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# ThreeSixty

Minnesota Teens Report Stories & Issues That Matter

The pressure to fit in.

Get into college.

Maintain a relationship.

Juggle jobs, extra-curriculars and high school drama.

It can be a lot to take in at such a young age.

What are the best ways for teens to take care of themselves—and perhaps even more difficult, take care of each other?

MYFACE

BEAUTY

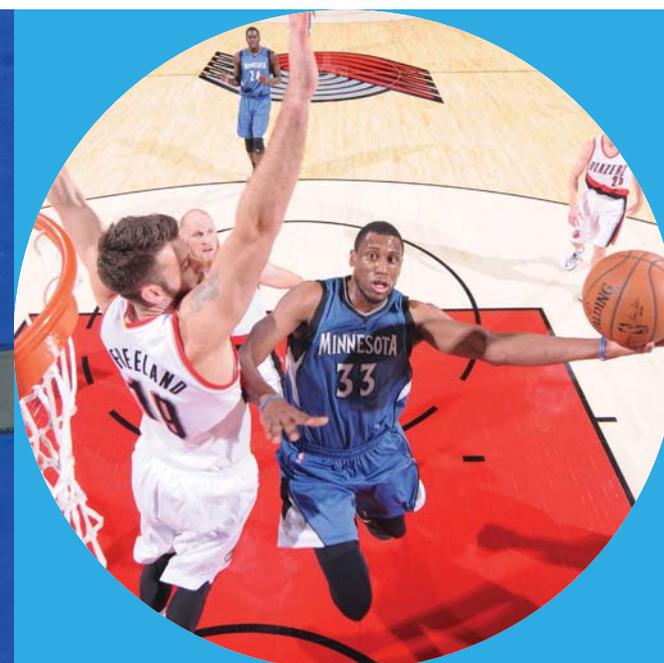
HISTORY

BIOLOGY

MATH

ENSURING HEALTHY FUTURES

■ Pages 12–20



## @16 w/ THADDEUS YOUNG

The Minnesota newcomer sees a bright future on the horizon for the young Timberwolves. ■ Page 10

# ThreeSixty

## FREQUENTLY **ASKED** QUESTIONS

**What is ThreeSixty Journalism?** ThreeSixty Journalism is a youth journalism program of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. The nonprofit program is committed to helping Minnesota teens tell the stories that matter in their lives and communities.

**What is ThreeSixty's mission?** ThreeSixty's mission is to bring diverse voices into journalism and related communication professions by using intense, personal instruction in the craft and teaching core principles to strengthen the literacy, writing skills and college-readiness of Minnesota teens. Our students also practice active citizenship and learn valuable professional skills for future internships and job opportunities.

**Whom do you serve?** ThreeSixty Journalism directly serves more than 100 Minnesota high school students each year via classroom instruction, school partnerships, individual coaching, summer journalism camps and our student-led editorial board. About half the students served come from low-income homes and more than 60 percent come from communities of color. We serve thousands more via our print publications and website—[www.threesixtyjournalism.org](http://www.threesixtyjournalism.org).

**How did ThreeSixty Journalism start?** The program began as the Urban Journalism Workshop in 1971. UJW provided basic journalism training to

Minnesota high school students, particularly low-income and minority teens, at summer camps at the University of Minnesota. In 2001, the program moved to the University of St. Thomas and became a year-round with a full-time staff.

**What's the name ThreeSixty Journalism mean?**

In 2006, the program's name changed to ThreeSixty Journalism to reflect the program's full circle growth and the range of backgrounds among the students we serve. We are interested in telling stories from all parts of our community, using a variety of media tools, including words, photos, illustrations and video.

**What is the ThreeSixty scholarship?** Each year, the University of St. Thomas awards one ThreeSixty Journalism alum a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study communication and journalism. If you've completed a ThreeSixty program and are accepted to St. Thomas, you're in the pool. To learn more about the application process, visit [www.threesixtyjournalism.org/scholarship](http://www.threesixtyjournalism.org/scholarship).

**How can I get involved?** To inquire about our magazine or submit ideas, essays, photos and artwork, e-mail [threesixty@stthomas.edu](mailto:threesixty@stthomas.edu). Students are paid for their published contributions. For summer camps, the application process typically begins in March at [www.threesixtyjournalism.org](http://www.threesixtyjournalism.org).

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# MIND, BODY & SOUL

The pressure to fit in. Get into college. Maintain a relationship. Juggle jobs, extra-curriculars, social media profiles ... and let's not even dig into the daily high school drama.

Teenagers are stressed—that much is certain. Whether it results in committing suicide at a young age, developing an eating disorder or battling the unseen scourge of depression, high school students aren't equipped to help themselves. Heck, adults have a hard enough time securing the help *they* need.

For teens, what are the best ways they can take care of themselves—and perhaps more importantly, look out for each other? Several ThreeSixty writers address timely topics related to health and wellness with a collection aimed at educating about everything from creative forms of therapy and the importance of self-advocacy to reporting on depression, suicide, eating disorders and social comparison via Facebook and Instagram.

Help exists, and it starts with opening up about how we're hurting. ■ **Pages 12-20**



## Send comments to ThreeSixty Journalism

Send your letters to ThreeSixty Journalism at 2115 Summit Ave., Mail 5057, St. Paul, MN. 55105. You can also like ThreeSixty Journalism's Facebook page or follow us on Twitter and Instagram @ThreeSixtyMN.

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# Chasing truth with a camera

## Two local photographers didn't know what to expect when they joined the Ferguson fray

*"I know how to tell the truth."*  
—Nancy Musinguzi

Truth. It's often called objective.

What can we accept as truth? Do we take the images of looting and rioting from a news network like CNN and say that's it? Or is it in the blog that denounces the police of America as racist and trigger-happy?

Nancy Musinguzi and Patience Zalanga believe that truth is determined by what perspective you are viewing it from. So they decided to change their perspective from "looking in" to "being in."

Musinguzi, a freelance photographer based in Minneapolis, and Zalanga, a fellow photographer and student at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, made two trips to Ferguson, Mo. in November.

A friend invited Zalanga, 22, because of her interest in social justice, one she credits to her father, a professor of anthropology at Bethel University. When Zalanga posted on Facebook that she was going with a group, Musinguzi, 23, asked to join.

"For me I think it's about being someone who documents something," Zalanga said. "If you don't have people in the movement documenting it, then people outside of the movement—who don't know anything about it—will write their own narrative."

"I wanted to be in an environment where protesters are," Musinguzi



**Selam Berhea**  
Blaine High School

added. "Someone is gonna capture it and pen their own perspective on it. Why not let it be mine?"

### SCENES FROM FERGUSON

The first trip they took was from November 17 to 23, prior to the grand jury announcement on Michael Brown's case. Brown, an 18-year-old African American man, was shot and killed by a police officer named Darren Wilson in Ferguson. His death sparked protests in Ferguson and other communities. It also opened up a national conversation on the treatment of African Americans by cops.

On November 24, Robert McCulloch, the prosecutor of the case, announced there would be no grand jury indictment—meaning that no formal charges would be filed against Wilson. On their way back to Minnesota, Zalanga and Musinguzi heard the result on the radio. While watching the reactions on a livestream, their group decided to head back to Ferguson.

"I went straight to a military surplus store and bought my whole crew gasmasks because we were just prepared for anything," Musinguzi said.

Back in Missouri, Musinguzi and Zalanga attended a protest at the Old Courthouse in St. Louis, the historic site where African American slave Dred Scott sued for his freedom and where all his trials took place. The court affirmed that a black person was not—and never could be—a citizen so therefore Scott could not sue. At the Old Courthouse, protesters were holding a mock trial indicting the city, National Guard and police.

"There were all kinds of people—white people, black people, kids, babies, mothers and fathers—all people from different types of races. It literally just looked like another Civil Rights movement," Musinguzi described.

The group later assembled at City Hall, where Musinguzi was surprised to find police officers blocking the entrance.

"We turn around and there are just 60 to 100 police officers in full riot gear," she said. "I'm talking about with full ammunition and arms raised."

During Black Friday weekend, both women were also involved in the #BlackoutBlackFriday, #ShutdownChesterfieldMall and #ShutdownWestCountyMall movements on social media.

Their goal was to counter what they saw as biased coverage on major news networks—or images of looting and rioting that relied on sensationalism, Musinguzi said. The Ferguson protests they saw were positive, both said. That's the perspective they wanted to capture on camera.

"Ferguson is the end of pain. I would say peace," Zalanga said.

"Solidarity," Musinguzi added.

Yet some of the responses they heard while at the protests were disheartening. People would say, "you're wasting your time" or just ignore them.

Musinguzi and Zalanga even saw outright anger from a white woman at West County mall. As protesters

### ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

**Nancy Musinguzi** is a documentary photographer, activist and writer based in Minneapolis. A recent graduate of Rutgers University, she uses her skills in photography to engage young people in conversations about social justice, community engagement and the power of visual art in media. She works as an artist-in-residence at the nonprofit organization, Youthprise.



**Patience Zalanga** is a student at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, pursuing her associate of arts degree. A ThreeSixty alum from Como Park Senior High, she works at The Network for the Development of Children of African Descent, where she assists high school students with youth participatory action research. Patience loves engaging people with pictures and hopes to become a journalist.

began chanting "shut it down" and held signs with "black lives matter" painted on them, the woman stood with both middle fingers raised in the air, Musinguzi said. When asked if she really wanted her photo taken that way, the woman replied affirmatively.

"Why do we have to convince people that this was a tragedy? That this is something to be mad about?" Musinguzi said.

### MORE MOTIVATION

Since late November, the protests that stemmed from Ferguson have yet to slow down. The movement found more reasons to continue after Eric Garner was put in a chokehold by New York police officer Daniel Pantaleo. Garner was stopped on suspicion of selling single cigarettes. There is video evidence of the officer putting Garner in a chokehold (which is prohibited by the NYPD) and Garner can be heard saying, "I can't breathe." According to the New York City Medical Examiner's Office, Garner died due to "compression of the neck," but asthma, heart disease and obesity were also said to be factors.

Another lack of indictment came on December 3 and spurred even harsher public reactions

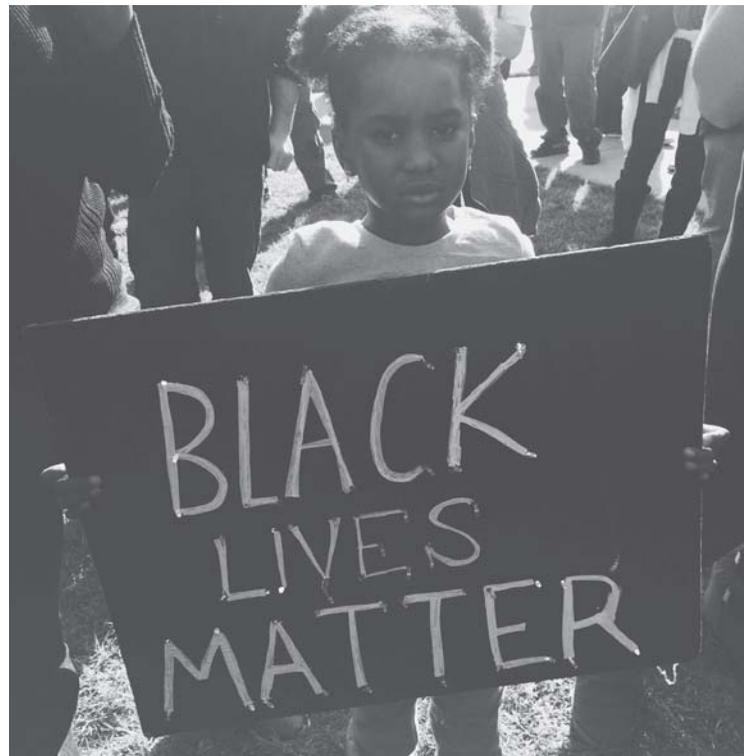
especially because of the video evidence available. A number of cities have since held protests: Boston, New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and even Minnesota. According to the Star Tribune, there were around 2,000 to 3,000 protesters at the Mall of America rotunda on December 20 for a #BlackLivesMatter rally.

After an emotional two months on the ground, Musinguzi and Zalanga both expressed hope for the movement to continue. They co-own a Tumblr blog called The Faithful Witness (thefaithfulwitnessproject.tumblr.com), and have since posted their black and white images to help combat what they see as biased media accounts.

Musinguzi said the name of the blog refers to "faithful witness to the past," or that "photography has the power to change the direction of the present, future and shift attitudes on what we understand as fact and truth."

Through their camera lenses, Musinguzi and Zalanga made a choice to add their voices to the multiple narratives influencing younger generations.

"Your silence will not protect you ... so you have to speak," Zalanga said.



#### **MORE PHOTOS**

Special thanks for Nancy Musinguzi and Patience Zalanga for allowing their photographs to appear in ThreeSixty. To view more of their images, visit [thefaithfulwitnessproject.tumblr.com](http://thefaithfulwitnessproject.tumblr.com). Warning: Language intended for mature audiences.

# Starting at the ground level

## Michael Walker gets a new position aimed at a familiar objective

The achievement gap. It's a common term in education that refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students.

For black teens, it means congratulating them for getting a C in their classes—as if that's all they're good enough to do.

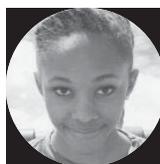
Michael Walker is seeking to create solutions to the negative labels attached to black students—in particular, black males. Increasing grade point averages. Eliminating the achievement gap. Improving graduation rates. It's a daunting task, Walker admits.

But as director of the newly formed Office of Black Male Student Achievement for Minneapolis Public Schools, Walker is trying to meet those goals. His position starts with "listening and building genuine relationships with the students," something Walker learned as a former assistant principal at Roosevelt High School, where he also went to school as a teen.

Walker has heard plenty of stories, and one in particular clarifies the expectations set for black males in everyday settings.

"One (black teen) once told me that no matter where we go, we are looked at as *monsters*. Those were his exact words. And me being a counselor (at the time), I had to ask more questions," Walker said.

"So he started to give a story, and the story was that one day they



**Amira Warren**  
St. Louis Park High School

were getting ready to go home from school. And in Minneapolis public schools, high school students take the city bus ... so they were going to the bus stop, and it was kind of windy this day. And it was him and two of his friends. They wanted to go inside the bus shelter to, you know, get out of the wind so they could stay warm.

"And there was a white lady that was sitting inside the bus shelter on the other side. And he said, 'As we walked in, she got up and walked out. No bus was coming. But she got up and walked out of that space. She didn't say anything to me, but the fact that she got up and walked out of that space made me feel a certain way.'

"No sooner than when he finished that last statement, another kid jumped in and said, 'When they do that, it makes me want to give them what they expect.' And I didn't say this to the young men at that time, but it brought me to the notion that it all goes back to expectations.

"If we expect our kids to misbehave and act a certain way, that's exactly what they want to give. He stated that. If you expect them to do something positive and take care of



Submitted

**A product of Minneapolis Public Schools, Michael Walker knows the challenges he faces as director of the Office of Black Male Student Achievement.**

business, that's exactly what they will show. So it's all about our expectations of young people. We, as adults, have to make sure that we're setting those high expectations and having that belief that they can reach those high expectations."

### **Helping young African American men in Minneapolis. Where do you begin?**

That's the million-dollar question. Because there's so many entry points into the work that there's not just one silver bullet that can solve what's going on. If there were a silver bullet, everybody would be implementing it.

The first place that I'm starting at is the ground level, and when I say at the ground level, I want to get input from the young men themselves to get an idea of what they feel like they're struggling with and what it is they feel like they need.

I also want to make sure that we are taking the time to understand that not all of our young men are in so-called crisis or at risk. We have

some young men that are doing some positive things out there: That are going to college, that are being scholars, that are taking care of business. And that story needs to be told, as well.

I'm a licensed counselor by trade, so I went to school and got my masters in counseling. I was taught ... that people have the answers to their own issues or concerns or problems, and the key as counselors is to go out and to ask questions. To pull that information out. And once we have that information out, now we can use that information to develop a plan to overcome whatever their obstacle is or whatever need they have.

### **What's a common experience that black students have shared with you?**

The underlying message that I'm hearing is centered around belief. Low expectations of them in the classroom. A lot of them feeling that they are being racially profiled when it comes to discipline in the

school buildings.

One statement that I've been hearing over and over—not the exact words from each person—but basically the same statement, is that "if we do something, we are called out quicker than other groups in our school. So we have one opportunity to mess up, whereas other people have three or four opportunities to make a mistake. The first time we make a mistake, we get kicked out of the classroom or get a behavior (punishment), and other groups have more opportunities for that."

There's an analogy that people use all the time: That you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink. And some people use that when talking about education. We need to ask two clarifying questions, because I look at the water as education. Obviously, the horse is the young people that we're working with.

The first question that makes me want to get clarity on: Have we made that horse thirsty? What have we done to make them thirsty? If we just walk a horse to water and we haven't made them thirsty, they're not gonna drink it because they need it.

The second piece of that is: What does the water look like? Are we giving them water that's infested with all types of nasty things in there? Water that they don't want?

