRT in Flint—he's also a weekend anchor—since his arrival in November 2014, before the national coverage of the water crisis.

Maloney had been part of the

sporadic coverage of dirty water locally. While the issue seemed severe, any stirs of a serious problem were downplayed, according to Maloney.

"People had come complaining about the smell, the taste, the color of the water," Maloney said. "At that point, everyone was just saying, 'Everything's fine, it's safe, it's up to code.'"

After independent researchers from Virginia Tech carried out tests that yielded troubling results, including drastically high lead levels in the drinking water, Maloney says, that was the moment where national media began to pour in.

As a local reporter tasked with covering a national story, Maloney said the impact of this story is incomparable to his past assignments.

"I've been doing this for almost ten years now," he said, "and I've never experienced a story of this magnitude, in its scope and what it is and who it affects."

Although reporting on the water **MALONEY** continued on page 27

# 22 for 22

## ThreeSixty Journalism Class of 2016 graduates to attend college

PUBLISHING A MOVING STORY.

Conducting a powerful interview. Reporting a story that brings change.

Undertaking those responsibilities is not everyone's cup of tea, but for Danielle Wong, being in the thick of things is ideal.

Wong, who first joined ThreeSixty Journalism in 2013, hopes to become an international broadcast journalist and, as a result, a voice of accuracy to dispel misconceptions about cultural practices.

"That's a large reason why there are so many conflicts in this world right now, because there's a lot of misunderstanding and misperceptions," Wong said, "and I think that by being a broadcast journalist I can help [reinform] those misperceptions, because I will be an advocate."

She'll take her next step by attending



By Lucas Johnson  
ThreeSixty Journalism intern

the University of St. Thomas next year with a four-year, full-tuition scholarship—the ThreeSixty Scholarship—to study Communication & Journalism (COJO).

Wong is one of 22 ThreeSixty graduates—who were active in the program during the school year—who have reported they will attend college this fall (and one who will attend the following year). Some will attend in-state schools, such as Augsburg College and the University of Minnesota, while others will head out of state to institutions such as George

Washington University and Dartmouth College.

Last year, all 20 ThreeSixty graduates reported attending a college or university for the 2015-16 school year.

"How cool is that, 42 of 42 students? We're proud of each one, no matter the path they're pursuing," said ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers. "ThreeSixty means journalism, yes, but it also means college readiness and student success."

For Blaine High School graduate Annrose Jerry, music has always been more than a hobby. To her, music is a means of bringing people together, as well as an outlet, she said.

Jerry, who was awarded as her high school's top band member, will attend the University of Notre Dame this fall and hopes to continue music there in ensembles.

"I look forward to college," said Jerry, who joined ThreeSixty in the summer of 2015. "I hope I can grow even more as a person. ... I'm just going to seek out experiences for those experiences, because that's when you become an adult."

Jerry also plans to study neuroscience and behavior at Notre Dame.

College is further on the horizon for



Jerry



Kozachok



Wong

Perpich Arts High School graduate Katia Kozachok. Instead of taking the contemporary route, Kozachok will take a gap year in Madhya Pradesh, India, to immerse herself in Indian culture.

After her gap year, Kozachok plans to attend the University of Minnesota Morris to study psychology and gender studies, and hopefully return to India before graduating.

Kozachok said a combination of her parents' experiences abroad coupled with her own desire to try something unique fueled her decision.

"Both of my parents were exchange students, so it's something that they really wanted their kids to do if given the chance," said Kozachok, who joined ThreeSixty in 2013. "... I just wanted to experience something vastly different than

what I was used to."

Kozachok hopes to return home a year later with a better grasp on the Hindi language. And she definitely will not miss the frigid months while she's gone.

"The lack of winter is pretty great," she said.

### OFF TO COLLEGE

ThreeSixty Journalism's 22 Class of 2016 graduates will be attending college at the following institutions:

- University of St. Thomas
- St. Olaf College
- Augsburg College
- College of St. Benedict's
- University of Minnesota
- University of Minnesota Morris
- Minnesota State University, Mankato
- St. Paul College
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- North Dakota State University
- Iowa State University
- Jackson State University
- George Washington University
- University of Notre Dame
- Dartmouth College
- Minneapolis Community and Technical College
- Normandale Community College

Students intend to major in the following areas:

- Communication and journalism
- Neuroscience and behavior
- Business
- Secondary education
- Engineering

\* Note: Some students will begin college undecided.

# MODERN-DAY TEEN HEALTH & WELLNESS

WHEN WE AS ThreeSixty Journalism staff started brainstorming story ideas for a health-and-wellness-themed issue, we soon realized how many stories were waiting to be told. ♣ Stories on teen pregnancy. Fitness. Body image. Nutrition. Relationships. School. ♣ And that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Our list was even longer. ♣ So, we took that list, boiled it down and challenged students in our brand-new News Reporter Academy camp in July to tell those stories—stories that relate to teens’ health and quality of life. ♣ We think they did a fantastic job. ♣ On the following pages, you will find stories about students who

have overcome a disability (pages 9 and 14), about organizations that help young people—whether they are aging out of the foster care system (page 15) or are young mothers looking for help (page 10)—and about issues that affect teenagers, such as when they should start school in the morning (story below) and whether they should try the newest body image trend (page 13). ♣ We hope you not only take notice of the great stories these students wrote, but also learn something about your own health and wellness in the process.

## Late-start debate

### Research prompts some high schools to push back start times

WITH RESEARCH SUGGESTING a variety of benefits to later high school start times for students, some Twin Cities area schools have begun to push back start times, while others have decided against the change.

For Wayzata Public Schools, a December 2015 school board vote in favor of shifting to a later high school start time, among other changes, was unanimous. One month earlier, St. Paul Public Schools’ board voted to not change start times, while participating in a pilot at one school in an effort to test a later start. Feasibility and potential health benefits were key issues for both school districts.

Research has shown the benefits of later start times range from improved academic performance to a reduction in car crashes by students. A 2014 study from the University of Minnesota,



By **Elisa Lopez**  
The Blake School



**Duniyo Awad**  
Ubah Medical Academy

which studied more than 9,000 students from eight public high schools in three states, found that shifting school start times to 8:55 a.m. from 7:35 a.m. decreased car crashes for teen drivers (ages 16-18) by 70 percent.

“The evidence is really clear that later start times are incredibly beneficial for academic outcomes,

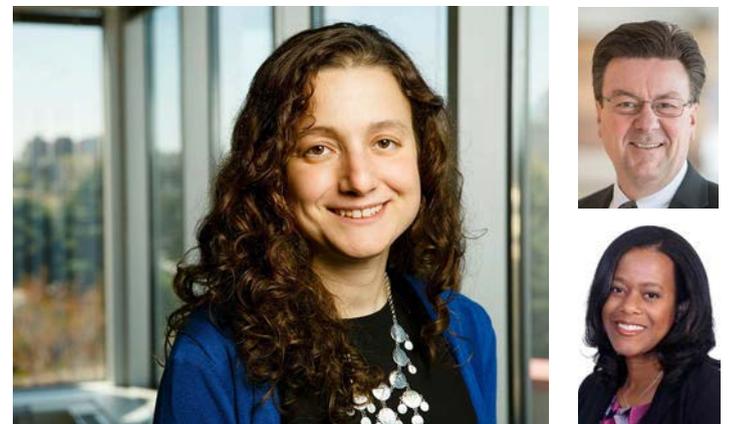
school attendance, mental health, and injuries—specifically car crashes,” said Rachel Widome, assistant professor of epidemiology and community health at the University of Minnesota.

Studies show nearly one-third of American teenagers get at least eight hours of sleep each night. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends teenagers between ages 14 and 17 get 8.5 to 9.5 hours per night.

In Wayzata, the research was persuasive enough to lead the school board to unanimously adopt nearly an extra hour of sleep for high school students. The start time was pushed back to 8:20 a.m. from 7:30 a.m. for the 2016-17 school year.

For Wayzata Superintendent Chace Anderson, the later start was necessary, despite opposition from some parents who worried about the effect on elementary schools, which would start earlier to provide available buses for high school students later in the morning.

“Research shows that they wake up bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and ready to go,” Anderson said of elementary school students. “Whereas for high school kids, it’s a little harder to get the engine going. So we have elementary teachers saying kids are tired by the middle of the afternoon and high



Clockwise from above: Rachel Widome, Chace Anderson, Jackie Allen Statum.

school teachers saying students aren’t awake until 9 a.m.”

The Burnsville-Savage-Eagan district also pushed back its high school start time for the 2016-17 school year. Minneapolis and Edina schools switched to later start times several years ago. Schools across the nation also have followed suit.

In Wayzata, the most straightforward approach was to simply rear-range bus schedules. Anderson said the district’s 85 buses are enough to transport more than 10,000 students

over a staggered pickup and start time schedule.

St. Paul Public Schools doesn’t have the same luxury. By serving more than 39,000 students, St. Paul district bus drivers have a lot of ground to cover.

Similar to Wayzata, St. Paul schools use a three-tier system in which buses drive multiple routes on a staggered schedule. In the current system, high school and middle school students are picked up first, followed by elementary students.

**LATE START** *continued on page 27*

# Adding their own flavor

## Harding trio gets once-in-a-lifetime chance to display culinary chops in D.C.

AS KAYLYN VANG prepared to convince a panel of celebrity judges that she and her teammates had created the most flavorful, healthy meal during a national cook-off, time seemed to have stopped.

It was “the most nerve-wracking thing I’ve ever experienced,” said Vang, 17, an incoming senior at St. Paul Harding High School. “It felt like the longest five minutes ever.”

Vang was one of three students from Harding who won a regional chef competition earlier this year as a part of the Healthy Schools Campaign’s Cooking up Change initiative. The team advanced to the national finals on June 6 in Washington, D.C., where they prepared and presented their meals in front of a panel of celebrity chef judges—including Daniel Giusti and Kwame Onwauchi—as well as nutrition experts and national leaders.

The Cooking up Change program challenges culinary students across the country to create tasty meals that follow national nutrition standards—for about \$1 per meal. Students learn to work as a team, think critically and hone communication skills that prepare them for success, whether in the kitchen or not.

Vang and her teammates, Xia Vang and Chinue Yang, created the winning dish in St. Paul, one of 10 regional contests. Inspired by their Southeast Asian heritage, they produced Thai peanut chicken lettuce wraps, cucumber salad and pineapple crisp.

Their first-place regional finish also gave them another perk: the dish was lunch for St. Paul Public Schools students in May. This meant up to 40,000 students could try their work.

“I was excited and I really wanted to see how my peers thought of the dishes,” Vang said. “And we got a lot of good feedback from the teachers.”

Teachers described it as a vibrant, refreshing and presentable meal, Vang said.

As with any chef, Vang expected some criticism. One of Vang’s friends



By **Samantha HoangLong**  
Burnsville High School

### OTHER LOCAL DISHES

Other St. Paul schools competed in the regional “Cooking up Change” competition last school year. The following are their dishes, according to the Healthy Schools Campaign’s website:

#### ■ Central High School

Student chefs: Dexter, Alana and Hunter

Menu: Caribbean cilantro-lime chicken soup, hot and fruity Caribbean coleslaw and caribbean bananas

#### ■ Harding High School Team #2

Student chefs: Leslie, Cindy and Tracy

Menu: Chicken rice bowl, black bean and corn salad and poached apple

#### ■ Humboldt High School

Student chefs: Hibo and Der

Menu: Garlic chicken flatbread, fresh spinach salad and citrus smoothie

#### ■ Johnson High School

Student chefs: Va and Yang

Menu: Chicken laab, sauteed spinach and peanut butter bananas

#### ■ Washington Tech High School

Student chefs: Tramaine,

Houa and Mai

Menu: Southern barbeque chicken pizza with caramelized onion, salad and diced peaches

thought the dish lacked flavor. Vang said that was understandable, because she’s aware of the difference between serving a small group compared to thousands of students.

“I think that helped me, because I realized that negative feedback



St. Paul Harding High School students Kaylyn Vang (left), Xia Vang (center) and Chinue Yang competed in the Healthy Schools Campaign’s Cooking up Change national finals in June in Washington, D.C. The trio won a regional competition in St. Paul to earn the national bid.

Photo courtesy of St. Paul Public Schools



Allison Zaccardi, a family and consumer science teacher at Harding, says there should be more student input on what foods students eat.

Photo courtesy of Christina Garner

doesn’t stop me from pursuing certain things that I want to cook,” Vang said. “But I’m a person that really likes to experiment with food, and so I’m not afraid to try new things, and to get that feedback.”

One of the team’s biggest

cheerleaders is Allison Zaccardi, a Harding family and consumer science teacher.

“I think they’re amazing,” Zaccardi said. “They’re so motivated and creative and they do such a great job working together as a team. They each

have their own unique skillset and they really allow each other to kind of push their own skills, while supporting the other people’s skills.”

Zaccardi says there should be more student input on what students eat.

“The issues around student health are so critical,” she said. “It’s so important that we feed our students healthy food, and that they get used to eating healthy food” for the rest of their lives.

In D.C., students also had the opportunity to visit city sites and serve their dishes to legislative leaders, as well as meet the secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, John King.

A team from Orange County won the national competition with Moroccan stuffed zucchini, Moroccan salad and spiced pear cups. Teams from Chicago and Los Angeles took second and third, respectively.

Although Vang’s team didn’t win the national competition, the students learned the importance of eating healthy, the challenges of creating a recipe and the benefits of working in a team, she said.

And that will last longer than five minutes.

# Jerrad takes a walk

## Burnsville graduate's documentary highlights student with cerebral palsy

BURNSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL graduate Scott Tinkham and senior Jerrad Solberg were locker neighbors in junior high, but they didn't really get to know each other until Tinkham picked up a video camera.

Tinkham won Best in Fest and Best Documentary in May at a statewide high school film competition, the EDU Film Festival, for his 15-minute short, "JERRAD," which focuses on Solberg, 18, and his cerebral palsy. The film also is an official selection in the 2016 All American High School Film Festival, which takes place in October in New York City.

