

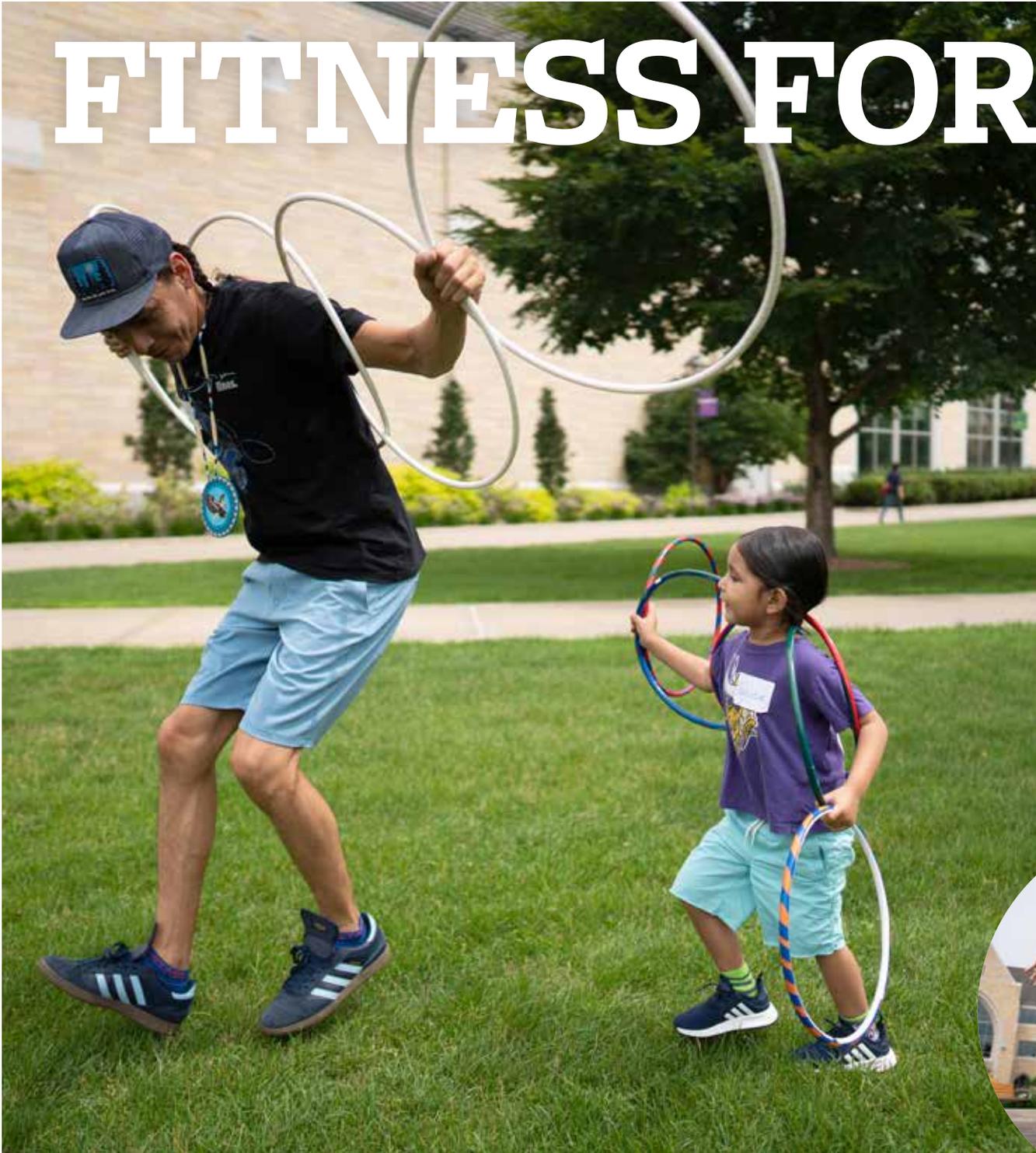
\$1

# ThreeSixty

Minnesota Teens Report Stories & Issues That Matter

## FITNESS FOR ALL

ThreeSixty students report on creative physical-activity outlets in diverse communities.