So if you're doing that, I'm not gonna drink that, either. I think we have to look at some of the things we're doing in our system, to say, "OK, what is the curriculum like? Is the curriculum nice? Is the curriculum relevant to young people? Does the curriculum value who they are? What do they bring to the table, and how will we make them thirsty for knowledge? Have we showed them what some possible careers are, and have we put them in a situation where they can see the different

**WALKER** continued on page 9

### **think spot**

**Do you feel that some students are treated differently in classrooms than others, purely based on racial or religious backgrounds? How would you change this?**

# Overcoming odds: A Harding essay project

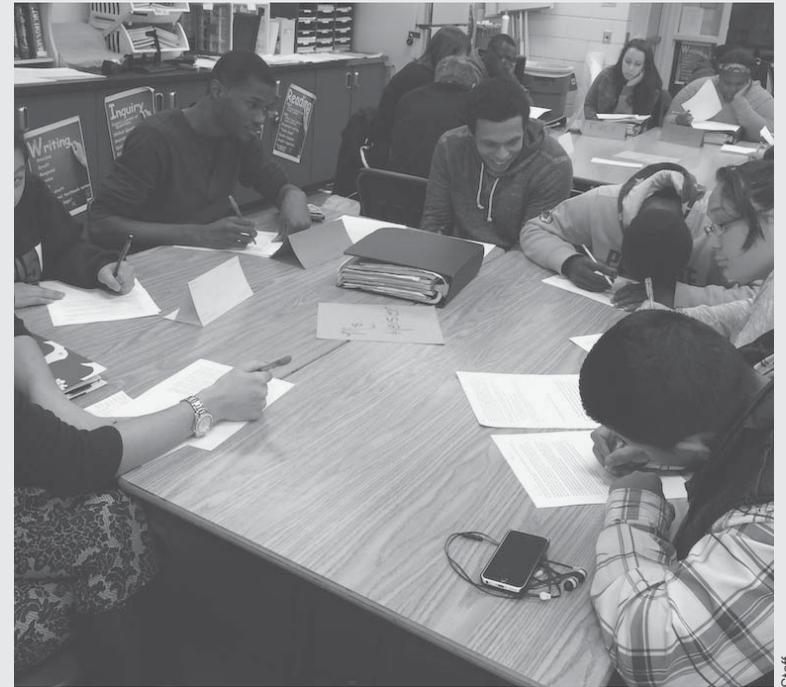


Staff

## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This fall, AVID seniors at Harding High School worked with instructor Cori Paulet and volunteer writing mentors Bob Franklin, Jenean Gilmer, Erin Heisler, Lynda McDonnell, Taya Sazama and Mary Turck to explore their personal stories and polish college application essays. The pilot project between ThreeSixty Journalism and two St. Paul schools on the Eastside—Harding and Johnson (in spring 2015)—is funded by the St. Paul Foundation.

Special thanks to AVID teacher Rebecca McQueen, Dr. Lucia Pawlowski, assistant professor of English at the University of St. Thomas, and Dr. Karen Rogers, professor of Special Education and Gifted Education at St. Thomas.



Staff

## Making good on a miracle

By Mai Jer Thao

The doctor led me into a small and quiet room. He calmly asked, “Are you sexually active?”

I hesitated and could only feel my heart pounding against my chest. I widened my eyes and stared at my feet to prevent eye contact. My hands hid under my thighs to keep me from shaking. I was afraid of what I would hear.

He paused and patiently waited for me to give him an answer. I shook my head. He had a confident look and said, “You’re pregnant.”

My ears understood the words that were coming out of his mouth,

but my brain and my heart could not. Why? I did not want to accept the fact that I would soon be a wife, daughter-in-law, and most importantly, a mother.

There are many things that go through a young mother’s head. Being pregnant at 16 years of age was not what I expected. People judge, people assume, and people don’t understand. I had to suffer through the feeling of emotional pain and fear running all over my body. I was afraid of becoming a mother, a wife, and a daughter-in-law.

I was afraid of what my family would think of me. They are strong into education, so they believe that all the girls in my family should graduate from college before getting married and having kids. I did not want them to see me as a different person. I haven’t changed.

When it was time for me to reveal my secret, I thought that they would deny and disclaim me. Eventually my family accepted me, and I had never been happier in my life. The last thing I would want my family to do is to disown me as a sister and a daughter.

A few weeks after I moved in with my baby’s father and family, it was difficult to adapt. I had new chores to do, new responsibilities and new rules to learn. At 16, I had to call someone else “mom,” which felt uncomfortable. I was becoming a “housewife” and had motherly duties

to accomplish. I was still only a baby. I wasn’t ready to live with another family because I felt as if I couldn’t be myself.

Going to school was difficult because I did not want to reveal my secret. It was something personal between me and my family, but it’s not easy trying to hide a growing belly. I did not want people looking at me or see them whispering things in each other’s ears about me. I remember walking to my bus at the end of the school day and an African American girl strolled by. I glanced up and saw that she

was giving me the “look.” I couldn’t keep up with all the embarrassment and shame. “Life is over for me,” I thought.

I had forgotten that I was carrying a miracle within me. When my baby girl Sunshine arrived, everything changed. I didn’t want her to grow up in the hands of someone who doesn’t see knowledge and education as a gift. I knew that if I gave up on school, I would be giving up on my child. I realized that I must be mentally and physically strong in order to be a successful mother.

As time went by, I grew more confident and had the courage to go to school. I also had a loving family who supported me and still does today. Although I may have struggled through many difficulties, I will not let them prevent me from achieving my goals.



**Mai Jer Thao** is a Harding senior from a family of “20 or more” if you count step and half siblings. She enjoys traditional dancing and singing, believes in Shamanism and loves art. She is also afraid of butterflies. (Yes, butterflies.)

## Start of a new “me”

By Kennedy Xiong

“I’ll do it later. I’m not really feeling it. I’d rather play video games than do homework.”

As the youngest of four children in an immigrant family, I did whatever I wanted and never gave much thought to the consequences. I especially did this in school. Homework was never done. The results? I received terrible grades and even failed my Spanish class in eighth grade. Thinking back, I’m embarrassed. If I did the work plain and simple, I would have passed the class.

Everything changed the fall of my freshman year. I was sitting on the sofa playing video games when I heard

the mailman come by. To my surprise, my oldest brother Lee was home early from work. He grabbed the mail and started looking at it. I remember him saying, “Look Kennedy, your report card! Let’s have a look at what your grades are.”

I knew that I was doing badly in school, and I didn’t want Lee to see it. As he looked at my grades, he frowned.

“You need to stop being so lazy, Kennedy, or you’re going to be like me!” he said angrily. “High school is where your grades matter. You won’t get into a great college without them.”

Lee used himself as an example. In high school, he slacked off and ditched a lot of days. He graduated with the minimum requirements. He went straight to work and found a job at a bank that paid him \$15 an hour. Even now, five years later, he

still works at the same bank with slightly higher pay. That’s not enough to make a good living, especially when he has bills to pay and provide for the family.

Lee said in a calm voice, “I realized it far too late, Kennedy, but you can still change. If I could go back and redo the choices that I have made, I would.” I showed no emotions, but deep inside I was shaking in fear. I respect Lee as the oldest brother, and when he told me to change, I did. This was the start of a new me.

Focusing on school was like learning a whole new language. I made myself finish homework assignments and studied for all the tests. I received all A’s my freshman year. Getting good grades gave me more confidence, and the spring of my freshman year, I took a big step forward and joined the tennis team.



**Kennedy Xiong** is a Harding senior interested in attending the University of Minnesota once he graduates from high school. He plays tennis, loves challenges and always strives to “be the best version of myself.”

I started out as a rookie. I didn’t even know how to hit the ball and hold the racquet. Through my hard work and dedication, by junior year I was part of the varsity team. Now in my senior year, I am one of three captains. My coach would tell us, “When you step into the court, it’s just you and the opponent. Either you fight or get beat up. This is how life is, and you better be ready for it.” This helped me see the importance of my future more clearly. I realized that education was the only thing that can help me climb up into the world.

Lee was happy for me. “You keep doing what you’re doing right now, Kennedy,” he told me. “I don’t want to see you fall back down.”

I’ve become someone that I wouldn’t have imagined to be three years ago. It was all because of Lee who cared for me. Now I have new goals. I want to be the first in my family to graduate from college. I want to show Lee that I learned what he taught me. He made an impact on my life, and now, with my hard work and leadership, I plan to make an impact on others.

## Dribbling toward a better future

By Ismael Kamara

Up, down, swish. The ball flies through the net as I watch with admiration. As players run up and down the court, the squeak-squeak of their shoes against the floor rings in my ear.

Some people become fascinated by a sport. They see how amazing the professionals are and they begin to imagine themselves in their shoes. For me, this sport was basketball.

I didn’t necessarily know the fundamentals of basketball when I was younger since I was from Africa, but I was determined to learn the game. I was introduced to basketball during a staff vs. sixth graders game when I was eleven years old. Running up and down the court, dribbling a ball that was 29 inches

in circumference and aiming at a rim that was about 18 inches in diameter, was very intriguing to me. Playing that day got me interested in the flow of basketball. In the summer of 2008, I convinced my mother that basketball was going to be an important aspect of my life.

I repeatedly asked her to agree to let me play. She gazed into my eyes and was filled with joy at the passion she saw there. She finally gave in, but on one condition: I had to continue to focus on my school work and not let basketball become a distraction. Feeling as jovial as a kid on Christmas morning who sees all of the gifts under the tree, I hugged my mother graciously.

The next day, she took me to the store to get some basketball shoes, shorts, a ball and a water bottle. That whole summer, I spent most of my hours dribbling, shooting and working on my skills. While I was at the recreation center, I realized how many people were talented at playing basketball. Being adamant, I told

myself that I could dribble down the court quickly and shoot three pointers. I would just have to work hard to get there by watching what the other people did: How they held the ball, dribbled and shot.

When middle school basketball season came around, I tried out. I showed that not only did I have the skills, but that I also loved the game. Finally, after four full days of going through conditioning, shooting and dribbling drills, the coach told us who was on what team. When the coach said, “Ismael, go the right side of the court” where most of the eighth graders were standing, I was so happy I wanted to shout and scream right there and then. But I had to keep my cool.

When I got home, all that joy that was built up inside of me burst in front of my mom. She was so happy to see me happy that she just laughed. I not only had a major impact on the team’s scoring, rebounding and defensive statistics, but more importantly, I became



**Ismael Kamara** is a Harding senior originally from Sierra Leone. He is the eldest of six and can speak four languages. A three-sport captain in football, basketball and track, Ismael enjoys anything that keeps him active and will be the first in his family to graduate from high school.

someone the team trusted and believed in. All my hard work and determination made me feel like a valuable player.

This determination to succeed has transferred to other aspects of my life, such as my school work and my everyday life. There was always this perception about African American boys, that sports are all that matter to them. To me, education was of equal importance, so I was determined to prove critics wrong. My determination to become a better shooter in basketball transferred to my school work. I set myself up to be well-rounded, to show that African American boys can love sports, be intelligent and be involved in their school and

community at the same time. Those judging eyes that watch me while I am in class asking questions or stepping up to lead a group make me even more determined to show that I am intelligent. I became involved in more school activities, and with my determination, I kept fighting to reach the highest goals possible, such as becoming a class representative and Homecoming king.

Basketball is a great passion of mine and while there are still more improvements to make as my high school involvement comes to an end, I must start looking toward adulthood. My love of basketball has showed me that I can do anything **KAMARA** *continued on page 9*

## Mother's sacrifice, daughter's debt

By Sunny Chang

When I gaze into my mother's eyes, I see happiness and my future. She is my world, my star and my universe.

My mother and I have been through many ups and downs, but I still love her. Through our disagreements, I have learned that everyone makes mistakes. But when I think of the difficult and loving decisions she has made in order to give me a future in America, I love and appreciate everything she has done.

Before coming to America, my parents escaped from Laos after the Vietnam War. For my mother, it wasn't easy. She was pregnant with my sister and surrounded by turmoil.

BOOM! A Thai soldier threw a grenade at the Hmong people. "Get on my back!" my father yelled, making a run to the Mekong River. There were many people who didn't make it across the river because the currents pushed against them and the icy cold water chilled them to the bone, making them weak. My parents were among many of the Hmong who sought safety in Thailand, and they

eventually made it.

After four to five years in Thailand, my parents escaped the war and its aftermath and arrived in the United States. They didn't know much about anything: Didn't know where to go, how to survive, how to speak or understand English. Even today, my parents still struggle to understand English. Yet even though my parents weren't educated like others, they wanted my siblings and me to have a bright future and to be successful. They wanted us to pursue our dreams.

Over the years, my mother has taught me many lessons in order to help me reach my goals. When I was young, she told me, "If you want others to respect you, you must be accountable and be of service to others." She modeled this each and every day as she cared for our family by cooking and cleaning the house. She would always put me first if I was sick: Staying home to look after me and cook my favorite sweet, warm porridge.

Now it is my turn to return the favor. My mother made me the person I am today, and now I will do my best to take care of her. As I see my future reflected in her eyes, I envision how my success will intertwine with loving and supporting her, my dear mother.

**WALKER** from page 6  
career options in front of them?"

**What expectations do you think they have as young men?**

I always think of a story about when I was talking to one of the young men over at one of the middle schools. And a lot of them were asking me, "Where do you work at? Where's your building at?" And my building is located on Broadway, right across the street from Popeye's Chicken, right in North Minneapolis. The school was also in North Minneapolis.

And I said, "Have you ever been to the Davis Center?"

And he's like, "No, I don't even know what the Davis Center is."

And I said, "Really, it's the building right across the street from Popeye's Chicken. You've never been in the Davis Center?"

"No, I've never been in there, but I've walked past it like 10 or 12 times."

So again, me being a counselor, I've got to ask a few more questions. And so I said, "Have you been inside Popeye's Chicken?"

He's like, "Yeah!"

"Have you been inside Cub Foods right down the street?"

"Yeah!"

"Ever been inside Marvin's Liquor Store?"

"Yeah!"

"Taco Bell?"

"Yeah!"

And then I asked him a second question: "Do you know what jobs are in those buildings and in those spaces?"

"Yeah, cashier, stock boy, and a person to push the carts in ..." So they knew all those different positions.

It made me step back and think that we have this building in North Minneapolis, with tons of professionals in there, and the students have no idea what's

*"Another big piece of this is managing expectations. And that's ... the community ... people inside of the school district, and then also managing my own expectations. This is near and dear to my heart. I'm a black male myself, and so I understand and live the lives of these young people."*

inside of that building or who is inside of that building. And so their reality is that, "Well, those jobs that I'm gonna be able to get are the cashier or the busboy or the stockperson."

If that's what your frame of reference is, they're smart enough to know that I don't need a college education in order to get that job. I don't need that kind of knowledge because of where I'm going. Because I see it right here.

**What does the achievement program that you are building look like?**

I'm (four) months into the job. I haven't solved anything, and the great thing about it, no one has solved it yet. And it's not like this is a field that anyone's involved in, so it's gonna take time. We have to remember that. It wasn't overnight that we got to this situation. It isn't overnight that we're going to fix the situation.

Right now, I'm just doing all the listening phases. I started to come up with a plan of action ... increase graduation rates, increase reading and math proficiency, increase attendance and decrease both behavior that results in out-of-school suspensions and out-of-class referrals. I'm still developing that plan.

Some folks have been successful in Minneapolis, and there are some places nationally that have done great things, so I'm looking at all of that to see what pieces to implement.

**What are some places you have been looking at?**

The biggest place is Oakland, Calif. They were the first school district to create an office specifically for black males, and they have been in existence for about four years. Before I got into this position, they came out to Minneapolis and talked to our top leadership about the importance of the office and what were some of the strategies that they were using to try to impact some of that change.

Another big piece of this is managing expectations. And that's managing the expectations of the community, managing the expectations of people inside of the school district, and then also managing my own expectations. This is near and dear to my heart. I'm a black male myself, and so I understand and live the lives of these young people.

**What direct experience do you think benefits you most in this job?**

Before I got into education, I worked for the YMCA, and so I was working at a nonprofit with young men. So I've seen it from both sides. And when I took on this role, I started to see some of the students that I have lost in the past—all those who have not made it, who are unfortunately dead, or went away to jail.

I still know those students. I still know their names. They come with me on this journey every single day. So that's kind of what my motivation is. To not allow that to happen.



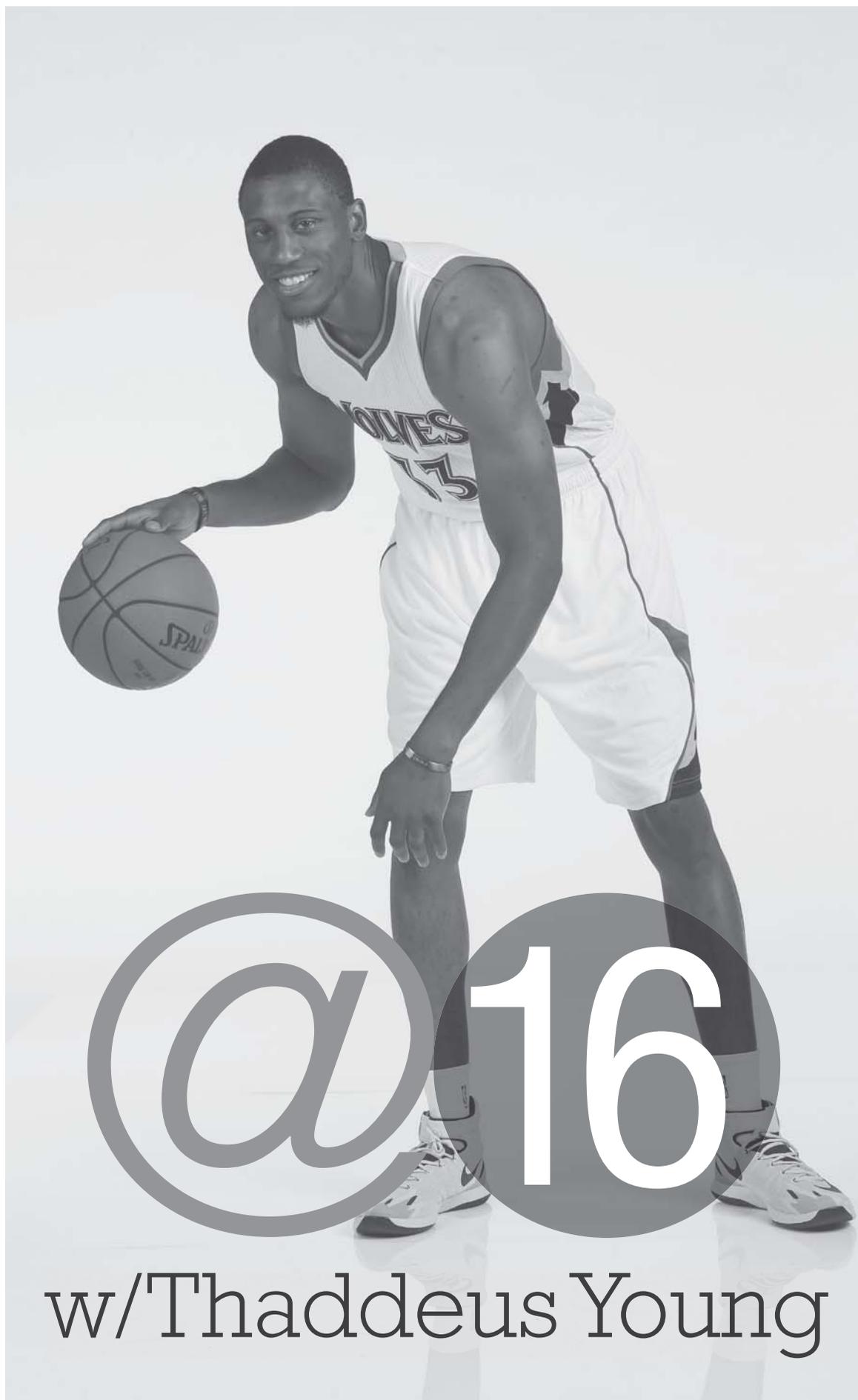
**Sunny Chang** is a Harding senior who loves shopping, spending time on the Internet and hanging out with friends. While in high school, she has noticed a personality shift, allowing her to become someone who is "louder, talks a lot and can be funny."