"I wanted to show how normal of a kid Jerrad is," Tinkham said.

The film, which was shot last school year and took four-and-a-half months to pull together, chronicles Solberg's efforts to attend school without the walker he had used since early childhood. The walker advertised his disability to his peers, putting a physical barrier between him and other teens.

"It makes them realize that I have



By **Zahra Mustafa**  
Eagan High School



**Citlali Bastian McClain**  
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School

a disability," Solberg said, "(and) half of the time they don't even want to at least talk to me."

Cerebral palsy is a congenital disorder that impacts body movement, muscle tone, coordination and/or posture. Solberg has a form of cerebral palsy that affects his left side, according to the film.

Family members describe Solberg as an easygoing, optimistic teen, an

important trait given the difficulties he has faced learning to walk.

"Determined and driven," Tinkham said when asked to describe Solberg. "Not letting his challenges get in his way."

Tinkham started making films with his younger brother when he was in elementary school. His passion for making movies deepened during his sophomore year, when he began making videos for his school's hockey and football teams.

Even with his experience, Tinkham said he struggled with Solberg's story because it was lacking something. He had to find context.

"I went into it blind," Tinkham said. He reached out to Kevin Silberman, Solberg's junior high teacher. Finding out Solberg has never gone to school without his walker gave Tinkham the context he needed.

In the documentary, Solberg's father, Jerry, said Solberg is able to walk without his walker, but uses it only during school. Their goal was to get Solberg walking without help at school.

Tinkham shot his film at Solberg's home and neighborhood, and at Burnsville High School.

"Shooting in the hallways was fun," Tinkham said. "I knew it made Jerrad look like a movie star."

During the filming, Tinkham and Solberg developed a friendship.



Jerrad Solberg (left) and Scott Tinkham at the EDU Film Festival in May in St. Louis Park. "JERRAD," a 15-minute documentary created by Tinkham that highlighted Solberg and his life with cerebral palsy, won Best in Fest and Best Documentary.

Photo courtesy of John Gessner/SUN Thisweek

"Naturally, spending a lot of time with him taught me about his lifestyle, his likes and dislikes," Tinkham said. "He is an easy person to befriend."

When the documentary was finished, Solberg's family was surprised how the film touched people who knew him and who had overlooked him for so long.

"When we were at the EDU Film Festival and a hundred kids from your high school went, I think those kids were like, 'I know him, but I don't know him,'" said Solberg's step-mother, Jolie. "And I think they were

surprised at how touched they were.

"... Even just people who already knew him were blown away at, 'Oh, he's not the Jerrad we think we know.' And it's given him a lot more opportunities that I think he wouldn't (have) had otherwise."

The family has seen the film multiple times—it's on YouTube and Vimeo.

"I always cry when I watch it," Jolie Solberg said.

"I kind of thought maybe it would change people's perspectives on me," Jerrad Solberg said, "but also other people with disabilities."

In the film, Jerrad Solberg is able to achieve his goal, but he still feels safer with his walker.

Solberg, who is an avid Twins fan and plays adaptive softball, is finishing his last year at Burnsville High School. He plans to attend St. Cloud State University and hopes to get into the field of sports, business or computers.

Tinkham is attending the University of Arizona and plans to get into film directing and production. One of the things he is willing to try is exploring different genres, he said, even though documentary is his favorite because he gets to film real people's lives.

"I made this movie to influence people," Tinkham said. "I gave him the opportunity to touch other people's lives."

### WATCH 'JERRAD' ONLINE

You can find "JERRAD," the award-winning documentary, on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0mxFl4gM2l> or on Vimeo at <https://vimeo.com/177119959>.



Photo courtesy of Scott Tinkham

A screenshot from the documentary, "JERRAD." The film chronicles Jerrad Solberg's attempts to attend school without his walker.

# A baby's bed—in a cardboard box

## Metro-area nonprofit gives young mothers maternity packages that double as infant beds

WHEN DANIELLE SELASSIE saw a story about a Finnish tradition of giving pregnant women small cardboard boxes to use as bassinets, she was inspired.

Selassie got pregnant at age 19 and knew what it was like to need help. In the end, she put her child up for adoption, but the experience gave her more empathy for young mothers.

That's why last year she created Babies Need Boxes, a Twin Cities metro-area nonprofit that provides teenage mothers—many of whom live in risky situations with minimal support—with cardboard baby boxes filled with supplies to get them on their feet. The goal is to help equip mothers with the tools and resources necessary to transition to parenthood.

But these packages are more than just a box. They look like office filing boxes, decorated with baby prints. The cardboard boxes are certified bassinets—safe beds for infants through their first nine months—packed with diapers, baby wipes, ointment, baby books, utensils and more. The boxes



By Talia Bradley  
Minneapolis  
Roosevelt  
High School

also include a waterproof mattress and safe sleep literature for parents.

“Nowadays people think you need the most fancy things, but that’s not the case,” Selassie said. “You need two arms, breastmilk, a safe place for them to sleep, and it can be very simple, as simple as a box.”

Babies Need Boxes has delivered more than 150 boxes to Minnesota mothers since its inception, including 100 this year. The Baby Box Company provides the boxes that Babies Need Boxes distributes in Minnesota.

For more than 75 years, the Finnish government has provided pregnant women with a decorated box of baby supplies, lined with a mattress and a fitted sheet to also be used as a bed. Struggling with high infant mortality rates, Finland began



Babies Need Boxes gives away maternity packages—which include diapers, baby wipes, ointment, utensils and more—to young mothers in the Twin Cities and in greater Minnesota. The boxes can double as a bassinet for an infant.

Photo courtesy of Babies Need Boxes

giving away the boxes in the 1930s. The country now has one of the world’s lowest infant mortality rates, according to the BBC.

Selassie began collecting baby supplies for teenage mothers at Longfellow Alternative School. After delivering boxes to Longfellow, Selassie decided to expand the program statewide and to Iowa. She connected with organizations and schools to get funding.

“The more that we can do to show people that they have support and build them up, the more successful they are going to be,” Selassie said.

Selassie’s company has since partnered with more than 20 nonprofits, two hospitals and multiple schools in Minneapolis.

Melanie Faulhaber, a parenting and pregnancy teacher at Longfellow Alternative School and a board member at large for Babies Need Boxes, said when Selassie delivered the first boxes, her approach with the young women was soft and sincere.

“When you deliver a box to a mother, you can see the relief in the mother’s face and can tell she is a bit

### INSIDE THE BOX

A baby box from Babies Need Boxes can supply the following (depending on availability):

- Packages of sensitive skin baby wipes
- Baby lotion
- Baby soap
- Baby nail care
- Diaper rash ointment
- Sippy cup
- Toddler plates
- Toddler forks
- Toddlers spoons
- Baby toys
- Baby books
- Burp cloths

The Baby Box Company provides the box, as well as a waterproof mattress, sheet and safe sleep literature. Each box also comes with a membership to Baby Box University, which provides videos and resources for caring for infants.

*“When you deliver a box to a mother, you can see the relief in the mother’s face and can tell she is a bit more relaxed.”*

—Melanie Faulhaber, a parenting and pregnancy teacher at Longfellow Alternative School and a board member at large for Babies Need Boxes.

more relaxed,” Faulhaber said. “I see it every time Selassie comes to my classroom.”

Now, more community members and churches are helping make bibs,

collecting items for the boxes or putting together the boxes.

“I want to cover the U.S. in baby boxes,” Selassie said, “because every mother deserves a box.”



Photo courtesy of Mark Vancleave

Danielle Selassie, left, the executive director and founder of Babies Need Boxes, and Melanie Faulhaber, a parenting and pregnancy teacher at Longfellow Alternative School and a board member at large for Babies Need Boxes. Selassie has delivered baby boxes—maternity packages that double as infant beds—to young mothers at Longfellow.

# Safety? There's an app for that

## Preventing sexual assault with the help of technology

IMAGINE FINDING YOURSELF in a dangerous situation, such as a first date that has turned threatening or a suspicious neighborhood at night.

Now, imagine turning to a mobile application for help.

In a recent study, 21 percent of female college students reported experiencing sexual assault since starting college. That can be a terrifying statistic for many women. Hoping to find a solution to prevent sexual assault, the world has turned to technology.

Some mobile safety apps people commonly use, such as bSafe, Circle of 6 and Guardly, have features that alert your emergency contacts in an emergency and use GPS to track your location. Some apps also have separate networks you can create based on your situation.

Jo Beyer, a student at the University of St. Thomas who advocates for sexual health on campus, can see how developers would think mobile apps for safety would appeal to young people.

"They have these blue lights around campus," said Beyer, referring to the campus emergency poles at St. Thomas, "but people don't use those blue lights, they use their cellphones."

Safety apps have different features in order to be useful to a wide range of people with varying needs. While using Circle of 6, for example, tap your phone twice if you're in a potentially dangerous situation and a message gets sent to six of your emergency contacts with your exact location. With bSafe, a network of people, called "guardians," can be alerted when you're in an emergency and can trace your path via GPS. Siren GPS will contact 911 and send your location to authorities with the touch of a button. Some apps also help victims report an incident and let them access 24-hour hotlines.



**By Melody Vue**  
St. Paul Harding  
High School



**By Marwa Mohamed**  
Ubah Medical  
Academy

But are these apps being used in the real world, and are they actually working?

According to Beyer, who is on the St. Thomas Wellness Center's Student Health Promotion Team, the apps haven't reached the University of St. Thomas yet. Emily Erickson, the sexual assault prevention coordinator at the university, also can't say if the apps are effective or if they're being used.

"I don't think right now it's been around long enough for us to know if there's evidence to show if it's reducing sexual assault," Erickson said.

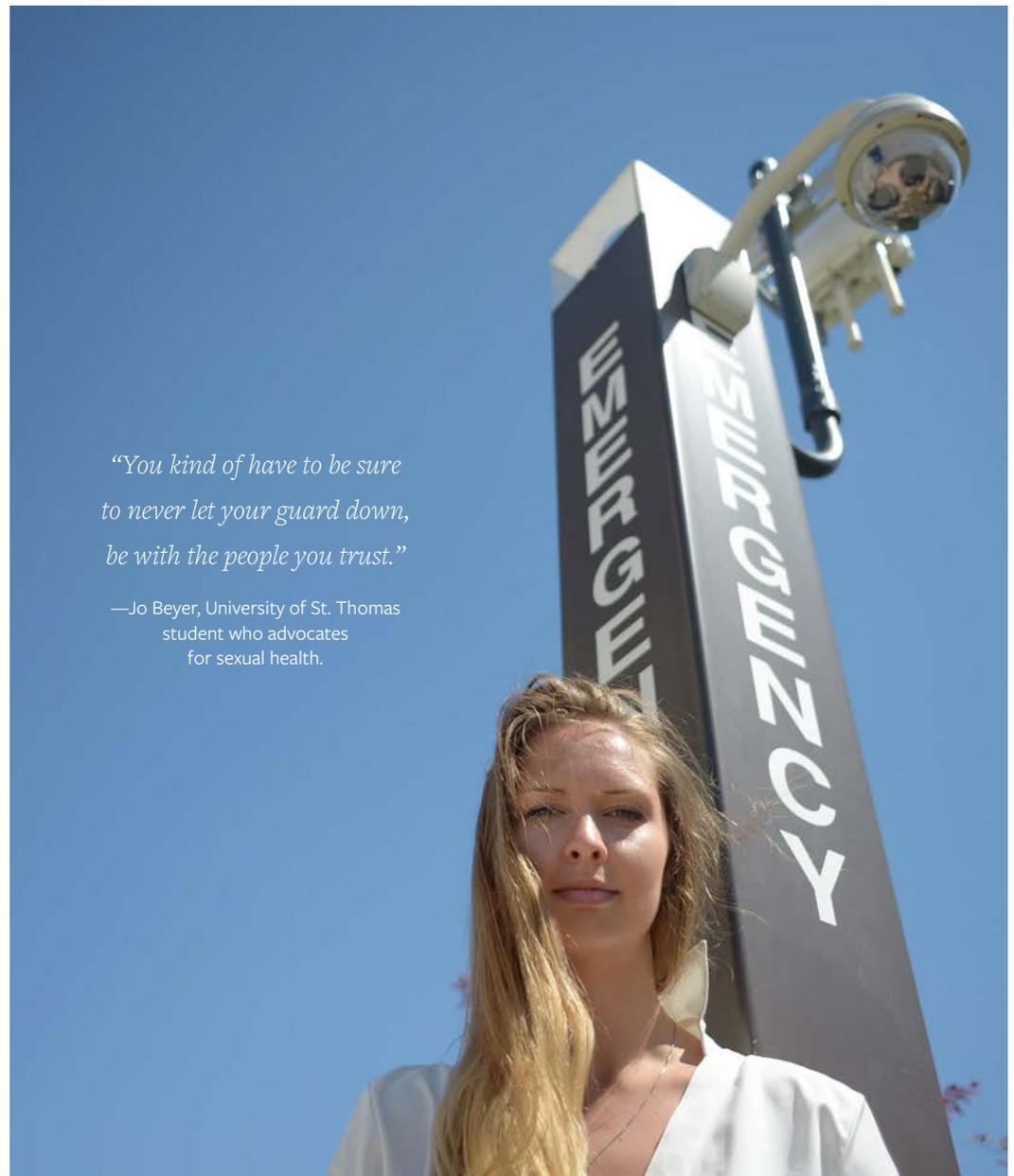
Nevertheless, Beyer said, there's no substitute for basic safety skills and common sense. You can always walk with someone—a friend or a public safety officer. If you don't need to walk alone, there are many ways to avoid it.

"You kind of have to be sure to never let your guard down, be with the people you trust," Beyer said.

Sexual assault comes in different forms, but most victims know their attackers. An assault also can result from a remark that can make someone feel uncomfortable or disrespected.

Even though success is slow in coming for mobile safety apps, advocates for sexual assault still believe that it doesn't hurt to try new tools.

"It can happen to women, it can happen to men, it can happen to anyone at any time," Beyer said.