**Special-use photos:** Ananya Dance Theatre • Girls on the Run • House of Dance • Jess Graba • Our Streets Minneapolis • Tamales y Bicletas • Subversive Sirens • Sunisa Lee and family • Twin Cities Native Lacrosse • University of St. Thomas

**ThreeSixty Journalism**  
Mail 5057, 2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105  
threesixty.stthomas.edu  
Twitter: @ThreeSixtyMN  
Instagram: @ThreeSixtyJournalism  
LinkedIn: @ThreeSixty-Journalism  
Facebook: ThreeSixty Journalism



Chad Caruthers  
Executive Director



Bao Vang  
Associate Director



Theresa Malloy  
Program Manager

Special thanks to student editor Allison DeMorett.

**ThreeSixty Leadership Council:** Aisha Eady, ThreeSixty alumna; Professional Services Marketing, LLC • Simeon Lancaster, ThreeSixty alumnus; PBS NewsHour's Under-Told Stories Project • Brian Bellmont, Belmont Partners Public Relations • Nancy Cassutt, MPR News • Chris Havens, Best Buy • John Hobot, Wells Fargo • Phil Piña, *St. Paul Pioneer Press* • Colleen Stoxen, *Star Tribune* • Jack Sullivan, Dorsey & Whitney, LLP • Amanda Theisen, KSTP-TV • Dr. Wendy Wyatt, University of St. Thomas • Andy Ybarra, University of St. Thomas

Copyright 2019 All Rights Reserved

ThreeSixty Magazine will be published twice during the 2019 calendar year.

ThreeSixty Magazine is designed by Diana Boger. [www.dianaboger.com](http://www.dianaboger.com)

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

ThreeSixty Journalism is a nonprofit program of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas.

Donations from individuals like you provide a significant amount of ThreeSixty's operating budget. To learn more, visit [threesixty.stthomas.edu](http://threesixty.stthomas.edu).

## ON THE COVER

**Clockwise from left:** Micco Sampson and son, Nokose Sampson, demonstrate a traditional Native American hoop dance. Hmong-American gymnast Sunisa Lee. Ananya Dance Theatre Dancer and Artistic Associate Kealoha Ferreira.

PHOTOS BY THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCELEAVE



ThreeSixty's News Reporter Academy students took master classes from experts, including ThreeSixty Alumna Erianna Jiles, who taught a class on podcasting and writing for broadcast with APM Reports Associate Producer Alex Baumhardt.

## CONTENTS | SEPTEMBER

**ThreeSixty Alumni Update** features our newest scholar, Heidi Sanchez Avila, and tells us about Danielle Wong, who returned to the ThreeSixty classrooms this summer as a teacher. **Pages 6–7**

**ThreeSixty showcases** high school students who won Minnesota Newspaper Awards in the College Division. **Page 7**

**Twin Cities Native Lacrosse** reclaims the ancient tradition and teaches youth how to play the sport. **Page 11**

**Micco Sampson** is passing on the tradition of hoop dancing to the next generation. **Page 12**

**Tamales y Bicletas** empowers Latinx and immigrant communities through several projects, including a bike shop and an urban farm. **Page 13**

**House of Dance** is more than just a dance studio. It is a place where passion is born amidst hip-hop. **Page 14**

**Sunisa Lee** could make history as a top contender for the U.S. Women's Gymnastics Team at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Learn how she stays focused and continues her training locally. **Pages 15–18**

**Our Streets Minneapolis** works to encourage safe modes of transportation, while also bringing communities together to celebrate at Open Streets Minneapolis events. **Page 19**

**Girls on the Run** offers a running club for young girls, especially from low-income communities, and has helped thousands achieve big dreams. **Page 20**



Page 22  
Ananya Dance Theatre's "Sutrajāl: Revelations of Gossamer"

**Subversive Sirens** is making waves as body-positive, plus-size synchronized swimmers on a mission. **Page 23**

**College Essays** feature student stories on their parents, experiences with colorism and desires to become advocates after family crises. **Page 28**