**KAMARA** from page 8

if I am just determined to do it. Basketball has taught me to work through obstacles and overcome challenges. It made me become an example for my fellow African American boys at school that had

given up or been given up on. This determination will follow me into college if I am admitted.

Boom, boom, goes between the legs, then behind the back, a quarter spin, extends arm, shoots and ... swishhhh.



David Sherman

**S**wish. Swish. Swish. Having just finished a hard practice at his new team's Lifetime Fitness facility inside the Target Center, seven-year NBA veteran Thaddeus Young knocks down jump shots with a broad smile spread across his face.

He has plenty of reasons to be in a good mood.

After winning only 19 games last year as a member of the Philadelphia 76ers, Young joined the Minnesota Timberwolves in August as part of a historic trade that saw the franchise part ways with its disgruntled superstar, Kevin Love, and acquire the past two No. 1 overall draft picks.

Young spent his first seven seasons in the NBA with the 76ers, the team that selected him 12th overall in the 2007 draft. He experienced some highs—including two playoff berths—but many more lows. Last year's 19-win team lost 26 straight games at one point, tied for the longest streak in league history. In his seven years, he also played for five different coaches.

Now he's on a team that has an accomplished coach in Flip Saunders and one of the most talented prospects in recent memory, Andrew Wiggins. The optimism surrounding this young roster is one that hasn't been present in the Target Center for a decade, and the team's new 6-foot-8 power forward is thrilled to be part of it.

"I was very happy about the situation I was coming into. They were acquiring a lot of young guys to try to rebuild the team very quickly, as opposed to Philly where they weren't trying to do too many things, they were trying to just wing it and keep going at a steady pace," Young said during an interview in late October. "This organization is trying to get back to the playoffs and trying to do something real big this year."

Unfortunately, after a promising start to the season, the Timberwolves have been decimated by injuries. Young is second on the team in scoring but also missed some time after the death of his mother, Lula Hall, to cancer.

For Young, playing basketball wasn't a given—even as the son of former NBA draft pick, Felton Young. However, at Mitchell High School in Memphis, he used a combination of natural athletic ability and hard work to become one of the best players in the country. The 2006 Tennessee Gatorade Player of the Year and one of the top recruits in his class, Young began his professional career after a lone season at Georgia Tech.

There's a lot more to Young than the typical NBA player, too. He was a 4.0 student in high school. He's a husband and has two young sons. He even started a foundation to help at-risk kids.

Shortly before the start of his



**Will Ragatz**  
Southwest  
High School

eighth NBA season, Young chatted with ThreeSixty about his high school days, his new team, and becoming old enough to serve as a "mentor" on the young Wolves.

**You were a really good player in high school, won a lot of awards and were a top five recruit. What was it like getting national attention at a young age?**

It was great. You get a chance to get a feel for some of the things that go on like they do in the NBA. Lots of people know you. They tend to flock to you and ask for autographs and stuff like that. It was a great feeling having a great fan base in high school.

**What were the best and worst parts of the recruiting process?**

The worst part is, you change your number five or ten times and they somehow get your number and call you and call you and call you. Now the rules have changed slightly, but it was a great experience because you have college coaches calling you and so many people want you to come to their school and be part of their program. It makes you happy and very enthused about going to college.

**Why did you end up choosing Georgia Tech over schools like North Carolina and Kentucky (who were both recruiting him)?**

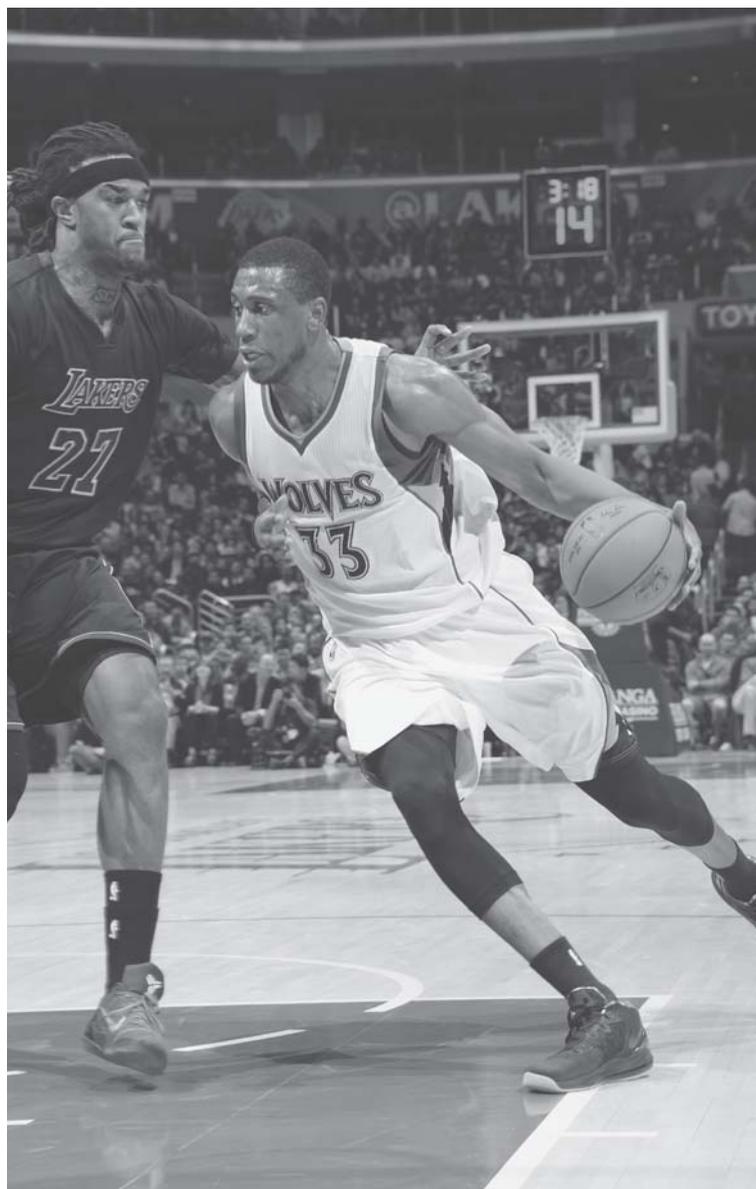
I think it was a great situation for me, they were known for one-and-dones and were a great academic school. The education part was real big for me because I was a 4.0 student in high school. Also, the coaches welcomed me in and I felt like it was a family atmosphere. And I had a relationship with one of the players already on the team, as far as playing against each other, playing with each other and just being around each other.

**Do you think the fact that your dad was drafted in the NBA put a little added pressure on you to be a successful basketball player? Was that something your parents expected?**

No, not at all. Actually, before I played basketball, I was a football player. I played football for probably three or four years. I broke my collarbone and that was the end of football. Basketball, I just kind of really got into it when I was 14 or 15 years old and got really, really good in a few years, and just stuck with it.

**Around what age did you realize that you had what it took to make it to the NBA?**

I'd probably say when I started seeing my name on draft boards coming out of high school—11th and 12th grade. But more senior year, people started talking to me, agents started trying to get into contact with my parents



Andrew Bernstein

It's hard to believe that 26 qualifies you as a veteran in the NBA, but Thaddeus Young has a lot of mentoring ahead of him while playing with so many exciting rookies.

and stuff like that. It was a different ballgame when I reached my senior year.

**You mentioned being a 4.0 student in high school. What were some of the things you were thinking about doing if basketball didn't work out?**

I actually wanted to be a really good financial advisor and work for one of those big companies that does a lot of financial planning and helping people get their life in order.

**Can you talk a little bit about why you're excited for this season?**

We're young, we're athletic, we have a good mixture of young guys and veteran guys. We have a lot of

scoring, of course, and I think this team can make the transition to get back to the playoffs.

**How did your first seven years in Philly contribute to your development as a player?**

I've been through the ups and downs, seen a lot of different players, seen a lot of different coaches, been through a lot of different GMs, two different ownership groups—so I've seen a lot of change. It's helped me adapt to change in my career and change in the team structure. So that was big in helping me, coming here with this (latest) change.

**You've gone from being the second**

## The Young file

**Profession:** Minnesota Timberwolves power forward

**Age:** 26

**High school:** Mitchell High School, Memphis

**College:** Georgia Tech

**Career highlights:** Averaged a career-high 17.9 points and six rebounds during the 2013-14 season with the 76ers. Named to the NBA T-Mobile All-Rookie Second Team in 2007-08. In high school, was a McDonald's All-American, three-time All-State selection and member of National Honors Society.

**Find 'em:** On Twitter @yungsmoove21

**youngest player in the league during your rookie year to now being one of the more veteran guys going into your eighth year. What's that like?**

It's a huge change. It's crazy, because I look at some of the young guys now and I'm like, "Was that how I was when I first came in?" But now you're much wiser, you have more experience and you know certain things that get you by on the court that they don't know.

**Is there stuff that you know now that you wish someone would've told you when you were a rookie?**

Yeah, plenty of things. (Laughs). I just wish I had certain guidance as far as just helping me out. Sometimes when you come into the league, a lot of guys are looking at you as taking their position and stuff like that, so they don't really wanna help guide you. My second year, I think I had it more than anything, where I was on a team with Reggie Evans and guys like that, and they were helping me get by and showing me how to figure out things.

**Do you feel like now you can be a mentor to young guys like Zach (LaVine), Andrew (Wiggins) and Anthony (Bennett)?**

Yeah, definitely. Whenever they come to me, they wanna talk to me and pick my brain and ask "what do

you think?" and we're going back and forth about things. I'm just spitting down my wisdom to 'em and just letting them know: This is how it's gonna be, this is what you should expect, this is what you need to do, this is what you shouldn't do ...

**What are some of the reasons for your success in basketball?**

My character and my ability to go out there and guard multiple positions and be very active and pesky on defense.

**Are you prepared for the Minnesota winter weather?**

No. I've heard it gets pretty crazy. It got pretty bad in Philly, but not like what I've been hearing (about Minnesota). I've heard it's gonna be like negative 20, negative 30, but I hope it doesn't get there. (Laughs).

**Can you talk a little about the Young for Youth foundation and why you started that?**

Basically, it was just to help at-risk kids. We go from clothing kids, to prom dress drives for young ladies, to feeding kids, to ACT prep courses, SAT prep courses, Big Brother-Little Brother programs, so we do a lot of different things. We've hired tutors to help the kids within our AAU program improve their grades to qualify for college and stuff like that.

# Coping through creative intensity

## Expressing pain by creating art can help with the healing process

While walking through the Adler Graduate School, you'll find an impressive array of artwork hanging from the walls, sitting on tables, and even hanging from the ceilings.

But one painting stands out from the rest.

It's an intricate assortment of shapes and colors that all seem to lead back to the center of the painting. A circle.

"This is a mandala ... It really focuses on wholeness," said Erin Rafferty-Bugher, an art therapist with the University of Minnesota Amplatz Children's Hospital and field experience coordinator at the Adler Graduate School in Richfield.

After taking just one introductory course, Rafferty-Bugher fell in love with the idea of using art to heal, and immediately took as many classes as she could to get her master's in Art Therapy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Now, she works as an art therapist with various organizations, including Adler.

Adler provides masters level programs, post-degree licensing options and certificate programs to train future human services professionals. Students take part in highly condensed training programs while receiving hands-on experience working among the metropolitan community.

"My dad raised us with this creative way of parenting, and we always had that heavy influence in our lives



**Danielle Wong**  
Eastview  
High School

to appreciate art, and to experience art, and to do art," Rafferty-Bugher said.

### ART AS HEALING

According to the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy is a nonverbal form of therapy that uses art and other creative mediums for healing and life-enhancement.

"Utilizing the art helps—actually it connects—both sides of the brain," Rafferty-Bugher said. "It engages all parts of the brain depending on the different medias that you use ... different parts of the brain can be utilized at different times."

On an even more detailed level, creating artwork can help connect new neural pathways within the brain. This helps integrate emotions, thoughts, experiences and sensations.

"The opportunity for people to use art helps connect them to some experiences that might have been ... tucked back in there, because of some painful things that have gone on," Rafferty-Bugher said. "It gives a place for that to be externalized ... and it can either be talked about or managed, giving that person an opportunity to heal!"



**Erin Rafferty-Bugher, a field experience coordinator at the Adler Graduate School in Richfield, grew up appreciating creative approaches to problem solving.**

After her father's death, Allison DeCamillis began the therapeutic process of expressing her feelings through art.

"My father had died when I was five and it wasn't until I was a teen that I knew the emotional impact his loss had on my life ... I had an AP art teacher who encouraged me to explore this loss through a series of artworks," she said.

"I remember reworking a pencil image of my father's face and how tears would flow each time I erased his features. That same teacher introduced me to the concept of art therapy."

Now, DeCamillis is the program director at Gilda's Club Twin Cities, an organization designed to help people with cancer—and family/friends they're associated with—cope and heal.

Known nationwide for its signature red door, Gilda's Club functions as a place where kids, teens and adults alike can find the support they need to get through the day. Programs don't just center on art therapy, but also incorporate yoga, other expressive arts and even nutrition programs to help keep patients healthy and engaged.

For Rafferty-Bugher, art is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to helping patients heal.



**Art therapy students display masks that express behaviors they want to model.**

"I'm completely open in my practice to work with people in any creative capacity," she said. "Typically, yes, I'll use the visual art mediums, but I have sandboxes in my studio, I have music in my studio, and we have yoga mats, too. Whatever it takes."

### OPEN EXPLORATION

It's a unique approach that isn't aligned with the scene we often see in movies or on TV: A psychologist facing a young patient while asking, "How do you feel?" A psychologist rarely faces a teen and gives them a piano or painting easel. Then again, Beethoven and Picasso may never have discovered music and art as creative outlets had they not been drawn to their healing qualities.

"In a traditional talk therapy session, you have two players—the client and the therapist. In art therapy, it is like there is a third party invited to the session, and often times that third party can be quite revealing," DeCamillis said.

"Different individuals need different forms of experiences to access their inner selves. The goal is the same—to help that person grow ... and find meaning of themselves and their life experiences."

So, how do teens—who are notorious for stubborn, tight-lipped behavior—respond to therapy from DeCamillis and Rafferty-Bugher?

DeCamillis believes that teens respond well to art and other creative outlets because they have the opportunity to "be with" emotions and experience. While working at a pediatric hospital in the bone marrow unit, DeCamillis found herself helping the "tough" patients, typically teens.

"Art allowed these teens the space to explore what they just didn't seem to have words for. We explored anger, sadness, rage, humility, shame, fear, hope, joy, and even death," she said. "Through the art, we were able to sit together in these really hard and often dark places and emotions, but the art somehow supported the intensity of these experiences."

Depression and anxiety are common trends Rafferty-Bugher sees among her adolescent patients. Some of the most severe cases she has worked on consist of teens that have histories of trauma—or their depression was so critical, they became suicidal.

"Some (cases were) not as severe, but still as important to take care of, and hopefully prevent some of those extreme cases," Rafferty-Bugher said. "Kids and adolescents have a hard time expressing their feelings verbally, (even) knowing how they're feeling, and then to ask them to talk

**ART THERAPY** *continued on page 13*

**ART THERAPY** from page 12 about their feelings with words is very challenging.”

### CREATIVE COMFORTS

For Clare Judge, an eighth grader at St. Therese Catholic School, singing, dancing and acting are the only ways she can relieve stress and anxiety.

“I feel like when you write stuff down on a piece of paper, people don’t really get to feel your emotions,” Judge said. “I’ve never been good at writing, so doing all the stuff that I do, like dancing and singing and theatre ... (it’s) really the only way.”

Added Rafferty-Bugher: “That’s the beauty of art and music and all those creative forms of expression. It’s a safe way to put those feelings on a paper, using markers or pens or crayons or clay and paint. And you can say this is how I feel. This is it.”

And don’t worry: Your skill in those mediums isn’t important. A common misconception about creative therapy is that an artistic background is necessary for it to work effectively.

“I think my most successful experiences have been with the kids that have actually stated, ‘I hate art. I’m a sports person,’” Rafferty-Bugher said. “The therapeutic relationship is first. And then it’s finding those gifts within each person that, ‘Yeah, you know what, maybe I am a little creative!.. Anyone can do it.’”

“I like to think that conducting an art therapy session is often like creating a piece of art. I create in response to what is shared in the session. It is much like sculpting—you build, you take away, you add a bit more,” DeCamillis added.

“Art and life are full of metaphors. So is the therapeutic process.”

# Don’t let a disability get you down

## Accepting a new challenge can lead to major mental breakthroughs

It was 3 a.m. Instead of sleeping, I sat awake on the couch trying to finish the homework I had been working on since 4 o’clock that afternoon.

It’s late, and of course, I was tired. It was hard to stay awake, but I continued to push through, determined to get the work done.

The next morning, I turned in the homework only to get low scores on everything.

“You’re not trying,” my teachers told me.

Up until that point, I had been getting by in school and managed to get good grades. However, as I advanced in school, the work only seemed to get harder and harder. Over time, the English assignments I used to breeze through took me all night to finish. As the readings became more difficult, I had trouble deciphering the complex concepts underlying the material. Eventually it got to the point where I couldn’t keep up any more.

I felt like a failure. All of my friends were doing well in school without having to put in much effort. Why couldn’t I be like them?

### HITTING BOTTOM

Frustrated and exhausted, I finally gave up, refusing to go to school. If all the work I put in seemed to amount to nothing, then why should I even try at all?

My parents noticed my sudden change in behavior—a total



**Simone Cazares**  
St. Paul Conservatory For Performing Artists

burnout—but could not understand why their once motivated student would not go to school. Unaware of all the time I was putting into my work, they also believed I should be trying harder. But they knew something else was wrong. They decided to get me evaluated for a learning disability.