*"You kind of have to be sure to never let your guard down, be with the people you trust."*

—Jo Beyer, University of St. Thomas student who advocates for sexual health.

Jo Beyer, a University of St. Thomas student and an advocate for sexual health, says mobile safety apps are new to her, but understands why technology is being used to prevent sexual assault.



Emily Erickson, a sexual assault prevention coordinator at the University of St. Thomas, says if you think mobile safety apps are helpful, then use them.

*In a recent study, 21 percent of female college students reported experiencing sexual assault since starting college.*

# Yoga for youth

**The ancient Indian practice can relieve stress, help with focus and inspire healthier lifestyles for kids, teens**

AT LEARNING TREE YOGA in Minneapolis, a group of preschoolers bounce around in a classroom, singing and jabbering.

Owner Jessie Forston prepares to perform what some people believe as magic—transforming agitated kids to focused, calm kids.

Her secret is yoga—an ancient Indian discipline, including breathing control, simple meditation and specific body poses, practiced for health and relaxation.

Yoga has grown rapidly in popularity in recent years, including with young people. One recent study by the National Institutes of Health shows about 400,000 more U.S. children (ages 4 to 17) were practicing yoga in 2012 than they were five years earlier.

Many young people have seen the benefits that follow, such as increased



By **Katelyn Vue**  
North High School



By **Pa Houa Yang**  
St. Paul Harding High School

flexibility and an improved metabolism—just to name a couple.

“We’ve seen the stress level of both adults and kids and teens growing with each year,” Forston said, “and they’re really finding kind of a release from that in being able to do things like yoga.”

Forston was a teacher at an Edina elementary school several years ago



Danielle Wong, 17, left, and Julia Larson, 17, show off their yoga moves in July at the University of St. Thomas. They are two of many young people across the country who have taken up the popular ancient Indian practice.

when she noticed the students in her class were having a tough time staying focused. She decided to integrate yoga into the classroom and saw her students react by becoming more present, she said. Inspired, Forston received her YogaKids certification, left her career as a teacher and opened up Learning Tree Yoga in 2008.

“A lot of people were thinking it was just a fad, thinking it would pass and never really be a career path,” Forston said, “but then they started teaching kids yoga all over the media.”

Studies show yoga has numerous benefits. Eighty-six percent of yoga practitioners report having “a strong sense of mental clarity,” 73 percent report being physically strong and 79 percent give back to their communities—all significantly higher rates than those who don’t practice yoga, according to a 2016 study by Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance.

Julia Larson, 17, said she felt energized and centered the first time she tried yoga at a summer camp when she was 14. Larson, a rising senior at

## YOGA STUDY

For more on the Yoga Alliance and Yoga Journal’s study, “2016 Yoga in America Study,” go online to <http://www.yogajournal.com/yogainamericastudy/>.

## LEARNING TREE YOGA

For more information on Learning Tree Yoga, go online to <http://www.learningtreeyoga.com/> or call 612-916-9369.

*“I think that’s important that every teen just find something that helps them get through the day and find center of self.”*

—Danielle Wong, 17-year-old incoming freshman at the University of St. Thomas.

Minneapolis Washburn High School, still continues to practice yoga.

“This last spring, I was under a lot of stress, not really having a healthy way of channeling my pent-up energy, so I decided I’m going to do more yoga each morning,” she said.

Larson sees herself implementing more yoga into her routine, especially when the fall semester rolls around. She said yoga should be taught to students in schools as a way for them to get in shape during the school day and find center of self.

“And if you put it down as part of curriculum, then they have no option,” she said.

Danielle Wong, a 17-year-old incoming freshman at the University of St. Thomas, first started yoga a couple years ago as an actress at Stages Theatre Company. Before her performances, Wong’s stage manager would make her and her peers do yoga.

“We would do moves, like ‘downward dogs,’ and it was just a kind of way to ease our nerves,” Wong said. “Take deep breaths, have that focus time before we actually went on stage.”

Wong saw the anxiety in the room diminished and improvements in their performances, she said.

“I think that’s important that every teen just find something that helps them get through the day and find center of self,” Wong said.



Young participants at Learning Tree Yoga, a Minneapolis yoga studio for kids.

# Corset comeback

## Does waist training trend cause more harm than results?

WITH ONE INSTAGRAM selfie in a purple waist trainer, Kim Kardashian brought the waist-squeezing—and potentially lung-constricting and rib-crushing—device mainstream in 2014.

And with it, a 19th-century beauty standard reminiscent of corsets and Hollywood bombshells.

The waist trainer is today's modern corset, but with celebrities promoting them on social media. Many women have embraced the waist trainer to attain an hourglass figure, yet medical professionals have warned about the health risks, including damage to internal organs.

For starters, the waist trainer restricts the ability to breathe, according to Madonna McDermott, the director of Health Services and Wellness Center at the University of St. Thomas.

"So it's collapsing in, cinching in at the waist," McDermott said.



**By Kelly Saybe**  
Roseville Area  
High School



**By Elezabet Mitiku**  
St. Paul Harding  
High School

"And everybody's waist is a little bit different."

Right above the natural waistline, the 11th and 12th pairs of ribs are called "floating ribs." Waist trainers can cause the floating ribs to crack or puncture an internal organ, according to McDermott.

McDermott's opinion is that young adults should not wear waist trainers

*"I don't think I would have been able to (lose an inch-and-a-half from my waist within three weeks) without the waist trainer."*

—Sae Yang, a Wisconsin schoolteacher who uses a waist trainer.

Sae Yang, a teacher in Wisconsin, takes a photo while wearing her waist trainer. Waist training has become a new trend among women, but some medical professionals warn against its effects.



Photo courtesy of Sae Yang

because waist trainers are a way to shape their bodies into something unattainable. She said waist training could contribute to an underlying eating disorder or a propensity for one.

Sae Yang, a Wisconsin high school teacher, wears a waist trainer for about five hours daily during school. While some people use the waist trainer to mold their bodies, Yang uses it as a motivator to be healthier, she said.

After repeated attempts to lose weight, Yang was hesitant about purchasing a waist trainer she saw on Facebook. Within three weeks, she lost an inch-and-a-half from her waist, she said.

"I don't think I would have been able to do that without the waist trainer," Yang said.

Despite knowing the possible health hazards of waist trainers, Yang experienced discomfort during the first few days only, she said.

"When I got it, I was like, 'I don't think I could fit in this!'" Yang said. "It was half my size, my waist. So I was really, really squeezing in, and it probably took me three days to really like, break into it."

Yang said teens who want to use a waist trainer need to first educate themselves, "because wearing a waist trainer isn't healthy, it's all the other steps along the way."

"I think if it encourages young women to change their lifestyle and really reflect about their lifestyle and their physical bodies and it motivates them to want to make changes, I'd say, 'OK,'" Yang said. "... I can't tell someone, 'You can't,' because I'm doing it."

University of St. Thomas junior Deborah Honore said she thinks waist training is a trend young people follow because they think, if celebrities can easily do it, they can, too. Honore has heard of the trend, but does not know anyone who wears a waist trainer.

"It's something that's enticing to do because everybody wants to fit, like it's a societal standard," Honore said.

She prefers exercising, she said, and thinks waist training is an illusion.

"I wouldn't (use a waist trainer) because you're just going to go right back to the shape you were before," Honore said. "It's not going to change the anatomy of your body."

McDermott recommends a more traditional health regimen.

"I would say, first, love your body just the way it is," she said, "and if you're feeling that you're not at the healthy status you want to be, to exercise reasonably, eat well-balanced, get adequate fluid hydration (and) good sleep."

*"It's something that's enticing to do because everybody wants to fit, like it's a societal standard."*

—Deb Honore, University of St. Thomas junior.



*"I would say, first, love your body just the way it is, and if you're feeling that you're not at the healthy status you want to be, to exercise reasonably, eat well-balanced, get adequate fluid hydration (and) good sleep."*

—Madonna McDermott, director of Health Services and Wellness Center at the University of St. Thomas.



# On a roll

## Young wheelchair basketball star sets his sights high

MOTIVATION CAN COME in many shapes and sizes.

For Collin Evans, it's the sight of the wheelchair he's used since a car accident nearly crushed his spine when he was 7.

Paralyzed from the waist down after the accident, Evans overcame great odds to become one of the top wheelchair basketball prospects in the nation. And his remarkable comeback is still being written. Next year, he'll continue his playing career in college, a springboard, he hopes, to qualifying for the 2020 Paralympics in Tokyo.

Some people "said it would be a lot harder to do stuff, just because of my injury," said Evans, 18, of Mondovi, Wis. "It kind of drove me, because I wanted to prove them wrong."

Evans recalls the accident, but not like it was yesterday. He remembers where his family members were sitting in their Ford pickup truck. He remembers their vehicle was hit head-on by oncoming traffic—but from then on, he remembers nothing until the hospital.

"The whole feeling of the house changed," said Evans' younger brother, Hunter. "[There were] big injuries to my mother, myself and Collin. And then, of course, the house changes itself. We had to make it accessible for a wheelchair. We had to get around."

After the accident, Evans found few people expected him to work as hard as he did in rehabilitation. Therapy that was expected to last a year took only a month. But Evans, a former three-season athlete faced with the prospect of never walking again, needed an outlet.

About two years after the accident, he found one in the increasingly popular sport of wheelchair basketball, to which he was introduced by his aunt.

Evans' confidence grew after he enrolled into the Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute. He eventually made his way onto the Jr. Rolling Timberwolves, the institute's varsity wheelchair basketball team.

Wheelchair basketball players are classified into eight categories ranging from 1 to 4.5. Higher numbers signify players with more



**By Austyn Lo**  
St. Paul Harding High School



**By William Bollom**  
The International School of Kuala Lumpur

*"Not only is he a great wheelchair basketball player, but he's also a great leader on and off the court."*

—Cara Gulbranson, wheelchair sports program coordinator for the Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute.

functional ability, lower numbers signify players with less. In the National Wheelchair Basketball Association, teams are allowed to have a total of 15 points per five players on the court at any one time.

A Class 1 player, Evans started his first varsity game at age 14. Twice a week, he would make the two-hour drive from his hometown of Mondovi to the Jr. Rolling Timberwolves' home gym in Minneapolis for practice.

As he progressed, he became more of a leader. Cara Gulbranson, the wheelchair sports program coordinator for the institute, said she has noticed a huge change in Evans' game since the first time he entered the gym.

"I think overall he's just more confident as a player and as a student,"

Gulbranson said. "Collin was on the all-academic team as well. Not only is he a great wheelchair basketball player, but he's also a great leader on and off the court."

After scoring 28 points to help the Jr. Rolling Timberwolves win the



Photo submitted

Collin Evans, a former Jr. Rolling Timberwolves player, persevered through a car accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down at age 7 and became one of the top wheelchair basketball recruits in the nation. He will play at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater this year.

*Some people "said it would be a lot harder to do stuff, just because of my injury. It kind of drove me, because I wanted to prove them wrong."*

—Collin Evans, wheelchair basketball player who will compete at the college level for the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

2013-14 junior national championship game during his sophomore year, Evans went on to average 19.3 points per game—and score 42 points during a game at the Midwest Junior Regional Tournament in Whitewater, Wisconsin—his junior year. He shot 40.5 percent from the field and averaged 4.4 rebounds per game en route

to winning the Junior Division MVP award. (Evans' stats for the 2015-16 season were unavailable when this article went to press.)

By the end of his high school career, Evans was a three-time national champion. He also traveled to Japan in November to compete with the United States U-30 team for the Kitakyushu

Champions Cup. Although the U.S. finished in fourth place, Evans still had a good time.

"We got killed by them, but it was still a fun time," he said. "The experience was great."

A sought-after college prospect, Evans signed to play at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, which has won the last three national championships. He said he chose not to try out for the U.S. team for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, and to instead focus on his first year of college at UW-Whitewater.

"I've gotta get stronger and faster," he said, "and grow and keep up with people."



Evans

# Fostering youth voice

## Irreducible Grace provides young people space to share their stories, to grow

A GROUP OF YOUNG people line up against a St. Paul light rail station. While one of them beats on a drum, they chant, “I got something to say, can you hear me?”

This is the opening scene of a video highlighting participants of Irreducible Grace Foundation, a St. Paul organization that works with vulnerable youth, especially those aging out of foster care or state guardianship, to help them gain a voice and to guide them into adulthood. The foundation also works to repair youth’s trust in adults and help them achieve their college, career and life goals.

“In our program we try to help kids get through the system, give them a voice because they usually don’t have a voice,” said Darlene Fry, executive director of the Irreducible Grace Foundation.



By **Bilan Mohamed**  
Ubah Medical Academy



By **Maria Navidad Sanchez Resendiz**  
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School

The U.S. Department of Education website says that foster kids are more likely to drop out of school and not attend college, much less graduate with a degree. According to the Irreducible Grace Foundation’s website, 50 percent of youth who have aged out of the



Darlene Fry, the executive director of the Irreducible Grace Foundation, and her adopted daughter, Grace, 12. The foundation—named after Grace—helps give vulnerable youth, especially those who have aged out of foster care, a voice and helps them transition into adulthood.

foster care system don’t graduate from high school, 50 percent will be unemployed by age 23 and 25 percent will be homeless.

In Minnesota, more than 12,000 kids were placed in foster care in 2015, according to the Department of Human Services. In Hennepin County

alone, 1,569 kids were in the foster care system as of June, with one-third of them ages 13 to 20.

**VOICE** continued on page 27

Photo courtesy of Mark Vancleave

# Life after foster care

## Effects of the system on children, young adults



By **Tyler Lee**  
St. Paul Harding High School



By **Mychaela Bartel**  
Roseville Area High School

TIARA SUAREZ SAT in her seventh-grade classroom when her teacher’s phone rang.

Suarez was called down to the front office. Child Protective Services was waiting for her and her siblings.

Suarez, her older sister and a younger brother were taken out of their unfit home in Minneapolis, she said, and moved into a shelter, where they would then leave for a

foster home.