# Contributors



**Paula Akakpo**  
Math and Science Academy



**Fran Aravena**  
Wayzata High School



**Peyton Burruss**  
Richfield High School



**Samantha Butterfield**  
Anoka High School



**Kaleah Phillips-Kelley Bynum**  
DeLaSalle High School



**Ilhaan Dhegadub**  
Park Center Senior High School



**Blake Ford**  
Twin Cities Academy



**Austin Kuo**  
Wayzata High School



**Josiah Lemm**  
Blaine High School



**Emil Liden**  
Minnetonka High School



**Evelyn Lillemoe**  
St. Paul Academy



**Jacqueline Martinez**  
Harding Senior High School



**Josie Morss**  
Lakeville North High School



**Evan Odegard**  
Nova Classical Academy



**Ayo Olagbaju**  
Patrick Henry High School



**Sam Stensgaard**  
Roseville Area High School



**Datelle Straub**  
Patrick Henry High School



**Asa Williams**  
Cherry Hill East High School



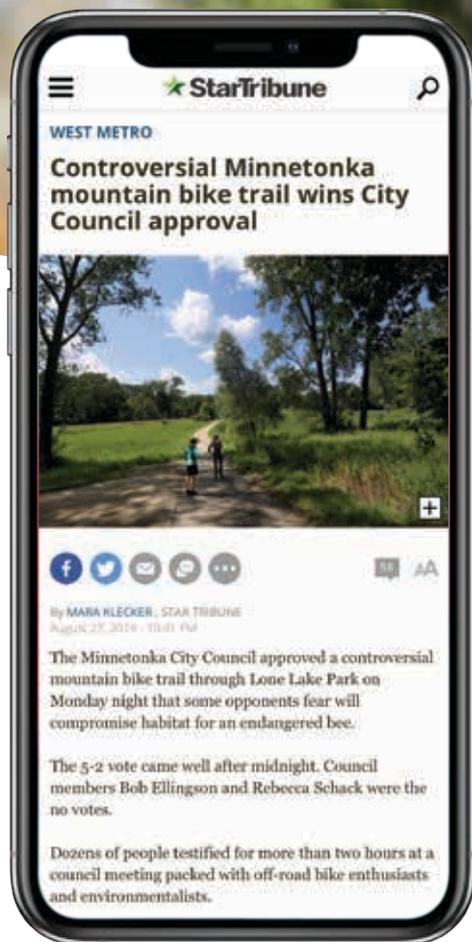
**Tristan Xiong**  
Great River School



**David Xu**  
Wayzata High School

# Your digital textbook.

Stay educated by staying in the know. Get the news that matters to you, and support local journalism from a source you can trust.



## College Student Special Offer

Enjoy 9 months of **Premium Digital Access** for just **\$10**

Includes the daily eEdition (a digital replica of the print edition), plus unlimited access to content on StarTribune.com. You'll also get two of our best newsletters: **Talkers** (a daily recap of what's hot) and **Best of the Week**.

*Act now to get this amazing college student only special offer!\**

[StarTribune.com/UST360](http://StarTribune.com/UST360)

\*This offer good for new digital student subscribers only.





THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

ThreeSixty Student Datelle Straub interviews Bird Coulter at Juxtaposition Arts for his MPR Radio Camp story. Straub's mentor Sam Choo, senior producer of "All Things Considered," joins him for support.

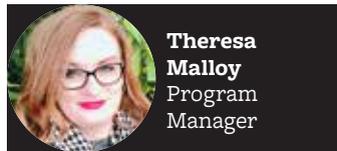


UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ThreeSixty TV Camp students work with professional mentors from local stations, including KSTP. Samira Mohamed's mentors, anchor Paul Folger and commercial producer Nick Tieri, assist with her interview.

## Editor's Note

THIS SUMMER, 80 participants joined ThreeSixty on the University of St. Thomas campus for College Essay Boot Camp, Digital Audio Storytelling Camp, News Reporter Academy, TV Broadcast Camp and Radio Broadcast Camp. This magazine represents and reflects their hard work and dedication, and for some, the start of important journalism careers. This issue's theme is health equity, with a focus on physical activity as a personal and cultural lifeline for under-represented communities. Our



**Theresa Malloy**  
Program Manager

main spread (pages 15 -18) on world-class gymnast Sunisa Lee offers a high-profile example of a story best told by one's peers. As leaders and changemakers themselves, ThreeSixty students relate to Lee's obstacles and remarkable accomplishments.

Our journalism summer camps

are volunteer driven. When I look at the stack of thank you notes on my desk left to write, I have to smile. We're grateful for everyone who helped make our camps possible. They all deserve praise and thanks for their support of student journalists. Many of these summer campers will continue to write stories in our school year News Team and Learning Labs, and on other advanced ThreeSixty assignments. Watch ThreeSixty students blossom as innovators, leaders and storytellers on ThreeSixty's Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook pages. We love showcasing student work.

Enjoy the magazine and be sure to share this with others!



UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

University of St. Thomas Senior Media Relations Manager Vineeta Sawkar coaches ThreeSixty Student Josie Morss on how to shoot a stand-up.



THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Radio Camp students are guided by eight professional mentors who work at Minnesota Public Radio News and American Public Media. The crew takes a picture in front of Juxtaposition Arts' mural before heading inside to interview sources.



THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Shooting on location at the Minnesota United's practice facility in Blaine, the ThreeSixty team stopped for a quick selfie. From left to right: WCCO Sports Anchor Norman Seawright III, ThreeSixty Student Datelle Straub, WCCO Photographer and ThreeSixty Alumnus Dymanh Chhoun, ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers and ThreeSixty Student Emil Liden.

# ThreeSixty Scholar Updates

EACH YEAR, HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholarship — a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Journalism, Digital Media Arts and Strategic Communication at the University of St. Thomas. Currently, there are four ThreeSixty Scholars attending St. Thomas.



**Zekriah Chaudhry**  
2018 ThreeSixty Scholar

As a freshman at St. Thomas, Chaudhry was a reporter with TommieMedia who covered major news stories on campus, including a bomb threat and evacuation. As part of his ongoing journalism opportunities with ThreeSixty, he filed stories from the March 2019 “Truth and Transformation: Changing Racial Narratives in Media” conference. Chaudhry was a reporter intern in the Pioneer Press newsroom during the summer of 2019. He will study abroad in Rome in the fall.



**Samantha HoangLong**  
2017 ThreeSixty Scholar

Following up on her 2018–19 school year internship as a reporter at MinnPost and her 2018 internship as the first communications and advocacy intern for the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, HoangLong joined KMSP Fox 9 as an Emma Bowen Foundation intern for the summer of 2019. For the 2019–20 school year, HoangLong jumps from reporter to director of TommieMedia at St. Thomas.



**Danielle Wong**  
2016 ThreeSixty Scholar

During the 2018–19 school year at St. Thomas, Wong served as junior class senator; worked with the university’s Marketing, Insights and Communications team; and performed with the women’s a cappella group, Cadenza. In spring 2019, she capped off her third year of college studying abroad at National Chengchi University and teaching English at a middle school in Taiwan. Learn about Wong’s work at ThreeSixty this summer on page 7.



**Amira Warren-Yearby**  
2015 ThreeSixty Scholar

Amira Warren-Yearby graduated from St. Thomas in May 2019 with a bachelor’s degree in communications and journalism. At St. Thomas, Warren-Yearby was president of the Black Empowerment Student Alliance and served as a board of trustees student liaison. She also studied TV, film and communications at Bond University in Queensland, Australia.

## Sanchez Avila Is 2019 ThreeSixty Scholar

HEIDI SANCHEZ AVILA is the 2019 ThreeSixty Scholar! She receives a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Journalism, Digital Media and Strategic Communication Arts at St. Thomas starting in the fall semester of 2019.

Each year, high school seniors who are graduates of a ThreeSixty summer journalism camp have completed the program requirement for the ThreeSixty Scholarship — valued at more than \$160,000 over four years.

“Being the winner of this scholarship is a huge deal not only to me but to my family,” Sanchez Avila said. “It proves that doing what you love and being creative can be rewarding. It also means my family and I don’t have to worry about the ‘what-if’ possibilities.”

Sanchez Avila, a graduate of Hiawatha Collegiate High School in Minneapolis, joined ThreeSixty in summer 2017. Since then, she has participated in College Essay



**Heidi Sanchez Avila**

Boot Camp, Rookie Journalist Camp and News Reporter Academy; ThreeSixty’s school year News Team; and Radio and TV summer camps. She also participated in the American Asian Journalists Association’s 2018 JCamp, a prestigious program for top high school students nationwide.

As a high school senior during the 2018–19 school year, Sanchez Avila attended her first Timberwolves games through a partnership with

the Star Tribune and Minnesota Timberwolves. She was one of three student journalists who sat courtside and had locker room access while covering the game. She interviewed players Karl-Anthony Towns and Tyus Jones, and her final story was published on the team’s website and mobile app.

“ThreeSixty for me has meant discovering a new passion, as well as being able to find out new life skills that not only apply to journalism but to the real world,” Sanchez Avila said. “Being able to say as a high school student I know a lot of amazing people who all have so many different stories, and I’m able to personally know them, has also been something I’m so grateful ThreeSixty has taught me.”