The process of being diagnosed was long and hard. I spent the day with a neuropsychologist where I struggled to arrange blocks into nonsensical patterns, categorize pictures and attempt to memorize lists of words. In the end, I was diagnosed with a nonverbal learning disability, which causes difficulties with problem solving and reading comprehension in people who are, as it turns out, exceptional in verbal communication.

Finding out that I had a learning disability changed everything. It gave me an explanation for many of the things I struggled with all my life, but also pointed out a lot of my

strengths—many of which I didn’t know I had. Now that I was diagnosed, I could stop focusing on what I couldn’t do and use my newfound strengths to my advantage.

One of those strengths I’ve discovered is writing. Since being diagnosed, writing has become a passion of mine. For the past three years, I’ve been writing for *ThreeSixty Journalism*, where I get to use my strengths by working with concrete information and write using facts and information obtained through interviews. And as an introvert, writing also gives me the chance to think about what I want to say—in my own time and without interruption. At *ThreeSixty*, I’ve recently been promoted to Senior Reporter, the highest rank in the program. In addition, I have even won awards for my work from the Minnesota Newspaper Association.

### ACCEPTING ADVERSITY

It just goes to show that people with learning disabilities can accomplish great things. I am merely one example.

Unfortunately though, many still assume that people with disabilities will never succeed. Some people make fun of students with disabilities in class and seldom give them a chance to showcase their strengths. But that shouldn’t be the case.

Having a learning disability doesn’t mean you’re incapable of doing something: It just means you may have to do it differently than others. It’s about learning how to focus on your strengths rather than battle your weaknesses.

That’s a lesson I’ve learned to keep in mind every day. For me, it means that I have to be aware of

my disability—and how I need to counter problems with my strengths. If I get stuck on an assignment I’m working on, it’s not because I can’t do it. I need to find a different way to look at it so the problem or question eventually makes sense to me.

I am a student who has faced adversity and I intend to continue to excel in life. My future goals are to go to college and become a journalist. However, the struggle continues as I apply for colleges and try to convince admissions counselors that I am more than my ACT score, a test that reflects my disability more than it shows my ability. That doesn’t mean I can’t succeed, though. With proper accommodations for my unique learning style at school—extra time and modified tests, namely—I’ve been more successful.

### ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF

Getting those accommodations wasn’t so easy, though. As a student with a learning disability, I’ve learned the importance of self-advocacy. It’s not easy, but in order to get the accommodations you’re entitled to, you have to speak up for yourself.

Sure, it still upsets me that my teachers simply assumed that I wasn’t trying, that they couldn’t spot the signs of a learning disability, or at least help me get the resources I needed to succeed. And I definitely think they could be trying harder to help students who are really struggling.

But there’s also a lot I could have done. I could have reached out to my teachers, told them I was struggling and that I needed help. Self-advocacy is a hard skill to learn, though. In fact, it’s something I’m still working on today. But I’m getting there.

And these days, instead of staying up all night to get my work done, I sleep soundly knowing that despite my disability I can do anything.

### think spot

Have you ever struggled to ask for help from an adult or peer? How did you recognize the warning signs, and what can be done to include other people without feeling embarrassed about your difficulty?

# Not just a teen problem

**The truth about eating disorders is that they can affect anyone—even guys**

Ten minutes of reading a fashion magazine is all that it takes for someone to feel worse about his or her own body.

With such a sobering statistic in mind, Keri Clifton isn't surprised that eating disorders in the United States are on the rise.

According to Clifton, community outreach coordinator for the Emily Program, more than 50 percent of Americans know someone suffering from an eating disorder. Yet



**Mina Yuan**  
Wayzata High School

misconceptions about these increasingly common diseases still exist.

Clifton has worked for the Emily Program, an eating disorder treatment program based in St. Paul, for five and a half years. Her job is to educate middle and high school

students about the truth surrounding eating disorders.

"One of the most important things we are trying to do is break down stereotypes surrounding eating disorders," Clifton said. "Often when you think of someone with an eating disorder, you're thinking of someone who is young, thin, white, female and in a well-off family."

It's an image that instantly springs to mind because "generally, girls are portrayed as more stressed," said Nick

Kessler, a sophomore at Wayzata High School.

"It's easier to imagine a girl having an eating disorder. Stress is present throughout life, but it is seen more in teens due to schoolwork, peer pressure, concern over appearance, social status, wealth, and much more," he said.

## CAUSE AND EFFECT

The truth is that due to their complexity, eating disorders impact

people of all different ages and genders, not only teenage girls.

Clifton said eating disorders follow the bio-psycho-social model—that is, biologically, some might have a "generic predisposition to develop one" or "if mom and dad struggled with an eating disorder, that might make you develop one."

On the other hand, Clifton said that eating disorders can also develop in perfectionists as a psychological defense mechanism when they feel isolated and alone, often alienating them further.

"I, personally, have never had an eating disorder, but I am friends with many that have, and I never know much about what they go through because they never open up to people about it," said Kenzie Mertz, a student at the University of Minnesota. "From what I see however, they are never happy."

Finally, societal causes of eating disorders manifest themselves in everyday American culture.



Illustration by Isabelle Loisel

## The joy of educating others

**By Mina Yuan**  
Wayzata High School

Joy Nollenberg, founder of the Joy Project in Minneapolis, can vouch for the lack of awareness surrounding eating disorders. In February 2006, Nollenberg founded the non-profit program following her own struggles with anorexia.

A star student in school, as well as a ballet dancer, cheerleader and figure skater, Nollenberg outwardly seemed successful and satisfied with her teenage life. Yet behind her cheerful image was a teenage girl with a mother Nollenberg referred to as "the personification of Dr. Jekyll (and) Mr. Hyde."

"Personally, I think the single biggest factor in the development of my eating disorder was how my mother's extremely erratic behavior influenced my sense of

self," Nollenberg said. "I didn't know this as a child, but as an adult I've come to realize that her behavior (was) typical of people with Borderline Personality Disorder."

Nollenberg's mother rapidly fluctuated between the "good mom" who loved and bonded with her daughter, and the "bad mom" who hit and ridiculed Nollenberg when she was not behaving "properly." Nollenberg learned to fret over every flaw, physical or otherwise, hoping to keep her mother happy.

"I learned that acceptance is fleeting," Nollenberg said. "Acceptance only resulted in you letting your guard down and showing your vulnerabilities, which would only be used against you later when the other person was upset with you. So yes, I absolutely learned that survival required elimination of every potential visible flaw. And, by God, if

the size of my thighs was a visible flaw that had been pointed out, I was going to eliminate it."

Nollenberg's anorexia developed to the point that she was only consuming between 100 and 400 calories per day, until the doctors on her college cheer team informed her that she would die if she did not receive treatment.

"I literally had no choice," she said. "I just couldn't survive and be eating-disordered anymore."

Unfortunately for Nollenberg, her insurance company did not cover treatment for eating disorders. No matter where she went, no one would offer her help. Kicked out by her roommates and no longer attending work or classes, Nollenberg decided to take things into her own hands.

"I guess I felt like, at that point in my life,



**Joy Nollenberg**

everyone had abandoned me. I was alone," Nollenberg said.

"And then, the 'me' in me got good and pissed. I mean really, really, really pissed. I thought of all the other people in the world who just went about their daily lives

“In our culture, there’s that stereotypical female, there’s that stereotypical chiseled six-pack male, and those images make an impact on us,” Clifton said. “We consume (those images) all day and every day.”

Mertz has also noticed how ideal bodies vary across different cultures, making it even more difficult for people to feel comfortable in their own skin.

“I went to Nicaragua for six weeks a few years ago, and the people there thought I looked too thin and sickly,” she said. “My body type is average or semi-curved, so I believe I would be considered a plus size in society, in the U.S., because I’m definitely bigger than a size four... But people (in Nicaragua) thought I wasn’t big enough.”

#### **GENDER STEREOTYPES**

Perception of the perfect body differs in varying countries, but gender is just as important as cultural factors.

“Boys are portrayed (by the media) as playing sports and being athletic,

which is difficult to do if you are too thin or too heavy,” Kessler said. “I sometimes feel too thin, no matter how much I try to eat. Though I’ve gotten over this, I have tried in the past to eat more to appear more ‘normal.’”

According to the Emily Program, about 10 percent of people diagnosed with eating disorders are male, and the number is probably higher since males often do not seek treatment. Those are the stigmas Clifton works hard at breaking down.

“As a male, it seems more unusual ... to have an eating disorder,” Kessler said. “If I had an eating disorder, I would have trouble discussing it with someone because feeling insecure is always somewhat of a touchy subject.” As for the thin part of the “young, thin, white, female” stereotype, Clifton said that not all people suffering from eating disorders are “extremely” thin.

A common misconception is that anorexia, an eating disorder in which people severely restrict the amount

and variety of their food intake, is the most common eating disorder. Yet while anorexia has the highest mortality rate, it is actually the least common eating disorder in the United States, according to the Emily Program.

“Anorexia is the most visible eating disorder when someone is quite chronic and thin, so it’s an easy image to latch onto in terms of the devastating impact it could have on someone’s body,” Clifton said.

“I think we’re looking for a quick visual—‘Oh, that’s what that looks like’—when in reality, there just isn’t one.”

The most common eating disorder is binge-eating disorder, in which a person loses control over their diet and often becomes obese as a result, showing that victims of eating disorders are not always emaciated, Clifton said.

“You can’t always tell when a person has an eating disorder just by looking at them. That stereotype makes (people) less likely to access

care when they need it, because they think, ‘Oh, I’m not that. I’m not that sick, so I should be fine,’” she said

#### **THINSPIRATION BACKLASH**

Yet the spread of eating disorders is not only perpetuated by the public’s misconceptions, but also the culture of the 21st century.

Thinspiration blogs, which combine the words “thin” and “inspiration,” often post pictures of slim people that bloggers emulate, sometimes for healthy weight loss, and sometimes not. Some thinspiration bloggers state that they are pro-ana or pro-mia—code names for anorexia and bulimia. Commonly found on pro-ana and pro-mia blogs are images of frighteningly thin “role models” and reminders to control food intake.

Joy Nollenberg, founder of the Joy Project, a nonprofit eating disorder awareness organization, acknowledged that thinspiration is generally negative, but added that “thinspo”

blogs are popular because they are seen as a form of community.

“It has been my experience at the Joy Project that people who gravitate towards (thinspiration) forums as a means for connection are often people who are alone and scared,” Nollenberg said.

“They feel misunderstood by people around them who don’t have eating disorders. The Internet provides a means of connection for them to reach out to people who understand what it’s like to have an eating disorder.”

With all the images, all the misconceptions, all the stereotypes—it’s why education about early identification and fostering a healthy, supportive environment remains essential, Nollenberg said.

“Most loved ones want to jump in and ‘fix’ the person, or they want to take control of the eating disordered person’s food intake. These are well-intentioned ideas, but they’re not particularly useful,” she said.



without a care in the world, doing whatever the hell they wanted like it was no big deal. And I thought, ‘Well, nobody ever bothered to ask me if they were ‘allowed’ to exist. Nobody ever asked me if they were allowed to make mistakes, to take up space, to step on my toes, or to just be. And then I figured, well, if they don’t need permission, then neither do I.’”

Nollenberg found a job at a day care center and started to increase her caloric intake. She moved into her own apartment in downtown Minneapolis. Yet her struggles with anorexia were long from over.

“The best analogy here would be to the process of drug or alcohol addiction,” she said. “The first step is to go through physical withdrawals from the drug—that’s similar to restoring regular eating behaviors (or

restoring weight. But it is only after a person has endured the withdrawal process that they can truly start to do the hard work of recovery. After detox from drugs, a person might then begin an intensive rehab program where their mental health is the focus. But that’s when an eating-disordered person is often dropped to a lower level of care. That’s also where they are most likely to relapse.”

In Nollenberg’s case, relapses of her restrictive behavior alternated with vicious cycles of binge eating and guilt as she convinced herself that she needed to eat more in order to recover. Some days, she would eat peanut butter by the jar, and others she would furiously exercise to compensate for her binges.

“My moods were insane. The mood swings made me feel like I was losing my mind,” Nollenberg said. “Sometimes when I started eating, I’d get ... high. Like literally, ecstatically high. But after eating, I’d flip to the other end of the spectrum. One particular night, I

remember feeling such tremendous anxiety that I found myself turning all my lights off, huddling in a corner with my arms around my knees, rocking myself in an attempt to comfort myself.”

Desperate to end the cycles, Nollenberg joined a research study on binge eating in which she was given a self-help book, which helped her to regularize meal times and sizes. As her body learned how to readjust to larger amounts of food, Nollenberg found herself feeling ravenous and gaining weight rapidly.

With the aid of months of recovery and the support of her boyfriend, Nollenberg learned to enjoy all aspects of life, including food. Her weight gain slowed and gradually reversed as her metabolism recovered.

However, while recovery had worked out well for Nollenberg, she knew that this was not the case for many other people with eating disorders whose insurance companies did not cover treatment. In response, she founded the Joy Project.

“The goal of the Joy Project is to fill in the gaps caused by inadequate access to eating disorder treatment, and create a dialogue between researchers, treatment professionals and those affected by eating disorders in order to foster a better understanding of how to help people not only recover, but remain recovered,” she said.

Through the Joy Project, Nollenberg set up weekly support groups, shared her history with anorexia and binge-eating disorder in a compilation of stories about recovery called “You Are Not Alone, Volume 2,” and talked to members of Congress to increase eating disorder and mental health awareness, especially regarding misconceptions about victims.

“Until recently, the field has viewed eating disordered individuals as being ‘crazy’ or (as having) ‘flawed brains,’” Nollenberg said. “My hope is that the conversation about eating disorders will change and expand to cover the full spectrum of eating disorders.”

# Raising flags, saving lives

## Factors that contribute to teen suicide are often complex, connection-based

*"Honestly, when we found out the news, it was a complete shock."*

Blaine High School student Hayley Pierce-Ramsdell fell into despair when her close high school friend, someone she considered a "family relative," committed suicide in early 2013.

"It was legitimately heart-breaking, and that's something I do not say very lightly," Pierce-Ramsdell said.

Nobody who knew Pierce-Ramsdell's friend at Blaine expected he would be one to end his life. There were no warning signs, no obvious reasons to his closest peers.

"He was always the happiest person in the room," she said. "He would be the kind of person (who) would light up the entire room for you."

But that did not stop the 17-year-old from becoming one of the thousands of American teens to commit suicide every year. Despite suicide and bullying prevention efforts aimed at raising awareness, Minnesota high school students are still committing suicide. But fellow teens never hear the reasons why.

"There is never one thing that leads somebody to suicide," said Melissa Heinen, suicide prevention coordinator with the Minnesota Department of Health. "People talk a lot about bullying as a contributing factor ... It is more complex than that."



**Lujain Al-Khawi**  
Blaine High School

### TOUGH TEEN YEARS

Heinen said there are two kinds of factors that affect a child's development: Risk and protective factors. While risk factors—being a victim of physical or sexual abuse, coming from a broken family and the use of drugs and alcohol—may contribute to a child's sense of unhappiness, protective factors help children lead happy, meaningful lives.

"Protective factors for youth are feeling connected, having a support system, feeling liked at school. There is something about social connectedness," Heinen said.

The American Academy of Child Psychiatry released a study showing that children who feel a sense of belonging are less likely to commit suicide than those who do not. According to the organization, "for some teenagers, divorce, the formation of a new family with step-parents and step-siblings, or moving to a new community can be very unsettling and can intensify self-doubts ... suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems and stress."

"A disconnect that a teen may feel from any group they feel a sense of belonging to certainly can lead to thoughts of suicide. We all have

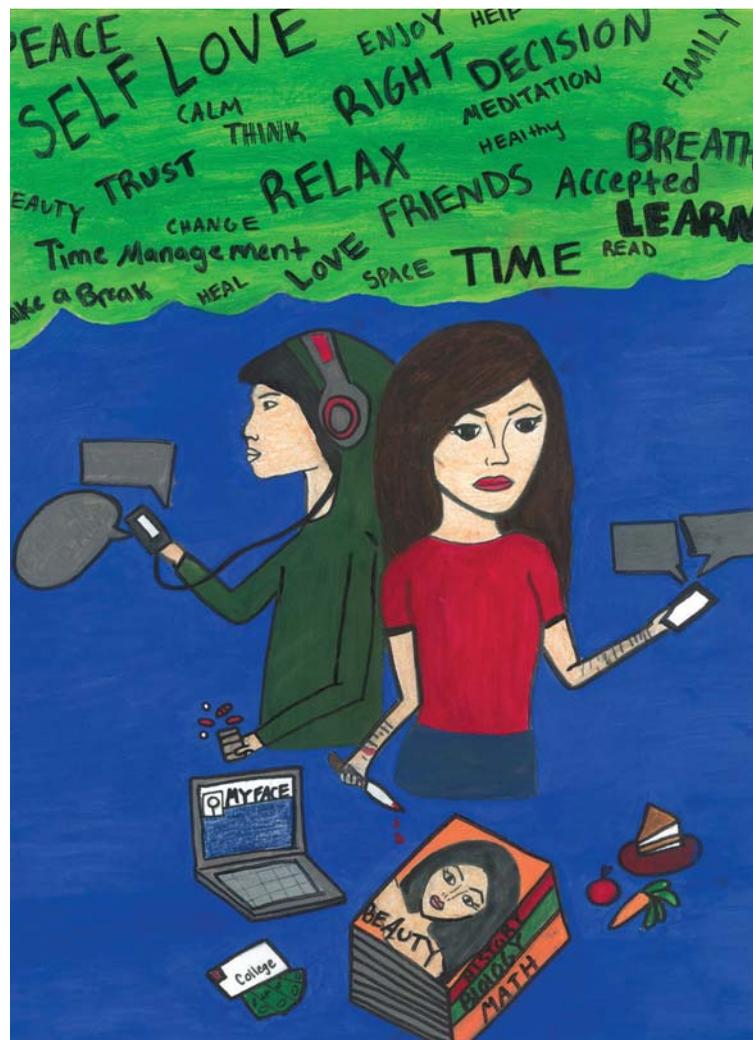


Illustration by Isabelle Loisel

a sense of belonging, whether that is to our family, school, community, religion, sports team, etc.," said Carrie Burk, an Anoka County social worker. "And if a teen's sense of belonging is hindered by a problem within their identified 'group,' that is

where, intrinsically, teens start to think 'something is wrong with me.'"