Suarez, 21, was born in California, raised in Salem, Oregon, and later moved to Minneapolis with the only guardian in the picture, a relative. Her mother was in and out of prison, she said, and she didn’t have a relationship with her father.

Suarez’s story is all too common, according to Wendylee Raun, the state adoption exchange and recruitment coordinator at MN Adopt, which offers resources and services to support adoptions. Raun helps facilitate adoptions between families and foster care youth.

“... Foster parents take children into their home to give them a safe environment while their parents try and work out whatever the problem is that got the kids into foster care,” Raun said. But some never reunite with their parents or guardians.

Thousands of youth are in foster care in Minnesota. In Hennepin County alone, 1,569 youth were in the foster care system as of June, and one-third of them were ages 13-20, according to county statistics. Nearly 120 kids in the county—the majority teenagers—were waiting for a family to adopt them as of May.

Suarez felt safe in her new Twin Cities home with an older couple as foster parents, she said. They enforced chores and clean rooms, and family outings were mandatory.

But, the changes in her life were sometimes too much.

“I went from a happy, smiling person to depressed,” she said. Raun says children who end up aging out of foster care face a number of obstacles, including being at higher risk of having developmental, emotional and behavioral issues.

**FOSTER** continued on page 27



Photo courtesy of Christina Garner

TIARA SUAREZ, 21, a former foster youth, bucked the national trend of foster care students not graduating high school and attending college. But, in line with other national statistics, she’s also a young mother who is unemployed and homeless, she says.

ThreeSixty Focus on...

# Jovonta Patton

Gospel singer Jovonta Patton, a Minneapolis native, recently debuted No. 1 on the Billboard gospel album chart—without a label deal—with his album, “Finally Living,” which he sold via Facebook and out of the trunk of his car.



Photo courtesy of Jabari Holloman

## North Minneapolis gospel singer hits No. 1 on Billboard’s gospel album charts

JOVONTA PATTON COULD NOT STOP yawning.

It’s 11 a.m. Aug. 1, a day after Jovonta Patton Day in Minnesota (which was officially declared by Governor Mark Dayton), and Patton was sitting through his second interview of the morning in the courtyard of Minneapolis’ IDS Center.

Patton had good reason to be tired. The 26-year-old north Minneapolis native and independent artist gained nationwide attention in late July when he debuted No. 1 on Billboard’s gospel album charts with “Finally Living,” an album he sold mainly through Facebook and the trunk of his car. On top of that, he’s been recording a new music video, raising an infant and jumping from one interview to the next.

It’s been “a dream come true,” he said.

When it comes to music, Patton is no stranger. He was singing in a local choir at Berean Missionary Baptist Church in Minneapolis at just 4 years old. Two years later, he was writing his own songs. When middle school came around, he was conducting the same choir he had been singing in just a few years earlier. He became a professional singer at 16.



**Danielle Wong**  
ThreeSixty  
Journalism  
intern

Patton has become something of a local celebrity—not just for his music, but also from his work as a community leader. In 2007, as a 17-year-old, he established a community choir called “Deliverance for Youth,” comprised of youth ages 14-21 from across the Twin Cities metro area. The choir—which aims to “empower and save youth for Christ”—has put out an album (written

by Patton) and shared the stage with high-profile musicians such as rock band Foreigner.

Patton’s voice resonates throughout the North Side because, in addition to performing at weddings, funerals and services, he also attends community meetings, is active on social media and is an activist for gang and gun violence prevention in his hometown. In July, he performed at a unity service in Minneapolis in response to the Philando Castile shooting and the violence in north Minneapolis.

ThreeSixty Journalism had the chance to talk to Patton in August about his journey to No. 1, his inspirations, his North Side community and what’s next for the rising gospel singer.

**Wong: Take me back to when you found out you were No. 1 on Billboard’s gospel album chart. What went through your mind?**

**Patton:** It was unbelievable. I am still in disbelief. ... Just disbelief, amazement, wow. It’s still like that, just wow.

**W: How did you find out?**

**P:** I found out through one of my favorite singers (Donald Lawrence) (who

tagged me on the post on Facebook. And some record executive had tagged me in a few posts as well on Facebook.

**W: Did you expect that you would get to No. 1?**

**P:** I mean, we were working, we were just doing what we were doing. Of course, you know, you shoot for it, but you don’t really think that that would happen.

**W: How did you get to No. 1 without a record label?**

**P:** God and social media. But I would say God and Facebook. Literally, we have thousands of clicks and sales directly from Facebook to the link that we posted.

**W: What does it mean to be at the top of the charts? Does it mean you’ve reached your peak?**

**P:** No, it’s definitely the beginning. However, it is a dream come true. One of my favorite singers in the whole wide world is Beyoncé, so you know I’ve seen her at No. 1 all these different times, so you just realize, ‘Wow.’ But to be No. 1, it’s just like a dream come true.

**W: You could have moved anywhere**

**to develop your career—Memphis, Chicago, Los Angeles—those are all great places for gospel singers, so why stay here in Minneapolis?**

**P:** Because my community is here. And I’m a community kid. I can’t go places without speaking to people. People relate that to, “Ooh, you’re popular, you’re a celebrity.” Actually, no, I’m just involved in my community. So when you’re involved in different funerals, or different weddings, or different community meetings or voting or different things of that nature, you begin to meet those people that live in your neighborhood. From that, I decided to stay here in this neighborhood because I have the support of my community.

... I’m literally homegrown, okay. I mean I’ve worked downtown before; I’ve done everything in Minneapolis. From downtown to north is my neck of the woods.

**W: You recently performed at a community service in reaction to the Philando Castile shooting in July. Do you feel your music plays a role in helping to solve issues of violence in your community?**

**P:** Absolutely. My voice does play a role

and my music. I would like to say on a bigger spectrum, my voice in general—whether it be through social media, or singing, or even us just communicating right now. Another one of my friends, they were killed probably two or three weeks before Phil, and we had a prayer wall, and (in) less than 24 hours we had over 800 shares, telling people just to come out and walk. Twelve-thousand views just of the (35-second) video.

However, that came from the community, and that was my voice. So I do believe I have a huge voice, and I also believe I have a bigger voice because I know (Castile's) girlfriend, Diamond. So when she went live, I got a notification because we're friends on Facebook. We went to school together. So once again, it wasn't just a CNN story like, "Oh, what can I do to help?" I'm looking, watching my phone like, "That's Diamond."

**W: What do you see are the issues in north Minneapolis with the violence that has happened, and what do you think are some of the solutions?**

**P:** I would say some of the solutions are—and I don't say this out of haughtiness, I say this out of humility—are bridges like myself. North Minneapolis seeing product from exactly where they live do something successful and give them hope. They need more pictures of hope from right where they come from. Not pictures of hope of people that they never really met or this far off on TV, but "That's Jovonta!" They need to see hope, they need to see hope. And outside of them needing to see hope, they need a support system that believes in them.

**W: What are some of the issues that you see?**

**P:** I see a lot of issues. The lack of education, the lack of stable housing, highly mobile young people. Also the lack of summer programs for teens and young adults.

**W: I know you created a summer program for teens as part of Deliverance for Youth (DFY). How have you seen that program impact young people involved?**

**P:** Multiple ways. 90 percent of those young people that were involved graduated, went on to higher education, one of them just got their masters probably less than a month (ago). They've started businesses, done small-business clothing lines, hair salons, one just

finished her bar exam. So we have had a plethora of success stories out of the summer program and out of just DFY in general.

Higher education is one of the greatest ones. Some will write songs, they produce for other people, but higher education has been one of the main things that affect the DFY.

**W: What kind of influence has your daughter been on your music?**

**P:** I've been writing forever, however for this album, I did not start writing until she was born. My daughter had the biggest influence. ... So I had my daughter four days before my birthday last year. I'm a very planned-out guy, so my daughter wasn't a surprise or anything like that. We knew she was coming. However, I think it's normal, first-time parent, so I started to worry about, "Hey, what am I going to do with a whole entire human for the rest of its life?" ... It's a human and I have to be responsible and I have to teach them. And I just started humming ... "I have nothing to worry about."

She also inspired me to write another song on the album called "No Love Lost." She had a massive number two, and it was my first time having to change her. So massive... There's a term that we use in the hood that says, "No love lost." So if somebody does you wrong, or if somebody crosses you, "No love lost, it's fine." And so I just felt like you could have done the most messy thing that you possibly could do right now, however me being your father, there's no love lost.

And so I felt that that's how God views us as his children. We may mess up, we don't get it right 90 percent of the time ... and so God is still there to compel us back to him and it's no love lost. So she was a good inspiration. I owe her some money.

**W: How has being a father changed your viewpoint on life, on music?**

**P:** I was already soft, so let's just start there. It made me softer. She's changed my viewpoint on music in this particular way. She reminds me a lot of myself. The only reason why I say that is because she sings the whole entire album at 1, and she dances when Beyoncé's "Formation" comes on, and you know, in the WCCO interview, she was singing the song. I would say seeing her notifies me that music is in me. It's in me, because the product of what I could do, clearly, and it's just

in her. And so it really changed my viewpoint on life, that music wasn't something that I chose, it chose me.

**W: What are your hopes for your daughter and other youth in the Twin Cities?**

**P:** My hopes for my particular daughter is I hope she grows up to sing and she's really good at it. I hope that she's a way better version than her father. I think you're supposed to get better than your parents. ... My goal for her is that she's like a better version. ...  
And for young people in the

#### THE JOVONTA PATTON FILE

- **Profession:** Singer
- **Age:** 26
- **Hometown:** Minneapolis, MN
- **Career highlights:** Album debuted No. 1 on Billboard gospel album chart in Summer 2016. At age 17, started Deliverance for Youth community choir, which released album in 2011. Became professional singer at age 16.
- **Find 'em:** On Twitter and Instagram at @mrpatton316

community, my goal is that hopefully this causes a lot of entrepreneurs and people that are bored to just do what they want to do. Go out, make a song, promote the song, create a plan. My hope is that they become successful in their endeavors and that they find finances and that they find audiences that will help support their particular vision and dream.

**W: Yesterday was Jovonta Patton Day, so how did you celebrate?**

**P:** It was Jovonta Patton Day in Minnesota, declared by Governor Mark Dayton. Believe it or not, the only thing I did was I went to Red Lobster, but I couldn't even eat there. Everything else was working, singing, "Hi, how you doing? Can we take a picture? Can you sign this?" ...

I did do something really cool later on, though. One of my friends has a '68 Impala and it's really nice. And he took me joyriding last night downtown for about 30 minutes and we did a Facebook Live. I saw a lot of people, and everyone was congratulating me. So it was like a ghetto parade.

**W: So what's next for Jovonta Patton?**

**P:** That's a good question. I have a kid that is due Sept. 16, my wife's birthday. But musically, to stay on the chart

another three weeks. After staying on the chart for another three weeks, so I can submit myself for Stellars and Grammys, and that's about it, just keep doing what I'm doing, singing and selling CDs so I can make my money back that I spent as an independent (artist).

A lot of people equate it as, "Oh you're making a lot of money." But it's like, "No, this is the money that I spent that I'm finally making back." I spent about \$13,000 on the record.

**W: Do you regret not having a record label?**

**P:** Not at all. I'm happy I did it without one, because now when I do get the opportunity to go to one, then the offer won't be one-sided. "Okay, well I could stay on the chart for this many weeks by myself." I have leverage. People already know. What can you do for me that I can't do for myself? Can you get me to perform at the Grammys pre-show? If you can do that, then we can possibly talk.

So that's kind of the next goal, but I don't want to be in pursuit of a record deal or any of those things. I just don't want to live in a moment where I don't ever enjoy the moment. I want to be more of the, "whatever happens, happens," and to keep working hard.

*This transcript has been edited.*



Patton with his wife, Symone, and daughter, Ella.

Photo courtesy of Jabari Holloman

# COLLEGE ESSAY BOOT CAMP

*Kicking students' college essays into shape!*

LAST SPRING, ThreeSixty Journalism hosted its first-ever College Essay Boot Camps at Minneapolis Roosevelt and St. Paul Harding high schools.

The program went above and beyond our expectations.

In an effort to help every ThreeSixty Journalism student leave our program with a college essay, we installed that same school-year model—one-week, start-to-finish college essay workshops—into our journalism summer camps. This summer, ThreeSixty held two more College Essay Boot Camps, in which more than 40 students completed their college essays.

We're excited to share a collection of these powerful, compelling essays with you, and we hope you are as moved while reading them as we are.



A morning session during ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp week during summer camp in July at the University of St. Thomas.

Staff photo

## The art of storytelling



**By Tony Vue**  
St. Paul Harding  
High School

"AHLAO, DO YOU want to hear a story?" said Dad, addressing me by my childhood name more than 10 years ago in our living room.

"But I want to play with my toys!" I replied.

"Now now, come on," my dad insisted. "You're going to love it."

He brought me to the small kitchen table, sat down on a chair and pushed away the books on the tabletop, replacing them with some pieces of paper and a pencil. What he did next with

the pencil and paper would change me forever.

He steadily started illustrating out his history while telling his story. This way of telling his story managed to get me to listen.

"So there's me and my family," Dad said as he sketched out a few more stick figures. "We live in a village in Laos."

As his story went on, his happy, slow-toned voice narrated the story while his hands swept across the fibers of the paper with the pencil, leaving traces of various lines, shapes and marks. Even though what he drew was just a collection of stick figures and poorly drawn houses, they grabbed my attention and I stared in awe as he doodled, and I thought to myself, "Hey, I can do that too."

"After avoiding soldiers, crossing the Mekong River, living in a refugee camp, and getting ready to move to America, we're now here," Dad said, his lips curved slightly upward to form a small dimpled grin.

Once my dad ended his story, I grabbed the pencil he placed on the stacks of paper and right away started scribbling some shapes, animals and stick figures. I started to draw a house with grass on the ground, clouds in the sky and a sun peeking out on the left corner of the paper.

I lifted up the drawing to get a full view of it. Smiling, I could say that I was in love with drawing. I might cringe if I looked at it today, but it was the best piece of art that I had made up to that point. My dad's passion for visual storytelling inspired me, and his doodles that day sparked my interest in art.

Since then, my art has evolved from stick figures and random doodles to video game fan art. In 2012, I started to

take my interest in drawing more seriously. And video games became a big influence on my art. Video games can tell stories as well, and getting involved in the story as the main character and listening to it while I'm constantly pressing the system controller's buttons gave me the inspiration to draw the characters in the game. I've drawn characters mostly from the Nintendo franchise, such as the Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda and, mostly, Pokémon. Without these video games, my art probably wouldn't be the same as it is today.

Drawing is now an embraced hobby. I love telling stories, and just like my dad, I want to tell those tales visually to everyone. While I have many dreams and careers that I'd

like to reach, such as becoming an animator, graphic designer, computer engineer or concept designer, one career I'm most interested in is being a Mangaka, which is a Japanese-style comic creator.

From making money out of my art to gaining more skills and techniques to improve my artistic ability, I've been making a path of my own to get to where I'd like to go. My dad, who was my first artistic inspiration, supports my dream to become an artist. Besides my dad, there are several other artists and illustrators that I really look up to, such as Wenqing Yan, Alexis Kristedja and Mikiko Ponczek, as they also tell stories visually. Currently, I'm creating my own story, which is a web comic that I hope to publish when I'm older.

I know as I develop my talent and my art gets more mature, I'll never forget that it all started with my father telling me his story with simple stick figures.

*I know as I develop my talent and my art gets more mature, I'll never forget that it all started with my father telling me his story with simple stick figures.*

## Appreciating the skin I'm in



By **Oralyn Weah**  
Park Center High School

IMAGINE BEING in a classroom where everyone else is in on a secret, except you. What you hear is silence, but their stares say it all: You're different, you don't belong.

This was the scene I faced every day after transferring to a new junior high outside of my school district. As a young black woman, I never thought I would have to live each day disproving others' stereotypes about my race. I never imagined that within a year I

would want to quit school.

The three years I spent in junior high would break down my confidence but inspire me to become the strong young woman I am today.

From my first day at Brooklyn Junior High, I was seen as the new girl, the new black girl. As I walked into English class, my teacher looked me up and down. The welcoming expression on her face became guarded.

"Are you sure you're in the right class?" she asked. "This is an honors class."

I realized why she and other teachers were puzzled. I was the only black person in my honors classes.

The other students doubted me, as well. They called me a "wannabe" and a "weirdo" because I was eager to learn and did more than the teachers asked of me.

"Stop trying to be white," my classmates told me, as if "white" was synonymous with being successful, something I wasn't allowed to be because of

*Growing up I have learned that we are defined not by our experiences but by who we become because of them.*

*Being excluded and ignored has motivated me to be inclusive and open to everyone I meet.*

the color of my skin. I was trapped; my world became empty and silent.

I come from a family of dreamers and fighters, and my passion for education derives from them. When I was 3, my parents gave everything they had to bring my siblings and me to the United States from Liberia. My mom and dad never had access to a college education. That motivates me to seize every opportunity that comes my way.

"Don't go to school to be liked by others," my mother would say as I cried in her arms, describing my classmates' cruelty. "Go to school for your education."

Those were harsh words for a

14-year-old who only wanted friends. But they turned out to be valuable words of wisdom.

I realized I had two options: to be bound by what others say I can do or to create my own reality. Spending time alone awoke my love of writing and poetry. I learned to channel my sadness and loneliness into creativity and helping others. I volunteered at the public library and tutored elementary school children. Putting a smile on others' faces began to put a smile on mine.

Growing up I have learned that we are defined not by our experiences but by who we become because of them. Being excluded and ignored

has motivated me to be inclusive and open to everyone I meet. I pay more attention now to the girl or guy sitting alone in the school cafeteria. I ask that person to sit by me. Because of my experiences, I have learned to think twice before I judge anyone for how smart they seem to be or what they look like.

I am a strong woman today because I am willing to stand out and be different. I've learned that being an active participant in class is not something to be afraid of, but the best way to learn; I want to serve as an example for others who are afraid to embrace their intelligence and desire for education. I have come to appreciate the skin I'm in and the different cultures in our society.

As I continue to work toward college, I want to enlighten others, particularly those who feel alienated and worthless. I want them to see that, like me, they can make their way through darkness, and create a world of light that shines for them and inspires others.

## 'Everyone belongs in the light'



By **Mychaela Bartel**  
Roseville Area High School

ONCE A YEAR, my mom and I take a road trip to the same winding road along the St. Croix River, to the town of Prescott, Wisconsin.

I am nervous. I don't enjoy it.

Mom parks our van on the side of the highway, hoping not to be hit by oncoming traffic. Cars whiz by so you only get a second to look at them.

We exit the van and reach for the white wooden hand-made cross with

a pink flowered wreath laying in our trunk. We haul it up a hill with no paths, full of unattended grass, bushes, and bugs. We place it in a spot where people could spot it from the road and we utter a small prayer. When we leave we pass the town full of people getting their motorcycles ready to ride the road, like my father on the day that became a tragedy for us all.

I was 6 years old when my father set out on his motorcycle early one morning. He was told many times to be careful on the dangerous route he would be traveling on.

My mother was at home when she got the call that my father was being airlifted to the hospital. After that we received another call with the worst news possible—that he had passed away. My grandmother was holding my mother, who couldn't stand on her own. They were both in tears.

The next thing that sticks out in my memory was laying a single rose on top

*I didn't know it then, but this loss forever changed how I saw the world and it opened up my mind to seeing life from other perspectives. This made me want to help others who experienced the same tragedy that I had.*

of my father's body in his coffin, never thinking that would be last time that I would ever feel my father. I didn't know it then, but this loss forever changed how I saw the world and it opened up my mind to seeing life from other perspectives. This made me want to help others who experienced the same tragedy that I had.

When my father died, I looked up to my mom for her strength, but I had no idea how to move forward. I kept my feelings locked up for a long time. I felt like I was trapped, curled up in a dark room of my own creation, empty with no one to talk to. I never told anyone

what I felt, but my family found some papers I had written about how I was feeling.

They took me to a counselor, talking to this person who had the skills to help me break down the wall I built for so long. She worked with me to understand what I was feeling and express those feelings in the right way. Her office became a safe place for me where I knew I could allow myself to vent my feelings without any judgement. She sat and listened and suggested solutions on how I could solve problems.

Last year after the death of my grandfather, who had filled my father's

shoes in raising me, I went to her to help me pull through it. Going that soon after his death helped me understand how my family dynamic was going to change and how I would be filling his shoes around the house. It also helped me have my best trimester in school because I was able to focus on what was important.

Now, I want to use my own experiences to help people deal with all the challenges that they face. I want to be a counselor and teach people that there are better ways to handle the challenges that life throws at them. Already I'm the one my friends reach out to with their feelings and problems. I have become a person they trust, who will listen and help them through whatever they are going through.

No one should live in the darkness like I did for so many years. I want to show them that everyone belongs in the light.

## Making grandpa proud



By **Samantha HoangLong**  
Burnsville High School

I WAS ONLY 16 years old. Yet I was down on my knees, changing the diaper of an 89-year-old Vietnamese man.

Every day when I approached him, holding a clean diaper in my hand, I hoped that the dirty one was “light.” Sometimes he’d pee too much and soak the diaper, making everything around him wet. I would have to wipe him down and change his clothes.

At 16, I should have been hanging out with friends and staying up late watching Netflix. But I realized how this old man must feel—incapable of doing a simple task. A young woman had to change his diaper for him.

Although my parents emigrated from Vietnam, I was born in the United States, so speaking Vietnamese was not my strong suit. There were times when I didn’t know how to communicate

with him.

That man was my grandpa, Philipil Hoang, and caring for him in the four months before his death helped me learn the true value of family, sacrifice and commitment.

My grandpa moved in with my family about a month after his wife died suddenly. It was very difficult for him during these first weeks. He was weak, lonely and grieving the love of his life. They were married for 68 years.

This wasn’t the most challenging time of his life, though. His family (and mine) had experienced the struggles of war and migration. They were some of the many boat people who fled from the communist regime after the fall of South Vietnam in 1975.

In 1983, my grandpa built a boat on which more than 80 people, including my father, escaped from Vietnam. After six dangerous days at sea, the boat arrived in Indonesia. My family finally made it to Minnesota in 1985. Learning about the hardships they endured made me much more grateful for all of the opportunities I have here. That has shaped me into the dedicated, optimistic person I am today.

After my grandpa moved in with us, my life revolved around taking care of him. I fed him his soup before I could even touch my dinner. I did homework sitting next to him, just to make sure

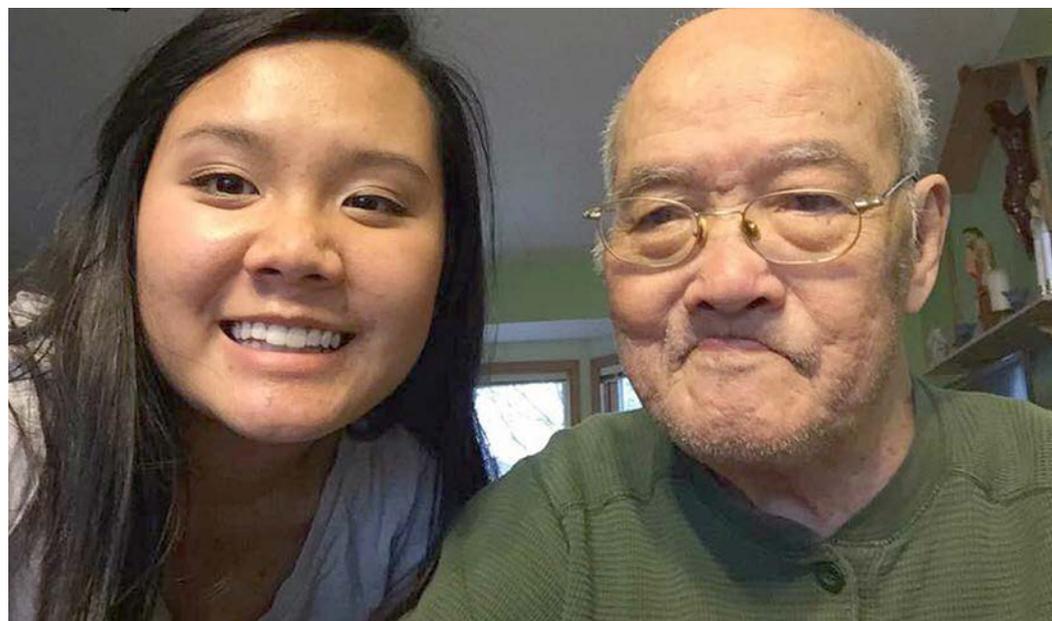


Photo submitted

Samantha HoangLong with her grandfather. HoangLong writes about how taking care of her grandfather taught her the values of empathy, compassion and service.

*My grandpa helped me realize how much I enjoy making someone happy and helping them through their struggles.*

he was OK. I learned that it was more important to spend time with him than with my friends.

My favorite part of caring for him was the chance to develop a close relationship with a grandpa I’d never really known. Over the last couple months of his life, I got to know a person who not only had lived an amazing life, but who,

despite his hardships and losses, kept a positive spirit every day.

I became committed to my grandpa. It didn’t feel like a chore to cook him dinner or tuck him into bed. Our relationship grew when we tried to communicate, sometimes without success; when we greeted each other every morning with a firm handshake and

hello; and when he would make me do something funny, like stroking his non-existent beard.

My grandpa helped me realize how much I enjoy making someone happy and helping them through their struggles.

In the four months I spent with him, I learned values such as empathy, compassion and the importance of service—especially helping those with the greatest needs. I hope to work with international voluntary organizations to improve the lives of desperately poor people around the world.

I want to make my grandpa proud.

## Life lessons through Aztec dance



By **Maria Navidad Sanchez Resendiz**  
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School

A 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL beats on a wooden drum under the blazing, yellow sun: One, two, one, two, one-two-three-four. Powerful lungs sound the white and orange seashells. I line up among the Aztec dancers in my regalia: a turquoise dress with colorful beads hanging from it and a headdress made

of feathers that mimic the colors of a Scarlet Macaw. With “El es Dios,” our feet start gliding from one side to the other.

I had been dancing for 10 years, pretty much my whole life. In the beginning I did not find any importance in Aztec dancing. I did not know how much it would change my life.

I started Aztec dance at the age of 8. I used to cry every time I went to practice. I just thought it was a boring waste of time. Why wouldn’t my parents let me live my life?

But as time went on, I showed more interest. I started to understand even more about the dances and their meaning. I learned why indigenous Aztecs still have traditions and perform the ceremonies. Every time we practice or perform, we open by honoring the water, air, sand and fire,

*In the beginning I did not find any importance in Aztec dancing. I did not know how much it would change my life.*

the four elements that are essential to Aztec life.

In Aztec dance, we are divided into two circles. The inner circle surrounds the drums and sacraments, and is itself surrounded by a larger outer circle. This outer circle is where the new, inexperienced dancers are placed. The inner circle holds the powerful dancers. These dancers will never give up, no matter how long the dance lasts.

Aztec dancing has taught me not to give up.

Over time I gained experience and showed improvement, and I was

placed in the inner circle. Being there challenged me more and more every time I performed. It meant not giving up and doing the steps and dances right and trying my best at all times. I learned that the best way to be challenged is not by the things that are hard, but by the thoughts that I had in my mind of giving up. That was the real challenge. I learned to ignore them and to believe in myself and in the words “I can do it.”

I have learned how to present myself and practice public speaking in front of large audiences. There are

times when I accepted the role of being the spokesperson and articulating with the microphone about our regalia, dances and the tradition. By taking these roles I have gained leadership skills.

The wooden drum that beats, the seashells that sound, the regalia that I wear and every dance step that I take are all very meaningful parts of my life. I know that I want to go into college, and have a successful future. I know that I want to continue to be a leader. I know that one day I will break the barrier in becoming a mechanical engineer. I will accomplish this because of Aztec dancing and the confidence, leadership and respect it gave me.