"One in ten high school students will think about suicide sometime during their four-year career," Heinen said. So during the teen years, more than ever, they need

*"There is never one thing that leads somebody to suicide."*

friends, family members and a community to support them physically, emotionally and spiritually.

"Many kids are bullied and do not commit suicide. It may be a piece of it, but not the whole explanation. There are other pieces beneath the layers ... Bullying is often just the straw that broke the camel's back," Heinen said.

### ACTIVE BYSTANDERS

But if it really is just about bullying, there are organizations in the Twin Cities that advocate specifically for bullying and harassment prevention at schools. Outside of her work as a social worker, Burk assists Green Dot, an organization that provides training to schools like Blaine High School—Burk's alma mater. Prevention is aimed at teaching communities how to be active bystanders, she said.

After Burk's 12-year-old brother committed suicide following several bullying incidents on a school bus, **AWARENESS** continued on page 20

### Warning signs

Everyone plays a role in suicide prevention—which is why the Minnesota Department of Health encourages everyone to know the warning signs of suicide.

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated or recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

If you are concerned that someone is at risk for suicide:

- Ask them if they are thinking about killing themselves (this will not put the idea in their head or make it more likely that they will attempt suicide)
- Stay with the person (do not leave them alone)
- Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Take the person to an emergency room or seek help from a medical or mental health professional

For more information and other helpful resources, visit <http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/suicide/>.

# Into the darkness

## The soul-crushing sadness of depression is impossible to escape alone

Living with depression is similar to taking a walk through an empty and abandoned forest during winter.

The trees stand lonely, naked without their green and bountiful leaves. Everything about the empty forest screams desperation and heavy sadness. The trees sag as if their very limbs have given up on existing any longer.

Winter has swallowed up all signs of life.

This is a pretty accurate description of how I felt during my depression episodes. It is not unlike coming across a burned-out building, ashes scattered everywhere.

I was no longer in control of my own body. It was as if someone had taken the fun, bubbly Hafsa and sucked out all the things I liked about my personality. In its place was a saddened shell.

I had all the classic symptoms, but I still wasn't aware of my condition. The first time I experienced depression was in early 2010 when I was around 13. It was my eighth grade year, and I remember having many sleepless nights—and generally feeling overwhelmed by the smallest things.

Simple tasks like getting out of bed every morning were extremely hard. I had trouble sleeping at night; my face saddled with dark, heavy bags under my eyes. These periods lasted for two weeks to six months at times. And every time, it felt like the soul-crushing sadness would never end.



**Hafsa Guled**  
Minnesota  
Community  
and Technical  
College

### ALWAYS PRETENDING

Functioning while depressed is almost impossible. Things I loved, like writing or listening to music, just reminded me of times when I was happy and made my depression worse.

I also found it difficult to interact and socialize. When you're depressed, you have difficulty communicating with those you love about your feelings and conditions. All the ambition and excitement you ever had about your future is drained out of your body.

Pretending to be happy every day also makes you feel fake. You constantly wonder if people can see through it. Eventually, your face aches with the strain of that plastic smile on your face anytime someone asks how you're doing. Giving them the true and real answer would just scare them away.

Personally, I developed a bad habit of lying to my friends and family when they asked how I was. I blame the way I was raised about mental health. I was influenced by the adults in my life and how they viewed depression.

Whenever we heard about someone we knew who "lost it," everyone's reaction was inclined toward disgust. I always got the feeling that they



Photo illustration by Rida Yacob

believed that most mental illnesses could easily be controlled.

It wasn't cultural either, but stereotypical among the masses. Classmates at school or co-workers also thought it was a choice whether someone wanted to have a panic attack in public.

It's why I felt more comfortable hiding my sickness. And that, of course, led to negative effects for my health and overall well-being.

### NO LONGER IN CONTROL

Dealing with depression alone is a long journey. But what makes it that much worse is being a teenager who is trying to juggle school, work and a social life while hiding your sickness.

The peak of my depression came during sophomore year in high school as I began taking college classes. I was about 16 and my normal school related nerves were slowly amplified.

Depression can come at any time—and, ultimately, that's what is hardest to explain to those who have never experienced it. Even when you have a million reasons to be happy, the self-loathing creeps up on you.

So here I was, excited to start college classes when I found myself reacting to inconsequential things like my bus coming late or saying something awkward. I would begin shaking and freaking out if a professor gave me anything less than a B on an assignment. Seeing the red

*"Pretending to be happy every day also makes you feel fake. You constantly wonder if people can see through it."*

corrections on a paper would send me on a downward spiral.

My depression was gradual, but it did not seem to be triggered by something specific. It was genuinely confusing to not know the source of my sadness.

I speak from the deepest, saddest part of my heart when I say that no one should ever have to deal with depression alone. Depression heightens feelings of loneliness, and I often felt like I had no one in my corner. I always wanted people to wake up and truly see what I was going through. But sadly, most people are not mind readers.

I hope and pray that as time passes, fewer stigmas against mental illness exist. I have recently begun therapy and taking medication for my illness. It has helped a tremendous amount.

But the biggest takeaway is that visits to the clinic and pills haven't been the most successful part of helping me get better. It has been the positive mindset I now have, and the

support I've received from my family members.

I have learned to communicate more effectively with others. My doctors told me to inform others about when my sickness flares up so they can help.

Best of all, most of my family members and friends have treated me the same—with much needed empathy and help. I was so afraid of being judged, yet the complete opposite has happened. Honestly, it has been so amazing.

### DEPRESSION SURVIVOR

That said, taking care of my body is an ongoing process.

It's true what they say about the human body being a temple—and the physical and mental being of your body should always be in sync. If a mechanic tells you that the brakes in your car are not working properly, you do not hesitate to get that fixed. The same should hold true for your brain whether you suffer from depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder.

Having depression is also normal. I know that now. Many people struggle with it. Robin Williams was one of the most beloved comedians of our time, yet was struggling with personal demons his whole life.

I am living proof that you can overcome your sickness with the right tools. But it is important to know that you cannot do it alone. You should not feel ashamed to ask for help.

If not for my depression, I would be devoid of the passion that is present in my writing. I also would not have the same drive and motivation to overcome what I know can drag me down.

Most importantly, I no longer hold stigmas against people who have mental issues. I am proud to say I am a depression survivor. And I plan on keeping it that way for the rest of my life.



# No laughing matter

## “Harmless” jokes about mental illness and depression cut deep for many

*Editor’s note: ThreeSixty Journalism has changed the names of teen sources in this story for privacy reasons.*

Nobody likes being the butt of a joke or have a snide comment made about them, but teens with mental illness so often are without the perpetrator even knowing.

Daniel, a sophomore from Minneapolis, has been diagnosed with a form of autism called Asperger Syndrome. Throughout Daniel’s life, he has endured jeers from fellow teens. With each insult, his self-esteem and courage has been slowly chipped away.

Now when someone tells him to “shut up” in class or the captains in physical education argue over which one ends up with him on a team, he stays silent. When he does work up the courage to say something, all he gets is more mockery.

“They usually don’t understand what I’m saying. They just laugh,” Daniel said.

It usually takes another student to stop the onslaught, otherwise it continues for the whole period.

“If one person is being picked on and nobody stands up, then they keep on being picked on. They just keep picking on them. If you aren’t getting backlash and just laughs, why would you stop?” Daniel said.

Laura Weber, manager of Crisis Connection, a nonprofit agency in Richfield that provides 24/7 telephone support and text messaging for Minnesota residents, believes



that teenagers don’t fully grasp what marks they leave on their victims. It’s why the Crisis service provides teens with an option to connect with an adult in a way that they’re comfortable and used to.

“When teens bully, ostracize and directly threaten peers who are already feeling that they have no voice, power or help, it can lead to (a) feeling that they have no hope and no options to change their life,” Weber said.

Kiara, a sophomore from St. Paul, is diagnosed with bipolar disorder (type two) and struggles with depression.

The most common misconception about bipolar disorder is that you’ll be perfectly fine one second, and in an instant, you’ll slip into madness. Kiara doesn’t tell anyone except her close friends because she doesn’t want to be labeled as someone who has no control over her emotions.

“I don’t usually tell people I’m bipolar because ... they just assume you’re crazy and you can’t control your emotions,” Kiara said.

She also believes that other students at her St. Paul school pretend that they have depression to get out of class. When Kiara needs to take a break, her teachers don’t believe her due to the sheer number of

students that use mental illness as an excuse. Kiara’s struggles are negated.

“It just really invalidates me. It’s really invalidating when people say, ‘I’m so depressed. I can’t do class. I just need to take a break,’” to teachers. Then when I actually need that, or when I need to be able to leave and go talk to a counselor or whatever because of what’s going on, teachers don’t trust that (my) experience is real. They just think I’m being dramatic or playing it up it as something bigger than it is,” she said.

Teenagers don’t have enough familiarity to know how to handle people that are different than them, Kiara said. She feels that if her peers were more empathetic, students like her—who aren’t forthcoming about their personal problems or can’t control their behavior in public—wouldn’t feel so trapped.

“Just try to understand where people are coming from. They’re not necessarily going to say it straight to you, like, ‘I have anxiety or I have depression.’ But just try to care for your classmates. If it seems like something’s off, tune into that, trust your gut, and try to be there,” Kiara said.

Weber advises that teens tap into their perceptive powers, because oftentimes, they’re much better at spotting those “on the edge” than adults. However, they don’t have the capacity to know how to help.

“The biggest misconception is that they can’t do anything to help a peer themselves. That’s not true. Teens can offer to talk with a peer about their depression, try to just listen, and offer to stay with them until they feel safe. They can offer to talk with a parent or school counselor with the peer so they’re not alone. They can give peer counseling information and suggest they get help,” Weber said.



# Keeping kids close

## Clinical resources in school give students free, convenient access

Kristie Anderson will be the first to admit that students probably think of it as “the sex clinic.” But as nurse practitioner at Minneapolis Washburn Clinic—one of several school based clinics offered at all Minneapolis public high schools—she also knows that a teen’s embarrassment quickly turns to relief once they experience the on-site benefits.

“Once they get in, they see it’s a lot more than (what they thought),” Anderson said. “It’s a nice space, so I think people get kind of comfortable in here.”

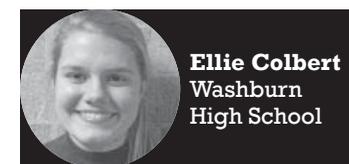
Indeed, when the clinic first started out, it was built to provide pregnancy prevention and safer sex education, Anderson said. It has now grown to be one of the most comprehensive school-based clinics in the country.

In addition to reproductive resources, the Washburn clinic offers sports physicals, acute and chronic care, immunization, nutrition, mental health counseling and health education outreach.

But that’s not enough for Anderson.

“In my perfect world, we’d have (dental care) and we’d have vision and service for kids with visual needs,” she said.

For now, it does plenty. Jennie Markworth, a full-time psychologist at the clinic, treats students most commonly for “stress and anxiety, relationship issues, depression, ADHD and trying to stay on top of school stuff.” After



reproductive health, the most widely used resources at the clinic are for mental health—yet it’s not something most students are aware of, said Washburn student Emma Stotts.

“We’re really lucky, as students of Minneapolis public schools, to be able to have access to therapy and other mental health resources for free,” said Stotts, who has used the mental health resources on site. “I think that the therapists there are really great. I think having therapy is really important for a lot of kids, but it’s hard to get to. And if you do find it, it’s really expensive.”

Yet there’s a “huge difference” between mental health and mental illness, Anderson said, which is a potential reason for some of the roadblocks teens face in seeking help. Coming to the clinic for mental health reasons can include school stress, dealing with unhealthy relationships, bullying, eating disorders, family issues or depression and anxiety.

“There are those where it is a **RESOURCES** continued on page 19

**RESOURCES** from page 18

mental illness situation, way bigger than a high school can provide for. What I mean by that is that some students need real intensive services that a licensed psychologist seeing patients on an hourly basis just can't provide," Anderson said.

For Anderson, the most beneficial part of the clinic is access for the students. "Kids can come in during school. Parents don't need to take off work," she said.

Added Markworth: "I think that being able to have a private space in school is huge. You don't get pulled out of school. You're not gone for a few hours, and for kids whose home life is stressful, their parents don't have to be part of it."

Resources are also free for students. The clinics are funded by the Minnesota Health Department, with extra grant funding helping to support the hiring of clinical staff.

Chloe Engel, a senior at Southwest High School, appreciates that the clinic at her school is safe and confidential. Access to clinics in school gives students a sense of independence and maturity that allows them to easily connect with and open up to the experienced staff, she said.

"I've gotten pretty close with our nurse," Engel said. "She always asks how I'm doing and feeling."

"I think what the students don't realize, but come to appreciate, is that the people in this clinic are dedicated to adolescent health care and are experts in that care, and that we really understand teen issues," Anderson added.

For Greta White, a senior at Washburn, that's all a teenager needs sometimes.

"It's nice that they offer that in school, like if you wanted to talk to someone if you're stressed," she said. "I think (my parents) would love it. I'm sure they don't know anything about it, but I think they'd like it."

# Too much left unsaid

## Shrouded in mystery, the death of a close friend leaves a lasting void

It was a day I won't ever forget. The day I met a girl so polite and friendly, so full of life, I knew that we would be friends forever.

But if only I knew that happiness would turn to sadness one day, I would not have become that close to her.

It was in tenth grade in my native country, Togo, that I met her. Aicha was black with short hair. She was beautiful, wearing a red dress, and walked toward me as though she was the coolest girl ever. I couldn't stop staring at her. She was perfect to me.

Our conversations were silly and crazy. I couldn't stop laughing around her. We'd talk about style, and she would never be shy to share her opinion. One of our rituals was going to the mountains three days a week. We used to do talent shows and other crazy stuff like wearing different pairs of shoes together. Once, when she found out I did something bad at home, she took my lunch money as punishment. We had our disagreements, but we always found a way to be cool about it afterwards.

We spent so much time together, that our friendship felt more special. We were like sisters. She became part of me.

### SIGNS OF TROUBLE

It took awhile, but she eventually opened up about her father, who was ill and passed away. She also



**Badekemi Biladjetan**  
Lincoln International School

felt bad about never meeting her mother. I was glad she opened up, but everything changed about our relationship after she shared those personal details.

I never knew how recent her father had died because she would start to cry whenever I mentioned it, so I didn't pursue it further. She also started acting weird around me. There would be moments when Aicha was harsh and distant, almost like she was trying to tell me something, but wanted to protect me from what I didn't know instead.

About two years ago, my phone rang in the middle of the night. It was Aicha. I was surprised to hear her calling so late. Maybe she was bored? She started telling me how great our relationship was. It seemed odd, so I asked her if something was wrong. She laughed and said, "Nothing's wrong. I missed you."

I trusted her, so I didn't push, but after she hung up, I felt a wave of apprehension. I thought something bad had happened, maybe related to her father or mother, but she was too scared to tell me. I just know that we had never hidden things from each other.

The next day at school, she was



Illustration by Daniela Garcia

absent. I decided to visit her at home, where I found her on the floor in her bedroom. I thought she was sick, but she just shrugged it off as being tardy in the morning. She didn't feel like going to school.

We spent the rest of the day together, talking about our futures and how she wanted to have a great family and work in a hospital. She also wanted to meet her mother who lived in Europe.

That's when she said, "I don't know how much longer I would be here with you." When I asked her if something was wrong, she replied, "No, I could travel somewhere far," with a laugh.

Even as she was laughing I was not convinced it was the truth.

### 'A BAD DREAM'

A week later, everything got weird again. Aicha didn't want to see me, answer my messages or take my calls. For two weeks, I tried to get in touch with her. But even when I went to her house and knew she was home, Aicha wouldn't come to see me.

Finally, I decided to visit her after school again. As I got closer to the house, I started to hear people crying. I ran into the house—filled with so many different people I had never met, crying—and into the bedroom. She was laid out on the bed wearing a white dress with white socks and white gloves.

My heart started beating so fast, like I was having a heart attack. I leaned into her and said tearfully, "Hey, I am here to hang out with you. I want to laugh like before."

She was not moving in her bed.

I couldn't process what was happening. We were best friends! Why did this happen? I started laughing and sobbing at the same time while shaking her to wake up. I kept thinking, "We have lots of things to do!"

There was no reaction from me when four men brusquely put her in the coffin. I felt numb. This was a bad dream. That's when I found a picture of us under her pillow with the words, "Friend forever, always has been and always will be. I am going to miss you."

She was going somewhere far.

### COPING WITH LOSS

I still don't know how Aicha died. Before her death, I had heard rumors that she might have AIDS, but I don't believe that. We were too honest with each other. There are so many versions of her death, I still don't know what to think. I believe that it wasn't natural, and that's the reason she avoided me. I think she wanted to protect me from what she knew was about to happen.

Not having those answers about her death makes me feel weak and guilty, like I was careless and didn't try hard enough to figure out what was wrong. I was too scared to hurt her feelings if I asked about rumors, or her father, or her mother. When I look back, I feel like she expected me to ask her those questions. But I never did.

Aicha is gone, leaving me alone in this sinful world forever. I grieve for her. I grieve that I can never be that happy again in friendship.

I try to be open with others and have a connection, but now I am careful about having another friend like her. I am too scared to lose again.

# Comparison overload

## Social media can connect us, but it also has a deeper psychological effect

With nearly every high school student owning a smartphone or accessing various social media accounts, the need for popularity and followers can be overwhelming. As a result, favorites, retweets, likes and reblogs have become sources of happiness and self-esteem for teens.

There's another side to consider, too. Can social media accounts and online profiles have emotional and psychological effects that strike teens deeper than they may think?

"When I was in middle school, I made my first Twitter, but I always felt really weird about what I was going to post and what people would think about me or the post," said Kylie Johnson, a senior at Wayzata High School.

"So I almost never posted anything and ended up making and deleting like, three different accounts, because I was just super self-conscious about what people thought of it."

Johnson admitted that feelings of inferiority and loneliness can come from merely looking at another



**Kayla Song**  
Maple Grove High School

person's account and seeing that they have twice as many followers or hundreds more friends. It's also common for teens to see photos or status updates of others and feel left out of activities, accomplishments or relationships.

Shayla Thiel-Stern, a journalism professor at the University of Minnesota and author of "From the Dance Hall to Facebook," began studying digital media from 2000 to 2004 when there was an outbreak of instant messaging among adolescent girls. While conducting research for her book, she came across a concept called the Social Comparison Theory.