These are things that no one will be able to take from me.

## Hard work now for a better future



By **Luis Rosas**  
Cristo Rey  
Jesuit High  
School

FOR A COUPLE of years in my early childhood, I regularly slept at night in a car. I would lie in the backseat, my legs stretching all the way to the other seat. Sometimes I would snore.

I was there because I was raised by my mother and grandfather, who both worked (and still work) two jobs, one

of which was delivering newspapers. There was no one else to take care of me. I started to go to their newspaper delivery job with them—some nights with my mother, and some with my grandfather, while I slept in the car.

At first, I thought it was fun sleeping in the car while they were working, and whenever I'd wake up, I would help them. As I grew older, it all became real. I realized they actually needed my help at work so we could earn enough money to have a stable life.

Today, I work two jobs—at a fast food restaurant after school and overnight on weekends delivering newspapers.

I work all weekend. After I'm done with school on Friday, I go straight to work at Chipotle, where I serve food. It's almost midnight when I get out, then I'll rest and wake up around 2 a.m.

*I am determined to use my ambition  
to make certain my future children are able to live  
a more typical teenage life.*

to go work with my grandfather, delivering Star Tribune newspapers.

After my route, I get home around 7 a.m., eat breakfast, sleep, and wake up around 2 p.m. Sometimes my grandfather will wake me up to go grocery shopping and buy ourselves something to eat. For the rest of the day, I have a small amount of time to hang out with my friends, but I eventually have to be back home before midnight, because that's when I go to work again with my grandfather. I repeat the same schedule as Saturday.

This is my teenage-years routine. It

stresses me out, and I wish I had more time for myself or to spend time with friends and family. I am missing out on the teenage life others lead.

I take this as a life lesson. I am determined to use my ambition to make certain my future children are able to live a more typical teenage life.

Fortunately, I have earned many opportunities, such as attending a good school (Cristo Rey Jesuit High School) that prepares me for college. I've received academic awards from school and from my corporate work study program, where I work in a corporate

office one day per week during the school year. I've been involved in a research program at my school and with the University of St. Thomas called Together Possible, and I've been in a summer journalism program at St. Thomas called ThreeSixty Journalism.

I am determined to use all these and other opportunities to thrive in college. Succeeding in college—and as the first in my family to do that—will change my life as well as those around me.

“Yo quiero que tu vivas una vida más mejor que yo,” my mother will constantly say to me. (“I want you to live a better life than the one I'm living.”)

“Yo voy hacer a ti y a mi abuelo orgulloso, ma. Lo hare. Lo se que lo hare.” (“I will make you and grandfather proud, Mom. I will. I know I will.”)

## ‘I am full of hope’



By **Abdifatah Abdi**  
Minneapolis  
Roosevelt  
High School

IN THE SUMMER of 2012, my childhood friend Ayaanle and I were exploring our dusty and blazing hot Ethiopian refugee camp when suddenly, we heard gunshots.

I knew because I had heard it before. Then, in front of us, people came out of their houses and started running.

“Let us go see what is happening and what people are running to,”

Ayaanle said.

Our slim 11-year-old bodies moved in the same direction—toward the gunfire. One more gunshot rang out, this time closer than before. I looked over to my friend. He was no longer next to me. My eyes found him on the green grass below, his head exploded. I wasn't able to move. I couldn't help. I was just a boy and I felt hopeless.

My family is Somali, and I was born in an Ethiopian refugee camp. Growing up in the camp was about survival, and there was not enough food and water. Violence was common. Education was terrible.

Starting in 2008, every day one of my family members would walk by the United Nations poster and check to see if our names were on the list to go to the United States. Still, I didn't know what my life would be like after five or ten years. Growing up, I felt hopeless.

*I kept moving forward when I faced so many  
challenges in the camp, so I always remind myself I can  
overcome challenges again and nothing is impossible.  
Nothing is harder than living in the camp.*

Then one day, after Ayaanle's death, I was playing soccer. My sister came to me screaming, “Waan ku jirna liiska,” which means, “We are on the list.”

In September 2012, we moved to the United States. I was so happy and excited. Tears were rolling down from my eyes.

I had to leave my life in the refugee camp and everything that I went through behind. I had conversations with my family about what happened in the camp. Things they told me helped me become a stronger and better person. They made me feel I could do everything

and I can overcome whatever I face. I kept moving forward when I faced so many challenges in the camp, so I always remind myself I can overcome challenges again and nothing is impossible. Nothing is harder than living in the camp. I am a better person because my thoughts are always clear. Whatever goals I set, I know I will achieve them.

I am determined to go to college and succeed. I want to do good in English, science and math in college. I want to have the ability to find a job where I can help people and the community, and provide a good life for my family. I want my kids to have

a better life than I did. I want them to grow up having goals and hope. I want my kids to be able to do whatever they want and go to college and have a bright future. I have the desire to do whatever it takes to make my dreams reality.

Moving to the United States opened a lot of doors. It gives me hope that I can do something with my life. I am a lot stronger than I thought. I have made a lot of progress in just a few years. I will live my dreams. I can do anything and overcome whatever I face. I am full of hope.

### MORE ESSAYS ONLINE

To read more essays from College Essay Boot Camp, go online to [ThreeSixtyJournalism.org](http://ThreeSixtyJournalism.org), click on “May 2016 Magazine” and scroll down to find another collection of essays from earlier this year.

## ‘Information is power’



**By Baher Hussein**  
Spring Lake Park High School

I LANDED IN CAIRO at a revolutionary time.

It was a hot day in Tahrir Square, the birthplace of the Egyptian Revolution. Cars honked, trash filled the square, cops patrolled the area in cars and on foot. The atmosphere was tense. The country was undergoing a political transition, which included the first democratic election after the protests that toppled former President

Hosni Mubarak.

I bought a notepad and pen from a street vendor and started writing. I wrote observations, and asked random people about the Arab Spring. Then my mom grabbed me and said, “Stop! This could be dangerous.” I stashed my notebook, but I wasn’t done writing about the Arab Spring.

I learned about Egypt’s struggles with human rights and poverty. Egypt was thirsting for something new, but at the same time was tired of the instability that the previous years had brought. A lot of Egyptians felt trapped by an election that made them choose between a former Mubarak prime minister and a Muslim Brotherhood leader.

I began writing personal essays about social and political life in Egypt. I kept a journal documenting the people I met, how they dealt with poverty and their views on domestic and foreign affairs. I sat in coffee

*I want to shed light on important issues. I want to provide a non-biased viewpoint on issues and conflicts. I hope to inform the misinformed and to show sides of the Middle East that the mainstream media doesn’t cover.*

shops with my cousins and had discussions with them, like I was a real Egyptian.

I returned home to the boring and rural town of Bemidji, Minnesota, and reflected on my experience in Egypt. I felt like people in Bemidji were naive about foreign affairs (especially in the Middle East), and it was time for them to learn.

I was an outsider for the brief time I lived in Bemidji. I was one of the few minorities at my school. Making the best of a bad situation, I began having political discussions. I began understanding some Bemidji people’s view

on the Middle East and the world. It was a one-sided view that everyone in the Middle East is radical, if not a terrorist, and no one wants change or democracy. My experience in Cairo showed me that was completely false. I became angry with the mainstream media for telling only bad stories and ignoring the reforms that are taking place.

It was there in Bemidji, witnessing people’s misconceptions about the Arab world, where I found my gift, my deepest desire and purpose in life. I want to shed light on important issues. I want to provide a non-biased

viewpoint on issues and conflicts. I hope to inform the misinformed and to show sides of the Middle East that the mainstream media doesn’t cover. I want to document human rights abuses and promote democracy.

Today, Egypt’s first democratically elected president has been overthrown by a military coup. The military is now in charge, and things are worse than before. Journalists are jailed, activists tortured and the media is biased. I, and many people I met during the Arab Spring, have completely lost hope.

Four years after my Cairo experience, I realize it helped me understand complex issues, made me more open-minded and, most importantly, made me more ambitious.

Let me write about complex issues. Let me investigate crimes against humanity. Let me make a difference. Help me inform. Information is power.

## Winning the fight against MRSA



**By Bina Lee**  
St. Paul Johnson High School

“OUCH,” I THOUGHT, after what seemed like a typical insect bite on my left leg. That is, until the sharp and unbearable pain put my life on hold.

I didn’t know that I, a fearless female, could be demolished by a bacterial infection. Strength stands as an important building block of who I am. I balanced and excelled in my daily activities. I was never afraid of a challenge. I’m called “Mama Beans,” the mother figure for my friends. I never realized my weakest point until my sophomore year in December 2014.

During winter break, my dance team and I traveled to Fresno, California, for a competition. I discovered something itchy at the top of my leg. I shrugged it off, thinking it was a mosquito bite. Within a day, it was bigger and the pain was almost unbearable. Pulling myself

together, I went onstage with that “bite.” On the plane ride home, it felt like a knife was jabbing through my leg.

Waiting for answers and relief was agonizing. The “bite” evolved into a huge boil that my mom had to treat every night. I began to pray to God even though I’m not Christian, nor a religious person.

“You have a MRSA infection,” said the doctors. It stands for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, a fancy way to say bacteria has eaten up a part of my skin. If left untreated, the infection can spread to the organs and be life-threatening.

The “bite” began a four-month-long battle. I had to bathe in bleach and water. Just when it seemed like I was getting better, the infection spread. I wasn’t strong enough to last through a school day, and I began missing classes. I was restricted from gymnastics and dance. I couldn’t sit or walk proudly down the school hallway. Tears streaming down my face were endless.

I was terrified of the infection spreading to my organs, resulting in my death. Fed up and tired of hurting, I decided to get surgery in February 2015. Surgery was painful, yet relieving. But recovery was the worst part. The struggle to walk, sit and sleep worsened.

It felt like a dream. Just a few months earlier I’d gained happiness



**Bina Lee competes in gymnastics. Lee writes about how she overcame her fight with MRSA, which sidelined her from gymnastics and other activities.**

*I realized that yes, I’m a carrier, a carrier of true strength. True strength is attained by understanding and accepting your weakness, and learning to work out of it.*

from landing a round off, back hand-spring, back tuck. I loved feeling the adrenaline flow through my body from being on stage. I always had too much

on my plate, but I loved the thought of always being busy.

Due to the turmoil, I dropped to the B Honor Roll for the first time.

Sometimes I stared into space while sitting in the tub, and felt nothing. With one leg up, I’d watch the water drip from my leg. I’d observe my bare body, consumed with the hidden bacteria. I listened to the water splashing down from the shower spout, smelling bleach throughout me.

I pondered of my failure; I failed my teachers, my coach, my parents, but most importantly, myself. I had fallen off the top.

Slowly, but surely, I rose up. I decided to fight. I stood high on the beam once more. I pushed through late nights of homework and studying with the help and aroma of coffee. I was laughing and smiling again.

After the surgery, doctors told me I now carried the bacteria. I was still able to get another staph if I got cuts or had anything happen to my skin.

But I realized that yes, I’m a carrier, a carrier of true strength. True strength is attained by understanding and accepting your weakness, and learning to work out of it. I also carry two scars from surgery, which are a reminder of my fortitude.

Since this time, I’ve won and lost some battles, but that’s just life. You win some, you lose some, and all that matters is if you’re still standing. I still have plenty of battles to fight before I win this war.

## Embracing a cultural mix



**By Duniyo Awad**  
Ubah Medical Academy

AS I UNFOLDED on the cold, hard ground behind the gym bleachers with tears rolling down my eyes, I sensed that I didn't belong.

Earlier that day, I approached the commons on my first day at West Fargo High School, where hundreds of students milled around. Their conversations and laughter bounced off the walls. I noticed a group of Somali students sitting at a table. I plopped down, beginning to introduce myself, but got a chilly reception.

I noticed my American-style clothes stood out next to their traditional Somali clothing. At first the conversation was light, but they began to bombard me with uneasy questions: "Why are you wearing pants?" "Where were you born?" "What tribe are you from?" It felt more like a test. I guess I didn't pass.

I didn't expect this reception from people of the same ethnic background. As a first-generation Somali-American, I felt I had something to prove to my family, other Somalis and "real" Americans. I was stuck between cultures; two worlds that were so different.

My mom was born in Somalia and fled in her 30s during the civil war. My father was also born in Somalia but immigrated before my mom, assimilating himself. When they married, they started to notice differences and eventually divorced. As I aged, I wanted my dad around more because he could understand where I came from, but it never happened.

*I don't need to cry behind the bleachers or change to fit in. I don't need to confine myself to my ethnicity because I'm my own person.*

As a kid I relocated often, bouncing from state to state, because my mom was a single parent. I despised it because I couldn't build friendships and connections like I imagined. I lacked control of anything in my life, but I never complained.

When I moved to West Fargo, North Dakota, at 16, I was bouncing with excitement. New opportunities, friends and adventure awaited. However, I was naive and hopeful.

My first class was English, which was not my strong suit. Regardless, I was ready and determined to go above and beyond. When I walked into class, I sat down near a group of people, hoping to make new friends.

I looked to my right and said, "Hi, my name is Duniyo, but you can call

me Duni." As I kept introducing myself, I was repeatedly ignored.

It wasn't only students. The teacher skipped over me as well. She forgot to assign me a seat. I finally spoke in a shaky, crippling voice, "Excuse me, miss, I don't have a seat." She gave me an annoyed look. "You may have a seat over there," she said, resuming the lesson with no apology.

As I moved to the corner of the room, I felt isolated. I eventually stopped attending that class because the teacher made me feel uncomfortable. It might not have been my first time moving, but it was the first time experiencing this alienation I couldn't control.

In the end, I told my mom that this school wasn't the best fit for me. We

left the town in search of an environment where I could grow and flourish.

Despite despising relocating when I was younger, I've realized that moving around helped me mature because I had to deal with different groups of people and learn to not take offense to the smallest of words.

At my new school in Hopkins, Minnesota, I experienced some drama, but I soon realized people approach things from different perspectives. That you're supposed to love everyone—no matter their background. I've learned to think differently than a lot of my peers, holding myself to a higher standard mentally and emotionally.