Though the theory was first revealed in 1954 by social psychologist Leon Festinger, the idea behind it is still prevalent today. Festinger concluded that when given the opportunity, humans will evaluate



Katie Braman

Scrolling through social media: Navodhya Samarakoon (top) views her Facebook account while Christine Lam looks at Snapchat.

their own self worth by comparing themselves to others.

Social media, more than ever, allows for comparison overload.

"Instagram and Pinterest and Facebook really kind of provoke (the theory), even more so than just regularly, because you get to see so many different people across the globe who you can compare yourself to," Thiel-Stern said.

### PRESENTING OUR BEST

Is it a phenomenon contributing to teen self-esteem? Thiel-Stern said that Instagram and Facebook often give skewed, selective perspectives of what is actually happening in users' lives. After all, it's common for people to only present their "best self" online.

"They're not going to show people the scars and the warts and the cakes that you bake that don't turn out," Thiel-Stern said.

Because there are profiles in the digital world that are too perfect to be true, there is high potential for teens to be discouraged and stressed about being just as flawless. This goes for both teenage girls and boys,

though Johnson believes that girls tend to be affected more by what they see.

(Boys) "obviously get upset over the same things that we do, but I always feel like with the way society is set up, it's portrayed that girls have more issues with it or get affected by it more," she said.

Sairam Venkat, a senior at Maple Grove Senior High, agreed. However, he believes it's because males are more conditioned to hide how social media affects them.

"Guys are pretty good at masking their feelings to not let other people know how they feel. Because guys are portrayed as macho figures in society, why would they want to let people know how they feel (about social media)?" he said.

Venkat's perspective fits the common line of thinking. After all, it was once believed that the extent of social media's effect on males and females were extremely different. However, the influence of social media sites on both genders is starting to balance out, Thiel-Stern said.

"Guys are starting to compare themselves physically to others and

that's starting to hurt their self-esteem, as well ... unrealistic body types, unrealistic portrayals of masculinity and femininity, that's all out there," she said.

### JUST LIKE EVERYONE

But it appears to be a small price to pay. Not only does the need to be up-to-date on the latest happenings keep teens online, but so does the need to be "cool and popular."

Venkat said he believes that teens model their lives after the people they see online, and quitting their accounts would leave them unable to follow the lives of the socially acceptable users everyone likes.

"I think it is mostly due to the fact they so badly want to fit in," he said.

And not all of that is necessarily negative, added Laura Michael, a senior at St. Paul Central.

"I think while (social media) creates self-esteem problems, it also gives teens validation and can build their self-esteem when a lot of people like their posts and also because all of their friends do it," she said.

As research on social media and self-esteem continues to develop, one absolute remains. No matter what, high school students can't seem to quit their online lives, Thiel-Stern said.

"I think the main thing that draws people in is that it's where everybody is at. You know, you want to be where your friends are," Thiel-Stern said. "If you're not on it, you might be missing out on something. If you opt out, you might miss out."

### AWARENESS from page 16

Burk vowed to fight for victims who couldn't speak for themselves.

"I am a believer in 'it takes one person to change a life' ... No family should ever have a story like this. It's a complete nightmare that you cannot wake up from," Burk said.

So what are the warning signs that can allow teens to be active bystanders?

"If you notice a change in behavior in a friend, isolation, change in appearance ... losing interest in things they used to care about ... please tell an adult," Burk said.

And if somebody tells you he or she is depressed or is considering suicide, Heinen advises to "take it seriously." At the same time, teenagers should not get carried away with their help.

"You are not the solution to someone else's problems. You are

just helping that person find the solution, which is the professional," Heinen said.

"Your job is not to become their counselor. Just be their friend."

As a teenager who continues to deal with grief, Pierce-Ramsdell's advice for her peers is simple.

"We need to work together rather than continuously compete against each other," she said, referring to the potential for high school drama to create enemies instead of friends.

"It makes it harder to get through (life) without having other people on your side."

# Simmering acceptance

## Embarrassment over cultural cuisine isn't always easy to swallow

In any gathering of Asian people, there will always be food.

This past summer, I was selected to play Fredericka from Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night Music" with Mu Performing Arts, a nationally recognized Asian theatre company in the Twin Cities.

At Mu, the diverse culture of each actor is portrayed through the sharing of cultural foods. The first time



**Danielle Wong**  
Eastview High School

I shared food, I brought something I knew everyone would enjoy: Egg rolls.

Soon enough, I was asking my mom to prepare another dish to

share. But when I looked at the food steaming in the pot, I was dismayed.

My mom had cooked Indonesian curry with yellow turmeric rice.

This is one of my favorite dishes, but for anyone unaccustomed to Indonesian culture, they would be shocked by the neon-yellow rice and the curry that looked as if a cow had regurgitated it.

For the longest time, I've had a fear of people judging the food I eat.

Ever since I began school, I brought lunch from home. My meals usually consisted of the standard white rice with stir fry vegetables, fried noodles or fried rice—and that was my problem.

They are stereotypical Chinese meals, and that bothered me. I had seen plenty cartoons of short, black-haired people with lines for eyes and chopsticks in their hair, slurping up noodles and saying something in stunted English.

I was embarrassed by how my race was portrayed, and I didn't want to fit the stereotype. It didn't help that I was publicly humiliated for eating my "chinky" food up until middle school.

One memory from elementary school stands out. For the first day of third grade, my mom had packed a simple meal of fried rice, but added a bit too much fish sauce—not that it mattered to my seven year-old self.

When I opened the top of my lunch thermos, I smelled a tasty blend that reminded me of home. But the other kids who were unaccustomed to the smell of pure Chinese food and some extra fish sauce recoiled.

I remember my own best friend, who used to pay little attention to the food I ate ever since we became friends in first grade, turn to me with an incredulous-almost-accusatory look. "What *is* that?"

I didn't notice the underlying disgust in her voice, but I did notice the slight shift of her lunch tray.

Away from me.

My need to reject being Chinese reached its peak in middle school. I used to swap meals with another student for her school lunch so I wouldn't be seen eating "chinky" food. Not only did I lose part of myself by rejecting who I was, but I also suffered through cold turkey sandwiches, goopy pasta and pizza dripping with grease while someone else enjoyed my mom's still-warm and savory cooking.

As I entered high school, I simply stopped caring what people thought about the food I ate. I still encountered situations where I was called out for eating "very Asian food," but it never bothered me as much as it did in my middle school years.

But to my horror, as I sat in the **CUISINE** continued on page 22

# Holding onto your heritage

## Somali traditions keep family roots intact while chasing the American dream

My mother came to America for one reason and one reason only. The "American Dream."

What she didn't know was the land we held onto might be sacrificed for that dream.

She came from Somalia, which was going through a civil war at the time. My mom fled to Europe in 1992 while pregnant with my eldest brother. Soon after, my two older siblings, Zamzam and Abdinaim, and



**Sagal Abdirahman**  
St. Louis Park High School

I were born in Bonn, Germany.

She wanted us to have the best life, filled with opportunities she never had. The only place to do that was America.

Coming here when I was only

three, my family and I soon realized that we needed to learn English in order to succeed. After going to school for a few years, my mother started to be filled with fear. Fear because when her kids came home from school every day, we knew a little more English and a little less Somali. Fear because it was harder for us to hold onto our culture while getting used to another.

My siblings and I came to slowly notice her fear. We saw it, too.

We didn't want to lose our culture, language and the amazing history behind our names. We didn't want to lose the music we heard my mom sing while cooking every day. The folk tales that taught us lessons, such as not to pick up trash from the ground and to not talk about others behind their backs.

And most importantly, the only way we communicated: Through our language. Soon after, my mother started a house rule: No speaking

English at home, only Somali. While continuing to hold onto every bit of Somali in us, it was very difficult to balance American culture with Somali culture.

Everything just seemed to be so different with Americans. In a Somali household, it's not OK to walk in with your shoes. While that might also tie into religion, it is seen as very disrespectful. However, it's normal to do so in an American house. When eating, it's also normal for Somalis to eat with their hands, specifically your right hand. If I dare do that at a local all-American restaurant or in an American house, I will be stared at like an animal.

These differences are frustrating and hard to balance, but I somehow seem to manage. It is the hardest at school because people don't often see me as American. I am not a white girl who shows her long blonde hair, who wears leggings and North Face clothing to school. Although

they will never see me as purely American, I'm actually more than happy to not be with the majority.

My family and I have adapted—and continue to adapt—to American culture. It's who surrounds us in our everyday lives. But in the end, I'm glad to have Somali culture and blood running through my veins. I will always be proud to carry my beautiful people with me.

I plan to continue being open minded about American culture after I graduate high school in June 2015. I have come to realize that both sides of my life are beyond important to me. I greatly appreciate my Somali people and traditions while continuing to learn about American ones.

My family and I strive for that original dream, the dream we came here for. I look at every difficulty I face as a source of strength to carry me through my life as a Somali.

As an American.

As a Somali-American.

# Coming back to your community

## A nonprofit aimed at Somali women pushes for empowerment, education

Walking through the Sabathani Community Center in Minneapolis, a long, winding hallway greets me. The lighting is dim and the walls are bare. Women of color stand in front of different doorways and little kids run around without mothers.

Behind a door with no signage lies the office of Isuroon. The Twin Cities organization, founded by Fartun Weli, stands for advocacy and community outreach in Somali communities.

Specifically, Weli is motivated to provide Somali women with emotional support and health resources to help ensure their success.

“We just want to make sure that the struggle of first immigrant, first generation Somali women is addressed and that they have every opportunity to succeed,” Weli said. “That will also mean that the second generation will succeed.”

### ADDRESSING A NEED

Weli, originally from Somalia, struggled financially while growing up. But thanks to an involved and



**Hafsa Guled**  
Minnesota  
Community  
and Technical  
College

present mother, her life turned out a lot more hopeful than others.

Weli credits her mother for instilling a deep need to give back to the community as an advocate. Her mother also emphasized the importance of education in order to be successful.

“There was a God, there was a Prophet, and then there was a teacher,” Weli said with pride.

After obtaining a masters degree in public health, Weli pushed hard to make change upon arriving in the Twin Cities. She started her own nonprofit organization, Isuroon, in 2010 to address cultural issues within the East African community.

Among her ambitious goals: Creating relationships between Somali mothers and teachers in schools, pushing for sex education forums and spreading health

everything that makes me who I am, including the food I love to eat at home. I hadn't ever accepted the fact that as a Chinese girl, yes, I ate Chinese food.

Partially because I wanted to prove something to myself, and partially because I wanted to get rid of



Submitted

Fartun Weli is careful not to scold teenagers into embracing their Somali roots. She believes that “knowing your language” will help them find better jobs.

education throughout the community. As Isuroon's website states, “culturally competent care improves access to health care services by understanding patient behavior and addressing disparities associated with sociocultural factors.”

Weli and several volunteers also worked hard to eliminate the vicious cycle of poverty and joblessness in the Somali community by making sure the people they helped were self-reliant. There was some resistance, though.

“We had a lot of complaints about school systems, especially nurses, about sexual education for Somali youth—teaching young kids about sexual health,” Weli said.

She also received some flak from Somali elders who were wary of the organization. That led to her biggest breakthrough while working on sex education initiatives.

“Long story short, it was the final day of the report I had been working on, and I sat down with the elders because I wanted to bring them in. I shared the report, and I was just holding my breath, because it was

the final minute. And then Uncle Ali, who had a red beard (a sign of tradition and wariness of Western culture), he called me over and said, ‘You did a good job,’ Weli said, laughing.

“That was a huge breakthrough for us.”

They also had to win over Somali men. As an organization that reaches out to women who may not have any other place to turn or someone they can trust with their issues, Weli also didn't want Isuroon to seem anti-male.

“At the beginning, men were put off by the women's rights issues, but as we proved ourselves that no, men were important—that they're part of the emotional support of keeping families together—now they understand,” Weli said.

### INTERNAL STRUGGLES

As for what she's learned about youth while at Isuroon, Weli keeps her advice to Somali teens simple.

“You have to come back to your community,” she said.

Growing up in the United States

as a teenager and being pressured by so many different parts of adolescence, it's difficult to remember your culture. It's much easier to blend in and be part of the melting pot.

It's the message that stuck with me the most since I can also identify with balancing two different lives. It creates an identity crisis, and personally, was something I also struggled with in high school.

I spent most of my childhood in the suburbs and faced a lot of identity issues. Part of me wanted to show my hair and listen to Hilary Duff just like the other neighborhood kids, but I felt held back by my cultural restraints. I felt embarrassed by my mom's broken English and the strong smelling foods we ate.

But as I grew older, I began cherishing the very things that made me different from my peers. I felt more comfortable in my skin after learning that speaking another language is actually an asset—not a negative thing. My hijab became a symbol of pride to me.

When Weli tells me, tells Somail teens—“Don't lose your language. It's your identity”—she isn't scolding us. Instead, she wants us to be true to our roots, to take advantage of opportunities that will reward young, successful Somalis who are bilingual and can give back to the community.

Talking with Weli gave me insight on the great things that are being done in my community, all right under my nose. I am proud to say, as a Somali woman myself, that our community needs voices like hers.

embarrassed about in the first place.

After all, my Chinese food is a part of being Chinese. No one had the right to look down upon me for being me.

That day, I went home with more than empty containers. I left with a heart full of pride to be who I am.

**CUISINE** from page 21  
makeup room of the theatre, I found myself debating whether I should bring my mom's food out at all. I was going through the same struggle I thought I had gotten over.

Then I realized, to truly accept myself means being proud of

this fear once and for all, I mustered up my courage and put the rice and curry on the table.

I sat on a nearby couch, and despite holding a fascinating John Grisham book in my hands, I tensely watched my castmates hover and take small tastes. Their faces ranged

from shocked, to confused, to ecstatic.

Yet one after another, the 12 adults came up to me and expressed how much they loved my mom's cooking. I felt a wave of relief rush through me with each compliment. I never had anything to be

# Name of the game

## Outlaw artists are drawn to graffiti culture because of its creativity, duality

Some people might need convincing that the words “graffiti” and “art” belong together in the same sentence. But whether seen as a volatile form of expression or vandalism, there are underground artists who pride themselves on being able to create something so visually striking within a city’s landscape.

For our latest career profile, ThreeSixty writer Selam Berhea e-mailed JoJo—one of the Midwest’s most influential graffiti artists—about his work as a muralist, mentor and youth program curator in the Twin Cities. Because of his graffiti art, JoJo has earned multiple gallery showings and has been featured in more than 100 magazines and books. He also lectures at schools on the history and culture of the art form while working with local businesses to build positive relationships about graffiti culture.

Due to the nature of his work, JoJo keeps his real name secret and also can’t share photos of his art for fear of identification.

### How did you get started in graffiti art? What do you enjoy about it?

I got started in graffiti art at the ripe old age of 12 or 13. I used to see it all the time traveling around L.A. and Orange County, Calif. I used to be a skateboarder, and when skating, my group of friends and I would find it at a lot of the local ditches and street spots we would frequent. We all just kind of picked it up and really enjoyed it, without any true understanding for it or what we were



looking at.

Also, I would go to work with my dad, who owned a construction company. We would travel all over the place, and I would see it along the freeway and in the neighborhoods he was working in. I was just so blown away by the bright colors and cool designs. After awhile, I began to experiment with it myself and even sought out any and all information about it that I could find at local libraries.

I still enjoy everything that I had mentioned above, but also the complexities that it takes to create a piece of work. I enjoy people seeing it and having an opinion about it—either good or bad ... I love being able to create something big and bright and colorful for people to enjoy.

### What techniques are utilized? How does that help you express yourself with more clarity?

The majority of the techniques are pretty simple—spray paint, caps and the ability to control the spray. In graffiti art culture, stencils and projected images, etc., are looked down upon and are only considered OK when doing large-scale work for money. Otherwise, those tools are considered toys (for beginners.) A true pro or master doesn’t need crutches to paint well. Sometimes



Isabelle Loisel



Katie Braman

Graffiti in northeast Minneapolis (top) and underneath the Ford Bridge in St. Paul (bottom) demonstrate different levels of artistic expression.

it takes longer, but you earn more respect.

I don’t personally think graffiti art helps me express myself more clearly, but it does help me express myself. The name of the game is to get your

name up and known as much as possible—whether for large-scale murals or even small tags. Each one has its reasons and contains a certain amount of freedom and power. If I want to express myself politically, I

### Career advice

This is the fifth installment of “The Way I Work,” a regular ThreeSixty feature aimed at providing insight into unique and interesting career fields. Intrigued by this career path? JoJo, a muralist, lecturer and curator of The G.A.M.E. (Graffiti Art Mentorship and Education), offers the following advice to teenagers:

“Being able to express oneself freely has its own rewards. I don’t think it is necessarily important to understand why (graffiti art) is created and how you can benefit from it, as it is to just appreciate and enjoy it for what it is while you’re looking at it. It can take you many places in this world. I’ve been able to travel and meet people all over the world just based off the fact that we enjoy the culture and artwork.”

can. If I just want to showcase my skill level, I can do that, as well. The act, by nature, is the expression and doesn’t require any real artistic merit or clarity. It’s like music. Sometimes the simplest songs are the ones that people enjoy the most.

### What is the graffiti scene like in Minnesota?

The graffiti scene in Minnesota is rather small but growing larger every day. I now give lectures and teach classes, where when I first moved here, that idea was unheard of. I know of about 2,000 artists that have attempted it in the state. Most don’t last long and move onto other art forms or cities. A lot of them just can’t handle the unneeded stress that being a graffiti artist or outlaw brings. It just gets to be too much and they stop altogether to live an easier life.

There is a lot of graffiti being done here by the lesser amount of artists practicing the art form. Ten percent of the artists probably contribute to 90 percent of the art being done. There probably isn’t a bridge in Minnesota that hasn’t had some sort of the art done on it at one time. There is also a good freight train painting scene here, too.

Intermedia Arts in Uptown is the only space that is legal for artists to create freely. There is no city sponsored, legal free parks or mural walls for artists.

### What have artists here accomplished? Why are they drawn to it?

Everyone is drawn to it for (his or her) own reasons. One of the main reasons people do it is to let people know that they exist. They are doing something that others don’t attempt to do and kind of living a “road less traveled” lifestyle. It’s unique and fun and can be rewarding at times. This fuels the artist’s desires and needs and even might provide them with **GRAFFITI** continued on page 31

# From page to the stage

## Spoken word poetry gives youth a potent platform to express individuality

Each Thursday night, performers shuffle into the Golden Thyme Coffee Cafe around 6 p.m. They chat with the baristas, the small cafe in Saint Paul a second home. They buy a drink, notebooks in hand. They've been waiting all week for this.

This is a chance for their voices to be heard.

At six, Tish Jones, the Soul Sounds Open Mic emcee, posts the sign-up sheet in the small back room where the open mic is held each week. She plays music on the speakers as teenagers congregate, slowly filling in the rows of folding chairs. While Soul Sounds is mostly young adults, it's multicultural and multigenerational. It's not uncommon for middle-aged men to offer advice after a teenager performs a heartfelt piece about the struggles he's been going through.

Jones introduces each writer to the stage with enthusiasm, smatterings of applause multiplying as the night goes on. Each performer has the opportunity to get feedback from the audience, and most do. Everyone who chooses to get feedback gets a thoughtful critique from Jones herself.

Standing in the back of the small room, Jones raises her hand.

"Hey, here's your goal for next week. I saw that you revised the poem from last week, which is good. Don't touch that. Instead, practice and come back next week focusing on your performance."



**Katia Kozachok**  
Perpich Arts  
High School

The teenage boy nods and heads back to his seat as Jones walks to the front, introducing the next performer of the night.

In between performances, she asks the crowd about events in their lives, what they've been thinking about. The audience starts a discussion about the events in Ferguson and street harassment. Over the course of the evening, nearly everyone present has participated—whether in discussion, feedback, performing their work, or all of the above.

### A CHANCE TO BE HEARD

Soul Sounds is an incredibly strong, warm community. While the chocolate muffins are good, that's not what keeps everyone coming back.

Jones is a spoken word artist who emcees Soul Sounds with another well-known Minnesota poet, Desdama. Jones is also the founder of TruArtSpeaks, a local nonprofit based on supporting youth and creating safe spaces for community voices to be heard through hip hop and spoken word.

"The people at Soul Sounds Open Mic care. They care about the space, about one another and about the issues that surface. They're



Isha Camara, a 15-year-old spoken word poet from Minneapolis, has performed as part of Minnesota's prestigious Brave New Voices.



Guante, a nationally recognized slam poet, also spends time educating Twin Cities youth about the importance of spoken word and rap.

invested. It is not a selfish space. They respect one another. Those things are rare," said Jones, who created TruArtSpeaks in 2007 after she was a nationally commended spoken word poet and felt the need to give back to local communities.

Isha Camara, a 15-year-old spoken word poet from Minneapolis, was selected for Minnesota's Brave New Voices team last year. That allowed the sophomore at Cristo

Rey Jesuit High School to compete nationally with the best teenage poets across the country.

She's no stranger to speaking her mind, though as a young, black, Muslim woman, there are plenty of people who don't want to listen.

"Once I was told that what I do wasn't poetry but ranting. And because I'm Muslim, I've gotten called slurs and what not, mostly when I speak out about topics

revolving things like ISIS, terrorism, etc.," Camara said.

"Not everyone can like my poetry and I know that."

Guante, a slam poet who's been recognized nationally, also works as an educator and activist in Minneapolis. With TruArtSpeaks, he also goes into local public schools to teach poetry workshops and promote the importance of spoken word and rap.

The Twin Cities, in particular, has a reputation for fostering a strong spoken word scene—dating back to local Beat poets influencing the area and the concentration of talented, vibrant young artists sharing their work today. Local spoken word venues of prominence, in addition to Golden Thyme, include Soap Boxing Poetry Slam, Slam MN Poetry Slam, Voices Merging and SteppingStone Theatre Youth Open Mic.

"One of the best things about spoken word as both a practice and as a community is that it's democratic. If you have something to say, you have a platform, whether that be an open mic, or YouTube, or something else. There aren't a lot of spaces in U.S. culture where people—especially young people and people who hold misrepresented identities—can have a big platform to say whatever they want to say," Guante said.

"I think of spoken word, in a very real sense, as new media, as independent media, as popular media, as alternative media. We're having conversations about real issues, and that's filtering into the larger culture."

Added Jones: "Youth are the architects of the future. The words, images, values and ideas that shape their consciousness will impact everyone. They, too, are witnesses. And they, too, deserve a platform to be heard."

### EMBRACING ACTIVISM

Performance poetry is vulnerable in a way that written word isn't, Guante **SPOKEN WORD** *continued on page 25*

**SPOKEN WORD** from page 24 said. Poetry—written to be performed in front of people—is often deeply personal, revealing an even more difficult journey. Those who step on stage and take the mic into their own hands find it rewarding, both for the finality it can provide while overcoming issues, and for the audience members whom it can impact.

“One woman came to me and said I gave her closure. Just thinking that everyone who came and heard me speak left with something they didn’t come in with ... that’s what’s good,” Camara said.

“I think there aren’t a lot of spaces where people can have deeper conversations about issues and ideas that we all struggle with. With spoken word, you can talk about whatever you want to talk about, however you want to talk about it, and then you can have a platform to express those thoughts and actually be validated for them. It’s such a simple thing, but it’s increasingly rare,” Guante added.

“We have to build with one another, sharing thoughts, ideas, techniques ... Also, because the platform lends itself so well to discussing social justice issues, there’s a community activism element that often (though not always) accompanies the poetry itself.”

Among the heavy topics Camara has already written about: Racism, harassment, war, education and religion. Spoken word provides a platform to go deeper with issues—and present them in a powerful way—that teens can’t so easily ignore.

“I just like writing about what’s important,” Camara said. “By using this with the youth and our communities, it’s so much easier to relate and understand each other.”

# Heating up the climate cause

## Caring about the climate comes to Minnesota in a big way next year

When it comes to the younger generation, it’s difficult to avoid the thought of how much responsibility for the planet they will inherit.

Jim Dorsey, a Minneapolis attorney, doesn’t mince words: (Climate change) “will be the defining issue of their lives.”

It’s why next October there will be more going on than the typical changing of the seasons in Minneapolis. Minnesota is slotted to host a major conference—from October 25–28 at the Minneapolis Convention Center and University of Minnesota campus—with a focus on sustainability and climate change.

Dorsey is behind “Minnesota 2015: Democracy in a Sustainable Future,” which is being coordinated with Club de Madrid and Partnership for Change. Club de Madrid is an organization composed of former heads of state from democratic countries or countries that have gone through democratic change since 1975.

Each time Club de Madrid gathers, the group takes on a general theme for the summit. This year, they met in Florence, Italy to discuss democracy and human rights. In Minneapolis, the theme will be democracy and sustainability.

Because Minnesota is a leader in the areas of water quality, food crops and healthcare, by hosting the “MN2015” conference, Dorsey believes that “Minnesota will show



**Maya Shelton-Davies**  
River Falls High School

itself to be a leader in sustainability.”

“Club de Madrid gives me the opportunity to show off Minnesota and the Twin Cities to the international community,” he said.

### MARCHING FOR CHANGE

Why the focus on climate change? As Dorsey noted, and the recent People’s Climate March in New York City demonstrated, it’s become a priority cause for mobilization and potential legislative action.

The September climate march—organized by 350.org, an environmental organization founded by writer and activist Bill McKibben, along with the partnership of various other organizations—drew approximately 400,000 people to the streets of New York City. The purpose for the large-scale event was to draw attention to climate action, making it the largest mobilization march for the environment in history, according to the New York Times.

Espoir Delmain, a junior at Great River School in St. Paul, attended the New York City march because “being part of something so huge and important was just something I couldn’t say no to.”

However, she realizes that some



Climate change activists gather to hear music and voice their opinions about the need for legislative action at the People’s Climate March in New York City.

of her peers don’t view climate change and environmental issues as pressing problems.

“It is easy for people not to care about climate change. It doesn’t feel as urgent as a job, schoolwork, or even (other) social issues,” she said. “Basically, with everything that we have to juggle nowadays, putting serious thought into the environment may take a back seat.”

For Olivia Nofzinger, a high school senior and PSEO student at the University of Minnesota, the issue hits home because of “flooding and the dying out of wildlife.”

“There are a lot of young people working on the (climate change) issue. If things continue the way that they are, the main crisis of our lives, like wars occurring over water, will be because of climate change and what we’re doing to the planet,” Nofzinger said.

### SHOULD WE CARE?

Although the dialogue is changing with recent events, there are still plenty of adults and teens who don’t view environmental issues as dire. This is primarily due to the thought that it’s either too late to change anything, global warming isn’t man-made, or that by the time the environment is in shambles, they won’t be around.

Advocates like Delmain, however, believe that they personally can lower their individual impact on the environment. Whether it’s by setting up a composting system, driving less, or even carrying a personal water

bottle in order to avoid plastic, every step taken is a step forward.

“The biggest problem is the lack of education,” Delmain said. “Lack of education shows itself when kids don’t know which foods are healthy, or even what climate change really is or what it entails. However, educating the younger generation on these environmental problems will make huge steps into fixing our planet.”

Dorsey said the emphasis on recent events is important because “when you talk to climate scientists, they’ll tell you that they know about carbon, they know about problems with the ocean, they know about deforestation, and that they know about the depletion of resources. What they don’t know, and what they want to better understand, is how they can get democratic governments to respond to the challenge.”

Minneapolis will be at the forefront of attempting to spark initiatives, Dorsey said, while formulating the “Minnesota Compact” at its 2015 conference. Groups affiliated with Club de Madrid are meeting all over the world to bring ideas to the table next year. Those reports and solutions will then be compiled into a template—a building block they can take back to their communities, Dorsey said.

“I view the Minnesota Compact as a chance to re-engage,” he said, “It’ll be important to be paying attention. These environmental issues, honestly, won’t affect my life at all. But who it will affect is this younger generation. Your generation.”

# Changing the charitable model

## Being disruptive can be a good thing—at least in philanthropic circles

Traditionally, the act of philanthropic giving has been categorized as charity done by the wealthy or someone from a well-established organization.

You have to be older. You have to be financially secure. You have to be important.

Kate Khaled, engagement and development manager of Charities Review Council in St. Paul, is striving to change this stereotype through “disruptive philanthropy.”

By playing the role of big brother, Charities Review Council upholds and maintains standards for charities in the Twin Cities. At its annual forum earlier this fall at the University of St. Thomas, the Council introduced disruptive philanthropy as “a transformative event or moment, an act of giving and relationship building that is a departure from the status quo.”

It’s a concept that could ring true for young people while influencing their investment in the future of philanthropy.

“It may not be something comfortable or something sanctioned or something that supports institutions, but it’s a necessary shift that needs to take place in order to improve the system of philanthropy,” Khaled said.

“Philanthropy itself is an act of giving. Putting those two together is a catalytic event or collaboration that shifts the way people do giving.”

With roughly 330 guests from the Twin Cities philanthropic community



in attendance—among them The Bush Foundation, Wells Fargo, Cargill, Medica and nonprofits like Lifetrack Resources, Springboard for the Arts and Metro Meals on Wheels—creative approaches to building relationships marked the all-day event. Michael Faye’s keynote address also helped unravel the status quo of philanthropy and push the audience to actively think about how—and what—they give.

Faye, co-founder and chair of GiveDirectly, focuses on exactly what his organizational title



Michael Faye of GiveDirectly believes in pushing the status quo.



One of the ways to disrupt philanthropy is to “imagine, create and innovate” new charitable models.

suggests—giving money directly to those in need and not to middleman organizations. Breaking down those social norms and expectations should be appealing to young donors, said Nausheena Hussain, fund development and marketing director at CAIR (Council of American-Islamic Relations) Minnesota.

“I think the younger generation is really great at putting in the time volunteering and showing up at events, coordinating events,” Hussain said. “So their giving already goes beyond (looking at philanthropy) from a

monetary perspective, but also from a service perspective.”

Jeremy Wang, board chair of the Mid-Continent Oceanographic Institute, agreed with Hussain’s sentiment. He also believes that disruptive philanthropy means more engagement, not just dollars.

“Go out and find a nonprofit that does work that you believe in. And learn a lot about it,” Wang said.

“I think there’s more to giving and engaging in philanthropy than just signing a check or handing over your credit card number. It’s about really understanding an organization and their mission and what they’re trying to do. And exploring nonprofit careers. Young people, especially, need to think about that.”

Hussain recommended that young people get involved where they’re comfortable. One obvious choice: Social media.

“Where would you want to donate to? ... Raise awareness of these causes,” Hussain said. “Not just donating, but helping (by) tweeting it out. Talk about where you’ve been on your Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.”

“I mean, they’re (youth) so big on social media. Let things go viral. Let

missions and causes go viral!”

The concept of disruptive philanthropy could be part of a culture change that’s already in motion. Movements like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, Love Your Melon, St. Jude Up ‘til Dawn and YouTube videos showing random acts of kindness toward the homeless are broadening the idea of who can “give” to their community.

Heather Lund, development manager at Bridging, recalled working on a Build It Bash project where kids decorated forts as a fundraiser. It was “active, enjoyable and fun,” Lund said, and helped young people learn more about the organization.

That’s the first step, Lund said. The next move is for the philanthropic community to push for more youth representation on boards and in advisory positions, to facilitate more diversity in organizations, and to reward “disruptive” models that young people are already skilled at.

“Kids communicate with each other with ease as opposed to when I was young,” Lund said. “So they can do more ... They can really get together as a group and support a cause or do something.”

# Going for broke

## Knowing when to make music a full-time career can be a tricky proposition

Musicians hear the warnings all the time—“You have to make it BIG in the music industry to be successful.”

But people had been quietly breaking that rule for awhile when popular hip hop artist Macklemore released the song “Jimmy Iovine” in 2012.

The rebellious tone in Macklemore’s ode to big-name record labels stems from the interactions he’s had with them. His fictional story about being given an offer by Iovine rings true to the pressure felt by all musicians trying to make a living.

“But if I get signed, my luck is destined/My future depends on ink,” he spits, verbalizing the fears of unsigned musicians. Macklemore and his partner Ryan Lewis independently released three EPs and two albums—culminating in four total Grammy awards and millions of album sales. They defied the system.

Dean Sorenson, a professor at the University of Minnesota School of Music, calls Macklemore’s path “creating your own luck,” a tactic he firmly believes in. After his parents expressed concern about devoting his life to music, Sorenson worked as hard as possible to be successful in the industry.

“As it turned out, opportunities came my way that allowed me to do what I do,” said Sorenson, who has performed professionally (on trombone) alongside talent like Idina Menzel and for major



**Madie Ley**  
University of  
St. Thomas

productions at the Orpheum Theater in Minneapolis.

But not all musicians are as lucky as Sorenson. In today’s music scene, more people are choosing a financially-safe route: Work a job to pay the bills and pursue their passion for music in their down time. These individuals are questioning some of the biggest stereotypes faced by musicians: “The industry is unpredictable,” “Music is just a hobby,” “Pursuing music is only for young people.”

Sara Bischoff of Minneapolis belongs to two bands—Web of Sunsets and Heavy Deeds—and works as a freelance writer and designer. She actively tours and records music with Web of Sunsets, and fiercely contests those stereotypes.

“It’s strange that people associate being in a band with being young or unsettled, or that it’s wrapped up in wanting to be famous. I think that should be challenged,” Bischoff said.

“I own my own business, I pay my bills, I have a house and a dog and a relationship, and I play music. I have no ambitions of fame. It’s completely satisfying to just make albums and play smaller shows. It’s also not a phase or a side project—it’s a huge part of my life and identity in a long-term, permanent way.”



Submitted

Local indie-pop group Whosah has its eyes on the music prize after college ends this summer at the University of Minnesota.

### STRIKING A BALANCE

Bischoff has been playing music since she was three years old. Formed in 2012, Web of Sunsets has been featured on 89.3 The Current and in Pitchfork, and according to Bischoff, “money aside, it’s as close as I’ve ever come to a dream job.”

Despite her success with Web of Sunsets—the touring band has recorded an EP and an album—Bischoff hasn’t convinced herself to go all-in. Her qualms mainly focus on the financial aspects of touring and recording music.

“It’s rare to make a full-time living playing music in a band, but if that were ever a possibility, I would commit in a heartbeat,” she said.

“What you do to pay your bills doesn’t have to be your identity, and sometimes it’s even better that way so money isn’t controlling your creative projects. In the same breath, things don’t have to be so compartmentalized, like you’re living a double life or something—I don’t think that’s healthy either. Everyone can find their own balance with it.”

While Bischoff works to create a symbiotic balance of work and play, musicians on the other end of the spectrum aim to play until they can’t make a living.

Enter: The starving artists. (Or, more realistically, people who are comfortable taking financial risks until they get what they want.)



Originally from the outskirts of the north metro, three-part indie pop band Whosah has big dreams. After forming in 2010, the band of three brothers—“two by blood and one by blonde hair”—has juggled music with family life, high school, part-time jobs, and most recently, college to arrive at a major goal for summer 2015.

“Right now, the plan (for) summer is to still pursue the careers our classmates are pursuing, but just tell anyone that offers us a job that we’re going to start in the fall, instead of in the summer,” said frontman and lead vocalist Spencer Grimes. “Then we’re going to try just playing all over the place and pulling all of our contacts from the last couple of years and trying to just push it really hard.”

If they arrive at a place where music is enough to support them, Whosah will commit full-time to writing music and performing shows.

“If we’re making enough money to eat, that sounds great,” said guitarist Dallas Erdahl.

### DEFINING SUCCESS

With both Grimes, 21, and Erdahl, 22, following degrees in engineering at the University of Minnesota, they’re not too worried if they don’t start working right away.

“The education that we’re getting is in demand enough that we can put off getting a job for awhile and still be able to get a job, so we’re kind of safe,” said Grimes, rapping his knuckles against a wooden table.

The band has developed from playing shows in old school cafeterias and Battle of the Bands competitions to gigs like the Minneapolis Aquatennial, opening for folk rock artist Mat Kearney, and collaborating with singer/songwriter Josh Clutter.

“We’ve always had eyes bigger than our stomachs,” Erdahl admitted. That said, Grimes realizes that the big-name record label pipe dream is a thing of the past.

“It’s not like a movie scene where a guy walks in and says, ‘I hear you in your garage. You’re good. I want you to be on the radio.’ That scene doesn’t really exist, and that’s depressing sometimes,” he said.

Becoming successful in the music industry doesn’t have to involve a record label or a world tour—it’s different for everyone, based on what makes sense for the group and the level of commitment you’re ready to make.