Now, I am comfortable with myself and my background. I don't need to cry behind the bleachers or change to fit in. I don't need to confine myself to my ethnicity because I'm my own person. Yes, some influences come from Somali culture and others from American. But, I'm taking the good parts from both, mixing them up and having it be my own.

## Writing: A passion, a safe haven



**By Genesis Buckhalton**  
St. Louis Park High School

"HE'S COMING," I told my mom as we looked out of the glass patio door at home, waiting for my dad. "He's just running late."

But I was lying to my mom, and I knew it.

When my older brother and I were little, my mom would get us all dressed in our winter coats, hats and mittens so that we could visit our dad. I would be excited but anxious to see my dad because I saw him only a couple times a year.

Five minutes turned into an hour late, and I knew my dad was not coming. I sat on the couch, fully dressed with tears rolling down my face, not understanding why he never showed up.

After years of this reoccurring, my

mom stopped telling us he was coming, knowing he was not. As I grew up, the trust and love I had for my dad slowly turned into anger.

By that time, my parents' divorce was finalized. Everything changed for my family once my dad left. My mom instantly became a single mother raising two kids on her own.

The constant struggle to put food on the table and pay the rent on time showed in the bags under my mom's eyes. No matter what, my mom worked hard to take care of us because she was all we had.

I couldn't talk about my dad with anyone, fearing that I would start crying or get angrier. I needed to tell someone how I was feeling about my dad and the struggles I was going through with my mom.

That's how I got the idea to start writing.

Because I went to a Spanish immersion school, I didn't have an English class until I was in the fourth grade. When I walked into the first day of English, it was an instant connection. The 45-minute class every other day was filled with reading and writing. I couldn't get enough.

When the school day ended, I would get off the bus and walk the two blocks to my apartment building. Reaching



Genesis Buckhalton (right) poses for a photo with her mother and brother. Buckhalton writes about how writing became a safe haven and outlet for her.

my bedroom, I slid open my sock drawer and, digging all the way to the bottom, I took out my green composition notebook with smiley face stickers plastered on the front. Grabbing a pen and finding the perfect spot on my bed, I started to write until my hand throbbled. First about my dad, but then I began to write about everything else.

Writing became my escape from the real world, and it helped me find

new passions. My sophomore year of high school, I decided to apply for the school newspaper, the Echo, ready to embark on a writing adventure.

To my surprise, I got on the newspaper as one of the new writers. I had taken a journalism class but did not know if I was ready for this fast-paced environment.

At the beginning, it was a challenge to get myself to open up. I felt like I

*Writing became my escape from the real world, and it helped me find new passions.*

was not getting my point across in my first story, and I was frustrated.

"If you knew everything about journalism, then you wouldn't be on the paper," my newspaper adviser would tell me whenever I made a writing mistake.

She was right. Everyone makes mistakes and there was no need to be down on myself. I just kept trying.

After long nights and countless revisions, my story was done and published in the newspaper. Seeing it in the paper was one of the happiest moments—my heart filled with joy as I thought about my future as a writer.

Being on the Echo and writing in my notebook as a child helped me deal with my anger toward my dad and the hardships at home. Writing is something I want in my career. In college, I know that I want to major in news or broadcast journalism. I want the opportunity to let my writing influence and help people who need a safe haven to cope with their struggles.

Just like I had.

Photo submitted

## Finding purpose through my sister



**By Jocelyn Sol**  
Cristo Rey  
Jesuit High  
School

“TU HERMANA tiene autismo.”

“Your sister has autism.”

Those four words changed my life.

In the fall of 2015, my parents, my two sisters and I gathered around our kitchen table. My sisters looked perplexed. My mother’s lips were trembling. She struggled to say the words. After, there was silence. Salty drops were running down my cheeks. The words that my mother spoke went through me like a bullet. I still hear those words every day. Now, though, they give me purpose, whereas before they left me devastated.

During the last 18 months, my love for my 12-year-old sister Magdaleny has grown stronger and stronger. I have learned that life is not all about me. I realized that I need to focus on others,



Photo submitted

Jocelyn Sol and her sister, Magdaleny. Sol writes about how she’s helped her sister, who has autism, and what she’s discovered about herself through the process.

especially those who are most in need, like my sister. I knew that it was not going to be an easy task, but I was determined to support her.

Opportunity found me quickly. One day, in a public library in Bloomington, the librarian finished asking me for the personal information needed to

get a library card. Then he asked my sister for the same basic information. She stayed quiet when the librarian asked her date of birth. She didn’t say a word; she panicked. That’s when I knew that I had to step in and say, “June 22, 2004.”

The librarian said, “Thank you,” and gave me a confused smile. When I looked at Magdaleny, she seemed to be embarrassed, staring at her hands and not making eye contact with the librarian or me. My heart dropped. My sister did not know what she had or how her disability affected her, but I was there to help her with her communication skills and behavior.

I’m still helping her today.

I work with her interests and talents, focusing on what she can do rather than what she can’t. Her behavior at home can be hard to handle. She often acts like a toddler, demanding to be in control. During these times, I help her understand that “no” is an OK answer, and that there is no need to be frustrated. It’s tough, but I won’t give

*I have learned that life is not all about me. I realized that I need to focus on others, especially those who are most in need, like my sister.*

up. I believe God meant my autistic sister to be a way for me to learn my purpose in life. I know God allowed me to open my heart and understand that my mission is to serve others.

Importantly, that mission includes the poor. When I was growing up in Mexico, there wasn’t enough money for food and housing, and certainly not enough for the medical care my sisters and I needed. My father had to leave the family and go to the United States to earn money for our care. That’s when I realized that there’s no health care if you’re poor.

These two life experiences, my sister’s autism and growing up poor, have inspired me to become a pediatrician. I want to support families, especially those with infants and those who can’t afford medical care. I want to bring hope to families in developing countries. My dreams will bring challenges, and it won’t be easy. But courage, faith and knowledge are the values that will keep me going. I have Magdaleny to thank for that.

## Triumph in the war on my skin



**By Kate Xiong**  
St. Paul Johnson  
High School

WHEN I WAS 12, I declared war on my skin.

I spent years squeezing, pinching, poking and feeling pain. I felt beautiful on the inside, but self-conscious about the parts of me people could only see. I compared myself to others. I thought other kids were flawless and unconcerned about their skin. I

felt different.

I struggled with the icky stage of adolescence. Typically, I would crack jokes with my group of friends at school. But one day, one of them went too far. He was making fun of the bumps on my face. I heard whispers, and soon my friends were spitting with uncontrollable laughter.

I ran home, and I looked at the monster in the mirror. My forehead was bumpy, like the Himalaya mountains. The painful skin of nesting pus and bacteria reflected back at me. I started to jab my skin with the sharp knives of my nails. It became worse. He was right and I was embarrassed. I was stuck inside this skin under a terrible spell. I knew a dermatologist could help me, but my family didn’t know how to find one, and couldn’t afford one anyway.

I stopped hoping for a miracle.

And then I mapped out a plan. I would become my own skin expert.

Every free minute I had in my busy teenage life, I roamed the Internet. It was both helpful and harmful. I discovered expensive creams, healing rocks and DIY home remedies. I was hungry to get my hands on the latest promising skin care. One after another, those products failed. And I lost hundreds of dollars.

After five years of mistakes, I was ready to discover a more natural treatment. Food.

I learned that what I ate affected my skin. I could make better choices

about meats, dairy, vegetables and vitamins. Growing up, I loved food, and I didn’t think about it as I ate mostly fried meat and white rice. I learned I had to change my diet with better cooking methods such as chopping fresh crunchy vegetables and steaming them instead of pan-frying. I portioned my food and even converted to brown rice. My meals were not only healthy, they were delicious.

Finally, with a more balanced diet along with basic skin care, I was starting to see results. My acne cleared up, my scars healed and any breakouts

*I know now that I have learned to embrace my differences, and I want to empower others to understand and accept their flaws, too.*

were controllable. For the first time, I felt beautiful in and out. The transformation was worth the wait. I was proud to look in the mirror and see the new me.

The obstacles and sacrifices I went through have taught me a lot. Trying hard to solve my skin issue made me realize to seek help, give back and to never give up. My goal is to go to college, study dermatology and become a resource for the others who struggle with skin care. Going in depth with skin can lead me to understand it more and provide awareness.

I know it’s not easy to live with an uncontrollable condition and the bullying that came along with it. But, I know now that I have learned to embrace my differences, and I want to empower others to understand and accept their flaws, too.

## Lessons from the loss of a loved one



By Lucy Kuo  
Wayzata  
High School

THE HEAT PRESSED against my skin on a humid June afternoon. Carrying change in one hand and bubble tea in the other, my grandmother and I strolled through downtown Taipei with the rest of our relatives, accompanied by dashing vehicles and lavish glass buildings.

As the only members of our extended family outside of Taiwan, my nuclear family and I took the annual trip from Minnesota back to our homeland that renewed my fading early childhood memories of bustling Taipei.

Jetlag compelled me to wake up at the crack of dawn, which luckily coincided with my grandmother's daily trek up the luscious mountains right down the block. She was invariably eager to bring my brother and I along. Although my grandma was agile for her age, our youthful bodies bounded steps ahead on hills.

As years passed, I never thought the next time I'd see my grandmother would be on her deathbed.

The summer before I began ninth grade, we learned that my grandmother had undergone a spinal surgery to offset the rapid deterioration of her legs. What had been a risky procedure to begin with did little to help her prognosis.

My brother and I followed my parents on their next flight to Taiwan while she went under the knife for a second time.

The trip up the hospital elevator ticked by in silence, everyone avoiding eye contact. A blast of cold air whipped my face as the doors opened to the intensive care unit. Snapping

on latex gloves, face masks and hospital gowns, we anxiously waited in the hall to enter her room, only two allowed in at once.

The first time I walked in, the shrill beeping of heavy equipment filled my ears, and thick trails of IVs sprawled on the floor. The rugged stench of rubber from my gloves clung in the air and my stomach churned to the ceaseless beeps. My heart crashed at the sight of my grandmother, immobile in a gray bed. Her lively spirit lied paralyzed, indistinguishable with jaundice and blackened fingers. I idled in shock the five minutes I was with her, conscientiously meeting her eyes, incapable of digesting the severity this situation had reached.

I left my grandma in a daze as a doctor somberly welcomed us into a room. There I learned that the initial surgery left her with a grazed spine and

a pierced stomach, leaving the rest of the organs in her torso to collapse and wither. Her blood had turned toxic.

The doctor spouted more medical vocabulary. Hesitating, he paused. "I'm afraid there is no chance of recovery," he apologized. His statement hung in the air as he continued, and eventually his words dissolved into white noise.

During my following visits, I stumbled over the right words to express to her. Her pain-enduring eyes masked with perseverance recurred through my mind hours after leaving the hospital. I still yearned for a miracle to occur in the two weeks leading up to her passing.

Because Taiwan is a moderately accelerated nation, I struggled to comprehend that the one-out-of-a-million failed victim of this risky operation was someone important to me, my 71-year-old grandmother.

*Her death caused me to recognize that my purpose lies in pursuing medicine.*

After the visit, under the dimming sky, I descended the mountain without my grandma. I realized how much one loss affected multiple people. The buzz of cicadas dwindled as I neared the house. The streetlight gradually flickered out. I could only picture her last breath in the lonely hospital room, fading out to the slowing beep of her heartbeat. At that moment, I yearned for the chance to recompense my grandma in any way.

My grandmother was a sole person, but she acquired dreams and goals throughout her lifetime. Until then I never understood how small changes created big differences—like how every life matters on this Earth. Her death caused me to recognize that my purpose lies in pursuing medicine.

Even today, our knowledge of human health is not enough to save everyone. My impact may not be big, but I want to contribute to the gradual advancement of critical medical care. My aspiration is to help as many people as possible experience life's potential.

## Rewriting the single story about refugees



By Zahra Mustafa  
Eagan High School

I LOOK AROUND, seeing two naked Turkana women carrying a pile of wood above their heads. Sacred red paint covers their bodies. Heavy and large beads adorn their elongated necks. An ugly donkey grazes near a dead tree while a little boy pees behind it.

My bare feet dig into the warm, dry, cracked ground, as the hot sun hits my bare thighs, arms and face. While waiting to meet up with friends, I

stare at my feet, which were bloody from stepping on thorns.

This was weird for a 7-year-old child, but it became a normal experience. A buoyant smile appeared on my face. This was my home, Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.

I was content. I never went to bed with an empty stomach. I never had to wonder about where my next meal would come from, and I never felt the fear of violence erupting as others seem to talk about in other refugee camps.

I was born in the city of Nairobi. My parents later fled from Somalia because of the civil war in 1991. In 2007, when I was the age of 6, we escaped.

Refugees certainly do have things in common. However, we are not all the same. The 185,000 people living in our camp came from their native homes from all around the world, including Pakistan, Sudan and India. We speak different languages, follow different traditions, believe in different religions and have different dreams.

Others see me as a young, dark-skinned Muslim girl who grew up in a refugee camp. But

I am more than that. I am a bright and happy girl who is independent and who aspires to be a journalist one day.

My refugee camp was my jovial place because it was run by the United Nations, and we were provided with food, healthcare and a promise of going to somewhere better. It was a place where people came together to escape the catastrophe that was chasing them. It didn't matter who they were or where they came from, they just wanted to live in peace. They weren't the isolated, third-rate African refugees people perceived. We had theaters, electricity and lakes to swim in. Like me, many had educated families abroad who supported them financially.

The fact that I am black, Muslim and a former refugee—people in America thought they knew me because of a single story that was established about me. That I was poor, unhappy, homophobic and a terrorist. These words make me feel numb, because I am here to change the world and make something out of myself.

I am here to get rid of those single stories people have about not only girls like me, but communities like mine. The danger of a single story is that they are incomplete. We hear those incomplete stories of sadness and we feel pity. We assume the worst of every story because they stick out more in our minds.