Macklemore decided he didn’t need a huge label to support him. Sorenson decided not to heed his parents’ warnings. Bischoff is comfortable with her creative output. Whosah is ready to push theirs as far as possible.

Bottom line: While the dream of “making it big” in music may not be an attainable opportunity for everyone, that doesn’t mean it’s the only road to prosperity.

# More than a fry cook

## Getting a fast food job taught responsibility—and even changed perspectives

If someone had told me five years ago that I'd be working at McDonald's in the future, I would have laughed out loud.

And yet, after more than two years of working at the McDonald's in my hometown of River Falls, Wis., I've discovered that the job allowed me to develop a strong sense of responsibility while exploring important tasks I wouldn't have ever learned to do.

As a teenager living in a small town, I was lucky to get a job at all. I was one of the first of my friends to get a job when I started working at McDonald's at 15—the earliest they hire. I hated it at first.

I thought that I would never learn how to work the computers, man the fry station or take orders in the back window while paying out the customers. I was overwhelmed, confused and more than a little scared.

On my first day there, I literally stood in a corner for five minutes—unable to move—because I was convinced that one of the employees would trample me in their haste to carry out duties. My mind was racing with thoughts like, “Will I ever learn to do this?” and “How do they keep track of everything?”

I must have looked terrified because I received a lot of sympathy, and some even said, “First day, huh?” I could only nod.



**Lana Rubinstein**  
River Falls High School

### GAINING PERSPECTIVE

I worked that day for about three hours and I was mentally and physically exhausted by the time I went home. There was so much information. Rules and regulations were swirling around in my mind and I was seeing McChickens floating before my eyes.

But I had done it. I had survived my first day. And it's only been uphill from there.

Now, after working there for two years, it's a breeze. I can take orders like nobody's business. I'm a pro at the fry station. What once looked difficult has become the easiest thing in the world for me.

But it's not all that great and nice.

Hypocrisy isn't a good look on anyone, but to prove my point, I must use it. I become offended when people constantly judge McDonald's. Even though I did it when I was younger, it still bothers me when others look down on a fast food job.

Just a month ago in my economics class, my teacher said, “Economics is all about choices. Like, for example, would you rather work at Apple or at McDonald's?” The entire class laughed, and one kid even said, “Is that even a question?”



Wikimedia Commons

Life behind the McDonald's counter doesn't sound glamorous, but it teaches teens responsibility.

And it bothered me.

Working in a place like McDonald's forces me to think quickly, act quickly and smile while doing it. But it's a stressful environment. Managers talking loudly, customers looking annoyed, beeping alarms and blinking lights—it can often be too much.

Since McDonald's is known for being fast with its service, when someone messes up, it's not a good thing. I've had my fair share of customers getting angry, managers being disappointed, and I've even cried at work a couple of times.

But I'm only a teenager. For some, this is their primary source of income.

Take adult employee Carolynn Lucas. She enjoys working there and is treated well by her co-workers and managers.

“People are great. They make working fun,” she said. Carolynn genuinely enjoys working at McDonald's, and despite the very rare bad days, she loves that it's her job.

When asked if she's ever felt criticized for working at McDonald's, the answer came quickly.

“No. The job is fun and people don't judge me.”

I'm not sure if I can say the same. As a teenager working at McDonald's, I've received the occasional comment of, “Really? You work there? Why?” I used to answer apologetically, saying, “Yeah ... I don't know why I work there.” But now, even though it may not be the best job, I can say to my peers who laugh, “At least I have a job.”

### LOOKING AHEAD

“Keep busy!”

That's a common refrain that all managers say at McDonald's. An employee should never be standing still. There's an unspoken rule that as soon as an employee has downtime, they grab a rag, wash a dish, wipe down a counter—they do something to occupy their hands.

And yet for all the hard work, the stereotypes remain.

When you think of an employee at McDonald's, you probably don't think “successful business person material.” Most people think “lazy,” “teenager,” “slacker” and “unmotivated.”

Sorry, but I'm a hardworking girl who is very motivated. The only reason I got a job so young is because I was motivated to start

working. I'm not a slacker and I try my best. I've also been working there for more than two years, which when I tell adults that, seems to impress them. Two years to keep any job these days is a long time. I think that's something to be proud of.

Above all, I've learned that I don't want to work at McDonald's in the future. I like my co-workers, I like most of the managers, and we like to joke around. But the work isn't fulfilling.

I'm going off to college soon and I'll be leaving McDonald's. I'm lucky to be young with opportunities in front of me. After college, who knows what my options for jobs might be? That's when I start to think about my fellow employees, the ones who are older.

Carolynn enjoys her job, but there are plenty of adult employees who might not have any other option. McDonald's might be the only job they can get, and they work hard at it.

Will I miss smelling like French fries when I leave River Falls? No. But what I've learned at McDonald's will stick with me. And that's what important.

# Is college *really* worth the cost?

## A future filled with debt shouldn't be the only option for focused teens

Back in late November, The Atlantic began linking articles noting the statistics of Millennials on Tumblr. Millennials, or Generation Y, include anyone born post-1982 up to 2004. Many people around this age range make up the demographic of Tumblr.

The article stated that Millennials were less likely to buy homes and cars after college, which for some bizarre reason, perplexed the poster. They wanted to know why Millennials, after graduating and getting a “real job,” aren’t going after houses and cars.

Upon further research, it turns out that because Millennials are less likely to take out loans and pursue the “American Dream,” we’re called the “Peter Pan” generation. Millennials, as a whole, have bigger gaps between so-called rites of adulthood than previous generations.

Peter Pan indeed. It’s not like there are extenuating circumstances. It’s just because we don’t want to grow up.

Baby Boomers and Generation X refer to Millennials as the “me” generation. We’re lazy and useless! We’ll never leave our houses! All we do is mooch off our parents and take selfies all day!

“When I graduated from college, I started with nothing and within a few years had already bought a house and blah blah blah.”

But they also fail to recognize that they grew up in an amazing economy



Shay Radhakrishnan  
Math and Science Academy

and then subsequently created one of the worst in American history.

So to The Atlantic, let me break it down for you. Why aren’t Millennials hung up on buying houses? Cars?

Most of them probably can’t afford to. Why? What are all those people blowing their money on? College tuition.

### COLLEGE CONCERNS

Our society almost universally fails to recognize that not everyone should be—or even can be—going to college. Not all jobs should require college degrees. Trade schools are still an option! But all I’m hearing from public high school teachers is that everyone should be aiming to go to college right after graduation. Nobody talks about other options.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, nearly half (46 percent) of the people that enter a domestic college manage to graduate within six years. But not all of the people that drop out are leaving because academia isn’t for them. Instead, the cost of going to a college in the United States is outrageously expensive.

And it’s already affecting my life



Students at the University of St. Thomas scan over material and study for exams during finals week on the St. Paul campus.

since I’m a year away from graduating high school. Buying Chipotle two times a month shouldn’t make me feel guilty. But I can’t help but think about how it adds up over time. And then I begin worrying about all the debt I know I’ll have to pay back—you know, since the average college graduate leaves campus owing about \$26,600, according to Forbes.

Back in 2004, the average debt was \$18,650. Hamilton Place Strategies predicts that in ten years the average student debt will be equal to the median yearly salary a graduate will earn.

And I’m not the only one who (quite reasonably) worries about paying student loans. Today’s teen is forced to grow up in the face of massive college tuition and the expectation that college is the only answer.

All my friends are stressing themselves out over doing well in school and volunteering so that they can collect as many scholarships as possible. I don’t particularly enjoy the concept of competing with my friends for desperately needed money this early in my life. But it’s not like I have a lot of options—it’s either cut their throat or pay in full.

It’s also stressful for people who are good at a few things, but aren’t the best at everything. I feel like I’m dragging my heels as I get older, because as much as I’m excited to see where I’m going, I don’t know a thing about what I’m going to do. With scholarships and class ranks, it’s easy



Look familiar, teens? College application season is in full swing.

to see who’s better than you and by how much. Especially in the final years of high school, that disparity between you and the next person seems to be much more significant.

Ultimately, I’d love to know where that \$13,626 (tuition alone for the University of Minnesota) per student is going every year. Does it really cost that much to provide an education? Will anyone come and enlighten me as to why we are shackled with thousands in student loan debt whereas some so-called “socialist” countries will pay their students to go to school?

This is the kind of thing that discourages people from wanting to further their education. Yes, getting a good job is important. Learning things is very important. But I can’t help but wonder if it’s really worth it, if there’s a chance that I won’t even be able to pay it back since it’s possible I won’t be hired once I graduate. A college graduate friend of mine, who came out of the University of Michigan, worked at Home Depot

for half a year before he finally got hired in his own field.

### UNATTRACTIVE OPTIONS

Not to mention, the things that I love and are good at are all shrinking fields. Journalism is changing a lot, to the point where future journalists are expected to do the job of more than one person—eliminating jobs that were previously done by specialists. I have to reasonably think about my major, and I don’t think I can study whatever I want to. I have to settle somewhere when I can expect to be paid, like the growing IT field. Once again, this isn’t a phenomenon limited to myself. My other friends have their own passions that they feel compelled to set aside.

The average age of retirement has increased, which is hilariously the fault of the Baby Boomers and Generation X—the same people who criticize Gen Y for doing nothing. What am I supposed to do? All of you are still working!

And yet banks still expect us to start paying them within six months of graduation. “Grace period,” they say. I’m not feeling very “graced.” Sadly, some people fail to realize that going to a private college with a yearly rate of \$40,000 a year isn’t very intelligent to do for someone with a dream degree in philosophy.

Inflation is still going at its healthy rate of one to two percent a year, but the minimum wage isn’t going up to account for that gap. So even if I get a job at McDonald’s, it will take me ages to pay any debt back.

And these people have the audacity to say, “Oh, just get a better job.” That’s not exactly an option! Besides, who’s going to get you fries at midnight if no one is running the graveyard shift?

So please don’t ask why we’re not buying houses. You probably already know.

# Opening up the college playbook

## Twin Cities-based College Possible gives low-income students a helping hand

College applications are a handful. They can be especially difficult for students who don't have trusted adults guiding them through the process.

Luckily there is College Possible, a nonprofit organization aimed at helping high school students understand how to get into college.

As executive director of College Possible, Sara Dziuk believes in a diverse future. She oversees the Twin Cities-based program and its 23 area high schools that pair low-income students of color with "coaches"—recent college graduates who give a year of service through AmeriCorps and are "ready to change the world."

"Over the course of those two years in high school, students spend



**Daniela Garcia**  
Edina High School

over 300 hours in our program. We offer the program every day after school, we ask students to come in twice a week to attend our after school sessions. They last about two hours each," Dziuk said.

"Students have a coach every step of the way. Through their whole process they have a coach, one in high school and then one in college—no matter where they go to school."

Could College Possible work for you? Dziuk explains how the

program is doing its part to close the achievement gap and help Minnesota create the next generation of talented college graduates.

### Who does College Possible aim to serve?

Our mission is to make college admission a success. And make it possible for low-income students. So we start working with students, and we actually do some college prep talks with underclassmen, ninth and tenth grade students ... It's a very light touch we do early on with students. Then we recruit students to be in our program, spring of their sophomore year. It's typically students who are low income or qualify for free and reduced price lunch, that have a GPA of 2.0 or greater.

They have to want to go to college and are willing to invest their time as a student that's preparing to go to college and be successful. Then we admit students into our program and spend all of junior year with them, really focused on increasing their ACT scores and their college entrance exam scores. We also expose our students to campus visits and get them thinking about summer enrichment programs and

opportunities that would be good for them. We help them start to create a "top five" list of schools they might be interested in. Then we spend senior year with those students working with that top five list and help them start applying for colleges.

Our goal is to have all of our students apply to at least five different schools, and support them in that process. We also work with every student to complete the FAFSA, to secure their financial aid that they need to go to college. We also help them identify private scholarship opportunities that our students can apply for.

### What are the requirements for a student to be in College Possible?

In order to apply for the program, they need to be income eligible and GPA eligible. Students should have recommendations from teachers or guidance counselors. Parents need to sign a permission slip and the student goes through an interview with us, as well as completes an application.

### What is your role at College Possible?

My job is to oversee everything that College Possible is doing. We

have 23 high schools where we have students, and we have more than 4,000 students who are in college at 300 universities. I spend most of my time thinking about our programming to support our students—making sure that we are reaching as many students as possible in the Twin Cities. I also spend a lot of time raising dollars and awareness for our program, so it takes a lot of resources to make a big program like this happen. So I spend much of my time out in the community, talking to media and groups, and our elected officials. I tell them about College Possible and educate them on college applications and success. Then I work with corporations and individual donors to ask them to support us financially so that we can support more students.

### Where do your coaches come from?

We have coaches that are AmeriCorps members, recent college graduates. They are passionate. They are realistic. They are the smartest people I know, and they are ready to change the world. The first thing they are doing, oftentimes, is spending a year in service. They're full-time volunteers and they are

## My reflection: Blazing a trail to college



Photos by Tyra Davis-Jenkins

College Possible coaches, alum and current students gather for an event at Augsburg College to share advice.

When I attended my first College Possible session in the eleventh grade, I had no idea what to expect for the forthcoming year. ACT prep and college info sessions twice-a-week for two hours, honestly, sounded terrible.

I always liked to challenge myself as a student, have taken AP and honors classes, and was an athlete the majority of the year. It was hard to see myself committing to a two-hour session two days a week while my peers were at home, going about



**Tyra Davis-Jenkins**  
Coon Rapids High School

their college readiness plan however they pleased. I never resented them because of this. I was merely jealous that they had options to explore, that they could learn about colleges or the ACT however they wanted, in their own time.

But then I had to remind myself

coaches for our students, so we pair that coach with students, either in a high school to work with 40 high school students or we have coaches for our college students. Our college coaches typically work with 200 students, perhaps in a number of different universities or colleges where we have students attend.



Sara Dziuk

**What happens to students who are in the program and don't follow through?**

When a student joins College Possible, we are making a commitment to see them through college admission and college success. Whether

that student likes it or not, we are determined to see them through. So their coach will track them down in the lunch room, or before school, or between classes to remind them that we want to see them in session. Coaches remind them that we want to be working with them through the process.

Ninety-eight percent of the students in our program earn admission to college. We see all of our students through college, and if there is ever a stop along their way that they did not earn admission right away, or they're in college for a semester and they need to leave for financial academic or personal reasons, we will continue to support that student. There have been many times over the years where a student is struggling, so our coach begins calling them. Until that student is ready to re-enroll, the coach will help them do that.

**What are the various partnerships College Possible has with different colleges?**

Some colleges host our students on college visits, so they are really excited to have College Possible students come to their campus and start to picture themselves on that campus. We have about 30 college partners who want our students to explore their campus. We also have some deeper partners who work with colleges that either really want a lot of students to attend, or we have a lot of current students attending and want to make sure those students are supported and successful. So those partners have many students on campus, for example Augsburg College or University of Minnesota.

why I applied to this program: To gain knowledge about ACT strategy and the college application process. Knowledge that I needed. Both of my parents never went to a post-secondary institution after high school. Ultimately, I would be a trailblazer in my family.

Now that I'm a senior, I look back and realize that there's no way I would've gotten through the ACT or fall college application season without the support and encouragement of my other CP

peers—and especially my College Possible coach, Kelley Redmond. I have made awesome memories with all of them and appreciate all of their support.

So far this year, I have applied to St. Cloud State, Minnesota State University Moorhead, University of Hartford, DePaul University, Columbia College in Chicago and Loyola University. I have received acceptance letters from St. Cloud State and Columbia College already, and ultimately, my dream

**How do you measure success?**

We are very result-focused as an organization. With our juniors, we strive to try and increase their ACT scores. In our history, students have increased their ACT scores by 22 percent—which shows that they are a much more competitive candidate for college than they were at the beginning of the year. In our history, 98 percent of our students have earned admission to college. Currently, a College Possible student is 10 times more likely to graduate from college than their low-income peers.

**What are your hopes for College Possible in the future?**

I hope to see even more students become successful. We want to see more and more of our students persist in graduating from college, because it's more about just earning admission to college. We want more of our students to graduate. And then for them to be here, in the Twin Cities, working or volunteering and giving back. We want to see future generations change because of the education our students are receiving today.

would be to study in Chicago and pursue a major in film.

College Possible has provided me with a wide variety of skills that go far beyond ACT strategy and filling out applications. I've learned how to talk professionally on the phone, properly write e-mails and construct a resume. I've developed a greater appreciation for the attributes that pay off in life, such as hard work and determination.

I already know that these skills will benefit me for the rest of my life.



Isabelle Loisel

A Northeast Minneapolis wall showcases the “stylized language” of graffiti.

**GRAFFITI** from page 23 somewhat of an edge in their perspectives of the world we all share.

Some artists have accomplished a lot in the culture—from being a gallery artist to making a living teaching the styles and the techniques of the culture. Others have been featured in magazines and books and even on the news and in the paper. The motive behind it is to always be getting your name out there—good or bad, and sometimes both at the same time.

**What negative perceptions are you trying to break down?**

The media and local, state and national governments often villainize the artists. There is a real energy and effort put forth in trying to stop them from expressing themselves and gaining public acceptance. They have contributed to this fear of chaos and lawlessness through propaganda and criminalizing of them.

I try to showcase the quality aspects of the art and teach people not to fear it, but to champion it. Graffiti art is, after all, “American” by nature and encompasses all the great qualities this country was founded on. Freedom to express one's opinions through speech is one of them. People often mistake

it for gang marking of turf ... which couldn't be further from the truth.

**What is the culture of graffiti as an art form? Why is it important to recognize this culture?**

The culture is atypical by nature. People often confuse the letters as scary messages, but I assure them that it is nothing more than a stylized language of writing, like calligraphy. That is why we call ourselves “writers.” We use letters as the main focal point for the artwork.

It is important to recognize this culture because, like all things man-made and created, it is unique unto itself. It's young and interesting. It is as basic and crude as cave paintings, and as complex and intricate as the things that created our universe. It is ugly and beautiful and challenges us as thinkers on many levels. It is freedom at its best and criminal by nature. Whether you love it or hate it, it exists.

**How can youth benefit from this art form?**

I guess just from experiencing something new and different or by creating it. You have to work hard to build the skills to do it. It takes many years to even become half-way decent at it, and technically, you may never fully master it.

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