And I hope to change those incomplete

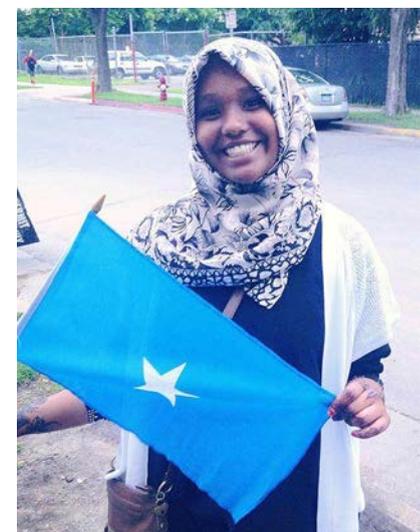


Photo submitted

Zahra Mustafa, shown above, writes about how she hopes to broaden people's perspectives about refugees such as herself.

stories by studying journalism. In programs like ThreeSixty Journalism, I am using my writing skills and voice to complete those single stories—to show the world that there is this one side of horror and desperation, but also behind all that, there is joy, happiness and a buoyant smile.

*People in America thought they knew me because of a single story that was established about me. That I was poor, unhappy, homophobic and a terrorist.*

## The veil: 'A means of empowerment'



**Bilan Mohamed**  
Ubah Medical Academy

*Misguided saviors trying to save a simple Muslim girl but they can't seem to comprehend that I don't need to be saved, for I have my own strength and wearing the veil is one of them.*  
—Bilan Mohamed

MY HEARTBEAT INCREASED and my palms started to sweat as I slowly walked by my neighbors' house, hoping they didn't notice me. Even

though I wasn't looking at them, I could feel them staring.

I expected myself to be brave and stand up straight, but I couldn't. I tried to tiptoe my way past their front yard.

I thought I was free from his attacks, but then I heard my neighbor say, "Terrorist." When I heard that, I bit my lip to try to contain myself from exploding on him.

These are the attacks I get for being a Muslim woman.

Being Muslim isn't something I can hide. I wear it in my dress and I show it in my actions. Through these insults, I've realized that I can't change people's opinions of Muslims by fighting or arguing with them, but through education I can teach people about my faith and what it means to be a Muslim woman. These situations have strengthened my faith and devotion to Islam. I view my veil not as a weakness but as a means of empowerment.

As a child I never realized people didn't wear hijabs. Since I was born in

*Being Muslim isn't something I can hide.*

*I wear it in my dress and I show it in my actions.*

Somalia, I was surrounded by people who dressed like me and practiced my religion. I didn't feel different.

Then the civil war hit, and I was forced out of my country. My family of seven found ourselves in a refugee camp in Kenya. Later, we had permission to fly to the U.S., not knowing I would leave a physical struggle only to enter an emotional one.

When I arrived in America, it was a culture shock for me. Everything was different, from the way people dressed to the way they ate. It was the small things that stuck out to me.

For example, in Somalia, my neighbors were more like family. If someone saw you wandering around, they probably knew your family and would take you home. In America my neighbors were distant. They didn't visit, say

hello or ask how I was doing. We were more like strangers. As a child that made me feel alone.

In order for me to not forget my culture, my parents enrolled me in a charter school that has a big Somali population. I was slowly exposed to other cultures, but I made sure not to forget mine. Growing up in America, I've seen many Somali kids change themselves to fit in, losing religion and culture. Some fully assimilate, leaving behind their family, while others accept some concepts of American culture but still keep their traditions.

Wearing the hijab is a reminder of my beliefs. I wear it through the heat of the summer, through the cold of winter and despite the curious stares. It takes willpower. Many would give up, but I'm not the average person. I

wear my hijab because it's part of who I am.

I am very dedicated and I don't give up easily when things get tough. Negative comments don't get to me anymore, because my experiences have made me more devoted to my faith.

I was 12 years old when my neighbor called me a terrorist. Back then I would always have a reply ready for him, but now I realize all he wanted was a reaction.

At age 17, I do things differently. I've realized people will try to put you down, but you can't let that impact your actions or decisions.

My struggles in life have made me a stronger person. Wearing the veil has made me the strong Muslim woman that I am today. But to succeed, and to help my neighbor understand me, I need an education that teaches me how to share my stories with the world and help the Somali community voices be heard.

## Forging my own path



**Tyler Lee**  
St. Paul Harding High School

EVERY TIME I visit my grandparents in their huge house in Blaine, I hear a broken record.

"I'm so happy you'll go be a doctor so you can take care of me," my grandma would say in her broken English.

"You have to work hard in school to be a doctor and make a lot of money," my grandpa would say in his sturdy Hmong accent.

As a second-generation Hmong, I'm expected to become a lawyer or a

surgeon. When my aunts and uncles failed to fulfill these expectations, the pressure fell on me and my generation.

Ever since I mentioned to my uncle I might consider working in the medical field, my whole family has been pushing me to become a surgeon. I grew motivated and determined to prove to them I could do it.

At a recent family graduation party, I realized that's not really what I want to do.

It was a scorching hot and humid day. Everyone was drenched in sweat and dressed in formal attire. The humid air was tangible. Makeup melted off women's faces, and those who wore high heels struggled.

Inside the banquet hall, the keynote speaker, a distant relative, approached the stage.

"Great, another boring and overdrawn congratulatory speech," I thought to myself. The deafening screech of the microphone interrupted. Everyone became silent. A man in his 50s, dressed in a suit, stepped up to

*I understand my parents, grandparents and others only want the best for me and my future, but I will show them that helping many people and earning a good living wage is not just limited to doctors and lawyers.*

the podium. He kicked off his speech by introducing his term of a "talented loser."

My ears perked up.

"We, Hmong people, have a lot of talented losers," the keynote speaker, Kong Meng Lee said. "You know what that means? It means we have a lot of people in the Hmong community that do not take initiatives, and the first step to being successful is to take the initiative to get things you want."

My freshman year, I desired to study business, but challenging math courses scared me away.

Listening to Lee, I realized one initiative I failed was enrolling in difficult math courses, ones needed for a

business career. I regret not challenging myself, so I have signed up to take IB Math Studies my senior year.

I kept watching and listening intently.

I learned Lee was pushed to become the first doctor in the family, just like me, and he also was unsure about what he wanted to do. Hoping to fulfill his parents' wishes, he attempted to obtain his doctorate degree, but then realized it was not what he desired.

Instead, he pursued a career in business because he wanted to help people financially. Specifically, lower-income people.

By rejecting Hmong social career standards, he was capable of doing

what he loves most and earn money at the same time. He is now making six figures as a financial advisor.

"Don't let people tell you what to do or what to become in life," Lee commanded.

As the audience applauded and Lee exited the stage, I instantly felt a jolt in my spine that ran through my shoulder blades. The heavy boulders on my shoulders were lifted off, and I felt like I was free from a prison that caged my dreams.

I understand my parents, grandparents and others only want the best for me and my future, but I will show them that helping many people and earning a good living wage is not just limited to doctors and lawyers. I plan to study business at a four-year university and educate low-income families, like my own, to save, invest and make financially sound decisions.

Lee's first step was to break through those standards. I am ready to take that step, too.

#### **MALONEY** from page 6

crisis may have been challenging, Maloney says it has reinvigorated his passion for pursuing the truth.

“... I think it’s rejuvenated my batteries a little bit as far as the importance of local news and the importance of holding people accountable and not just taking what they say for face value,” he said.

A St. Paul native who graduated from Hill-Murray School, Maloney knew journalism was the path for him after spending two weeks at the Urban Journalism Workshop in 2001.

“It was life-changing,” he said. “It was really an opportunity to see whether or not (journalism) was something that really interested me, and I took off from there.”

After his two-week camp at the University of St. Thomas, Maloney spent his college years at Columbia College Chicago, where he learned the importance of professional preparation.

“It was preached over and over again: you need to be prepared, there are going to be a lot of people graduating looking for first-time jobs,” Maloney said.

Maloney graduated in 2008, and one month later, he kick-started his journalism career as a reporter in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. He then spent four years at WKBN in Youngstown, Ohio, as an anchor and reporter, covering a range of stories, before landing his job in Flint.

#### **LATE START** from page 7

To accommodate an earlier high school start time, elementary students would have to start school earlier or the district would have to increase transportation resources for students, at the cost of around \$8 million, according to Jacqueline Statum Allen, assistant director of strategic planning and policy at St. Paul Public Schools. Metro Transit could help fulfill part of that added service, but it would be able to pick up only part of the slack. The remainder would have to be covered by the district, which already has a \$15.1 million budget deficit for the coming year.

“Anywhere that we are moving high school students without moving an equal number of elementary school students, that would cost us money, and we would rather have money in the classroom, not in buses’ gas tanks,” Statum Allen said.

Despite those challenges, the district will continue a pilot program at Johnson High School, which began last year with a shift to an 8:30 a.m. start time and the use of Metro Transit buses. The district is working with the University of Minnesota to study the impacts of the pilot, according to its website.

The chance of restarting the conversation for the entire district is still possible, according to Statum Allen.

“I think it would be time to talk about it again maybe starting next spring, which would be changes then for the 2018-19 school year,” she said.



Photo courtesy of Darlene Fry

Young people in the Irreducible Grace Foundation perform at a community event.

#### **VOICE** from page 15

A group of St. Paul Public School educators, led by Fry, started Irreducible Grace Foundation in 2012. While working as an assistant director of college and career readiness for the school district, Fry found the vast majority of the students who weren’t on track to graduate also had out-of-home placements – which includes foster care, homelessness, rehab and juvenile detention – during school, according to the Irreducible Grace website. Many started their out-of-home placements in foster care, according to the website.

Fry said that if she wanted to make any significant changes, she would have to take a risk, or what she calls a “faith walk.” She wanted to make a difference in the kids’ lives, both in and out of school, so in 2013 she left SPPS to devote her full attention to the foundation.

The foundation is named after Fry’s daughter, Grace, 12, whom Fry adopted when Grace was 2-and-a-half. Grace represents the core value of the program, according to Fry.

“That is why we call it ‘Irreducible’ ... she gives people a chance,” Fry said, “and so it is about, how do you give kids another chance?”

*“In our program we try to help kids get through the system, give them a voice because they usually don’t have a voice.”*

—Darlene Fry, executive director of the Irreducible Grace Foundation

One of the programs Irreducible Grace offers is the Fostering Voice Workshop, which is highlighted in the video. The workshop helps young people by introducing them to the world of dramatic arts on their journey to adulthood. Fostering Voice is led by youth artists, ages 18-23, who have experienced foster care, homelessness and incarceration, but also experienced the support of others.

“We made plays and workshops out of their lived experiences,” Fry said.

Artists include the audience during the workshop and create a safe space for young people. The workshop is not only offered to other youth, but also to adults who want to make a difference in

#### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

The Irreducible Grace Foundation’s 3rd Sunday Events are open to all youth. All 3rd Sunday Events go from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and are held at Camphor Church (585 Fuller Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103). Please call Irreducible Grace at 651-226-6594 or email [info@irgrace.org](mailto:info@irgrace.org) for more information.

- Sunday, Sept. 18: Housing link/resources
- Sunday, Oct. 16: Harvesting money & keeping it
- Sunday, Nov. 20: Giving Thanks dinner & discussion
- Sunday, Dec. 18: Gifts that don’t break the bank!

Source: [www.irgrace.org/events](http://www.irgrace.org/events)

the system.

Irreducible Grace also provides youth leadership development, mentoring opportunities and life skills. The foundation hosts 3rd Sunday Events, which can include workshops on special topics, community-building activities, art and meals, once a month at Camphor Church in St. Paul.

In its programs, Irreducible Grace aims to provide a safe space for young people to speak their minds and to share and reflect on their lives.

“I got something to say, can you hear me?” the teens chanted at the light rail stop.

“You are irreducible,” they chanted later, “and no one can put you down.”

#### **FOSTER** from page 15

“I feel like not knowing my father, and not having a relationship with mom, it’s had a big impact on my life,” Suarez said.

Being in foster care also affected her “relationships, friendships, communication and self-worth,” she said. “Moving from place to place, moving schools a few times, that’s all had an impact on my communication and also my self-worth and confidence.”

Still, with the support of her foster parents, the College Possible student graduated from Park Center High School and completed a semester at North Hennepin Community College.

Suarez is beating the educational odds for foster youth, but only by a little.

Only 50 percent of foster youth finish high school before age 18, according to a 2014 fact sheet from the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education. The percentage of foster youth who graduate from high school and attend college is at an astonishing 20 percent, according to the fact sheet. And less than 10 percent of former foster youth attain a bachelor’s degree.

In other ways, Suarez falls in line with the statistics. Studies show foster youth who have aged out of care are at a higher risk to be unemployed

and dependent on public assistance, and many find themselves homeless, imprisoned and/or young parents.

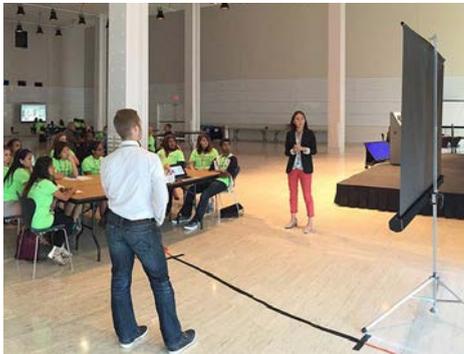
Suarez recently gave birth to her first child, a son. But, as of early August, she was unemployed, homeless and had only a few packs of diapers and a small collection of baby clothes, she said.

If she’s learned anything through her experiences, it’s to stay positive. She said she will share with her child advice her foster mother gave her.

“The most important person in the world is yourself,” she said. “Of course everyone is equal. But to you, you should always love yourself first.”

*“Moving from place to place, moving schools a few times, that’s all had an impact on my communication and also my self-worth and confidence.”*

—Tiara Suarez, 21, former foster youth in Twin Cities.



# summer snapshots

A look inside ThreeSixty  
Journalism summer camp.











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[alumni.stthomas.edu/ThreeSixty2016](http://alumni.stthomas.edu/ThreeSixty2016)