“Heidi has emerged as a leader in the program with so many younger students looking up to her. She is a brave storyteller whose college essay, ‘A Rainbow of Identities,’ continues to inspire,”



2019 ThreeSixty Scholar Heidi Sanchez Avila visited The New York Times offices this summer ahead of her freshman year at the University of St. Thomas College of Arts and Sciences.

ThreeSixty Journalism Program Manager Theresa Malloy said.

“She is a confident storyteller with a mission.”

## ThreeSixty Journalism Students, Partners Honored

THREE STUDENTS WERE honored at the Minnesota Newspaper Association Awards in January.

Two students earned the top recognition in their category, while another student placed second in the College Better Newspaper Contest, which is a college-level competition.

However, ThreeSixty students' work is eligible and competitive with college students.

The winners all wrote their stories as seniors in high school and are now attending universities across the state.

Anne Omer, ThreeSixty alumna and University of Minnesota student, earned a first-place honor as a columnist for her college essay, "Telling My Story, Without a Costume."

The judges wrote, "Anne Omer describes a life few of us begin to understand. The daughter of Ethiopian immigrants, her perspectives on adversity, heroism and fitting in at school has given her unique cultural insights.

Masterfully written."

Zekriah Chaudhry, 2018 ThreeSixty Scholar and current University of St. Thomas student, won first place for his sports story, "Ninjas in Training: American Ninja Warrior-Inspired Gym Creates Local Youth Program." The judges commented, "Cool topic and well written."

Loveisajoy Pha, who is a ThreeSixty alumna and transferred from St. Cloud State University to the University of Minnesota this fall, also won an award for her sports writing, placing second. Her winning feature is titled "More Than a Game: Off the Field, Dana Nelson Leads Super Bowl LII's Charitable Giving, Investing in Youth Health and Wellness." Judges commented, "Nice, crisp lede, and good mastery of AP style."

In May at the Minnesota Public Relations Society of America's Classics Awards Banquet, PRSA presented two awards to Padilla for its summer 2018 TV Broadcast Camp



ThreeSixty alumni Anne Omer, Zekriah Chaudhry and Loveisajoy Pha display their MNA College Better Newspaper Contest awards.

partnership with ThreeSixty and the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

Center for Prevention and Padilla are primary partners of ThreeSixty's TV camp, and the 2018 focus was shedding light on health equity issues. This is the second year straight Padilla won awards for the partnership. This year's awards were in the International/



Padilla's Leah Kondes and ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers accepted two PRSA awards for a partnership with Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield to tell health equity stories at the 2018 TV Broadcast Camp.

Multicultural Public Relations and Public Services Category.

ThreeSixty, Center for Prevention and Padilla partnered again in summer 2019 for News Reporter Academy and TV Broadcast Camp at the University of St. Thomas.

PHOTOS BY THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

## Life Journey Continues for 2016 Scholar



COURTESY DANIELLE WONG

ThreeSixty Scholar Danielle Wong spent her spring semester studying abroad in Taiwan.

### Danielle Wong spent the spring studying in Taiwan and returned to ThreeSixty this summer in a new role in front of the classroom.

DANIELLE WONG HAD an inkling she should pursue a youth journalism program while in high school. Her high school, Eastview High School in Apple Valley, had a program, but freshmen were not allowed to take part.

Like professional journalists are constantly asked to do, Wong kept digging. Her mother searched for available programs in the Twin Cities and ThreeSixty Journalism popped up immediately.

Sold.

A few years later, Wong was chosen as a ThreeSixty Scholar, which brought a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to the University of St. Thomas and an academic adventure that took her overseas.

"I received a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to St. Thomas under ThreeSixty, which is really,



Datelle Straub  
Patrick Henry  
High School

really, really important for me," Wong said. "Actually, I wouldn't have been able to afford to go to college, especially not here at St. Thomas."

Now a senior at St. Thomas, Wong is back where she began working with prospective high school journalists as a summer intern with the ThreeSixty program.

During her junior year, Wong studied abroad in Taiwan, where she took electives for her justice and peace studies minor. She said she sought out a country where she resembled the people, but the language barrier posed a challenge.

"I wanted to go back to a place where I look the same, but I may not exactly feel the same. It was very true when I went to Taiwan because, obviously, I look like everyone else there. I look Chinese or Eastern Asian," she said. "But I felt so different, and so out of it, for the first couple months, because I was this Chinese-looking girl that couldn't speak good enough Chinese to get by.

"I think that feeling, those looks of disappointment when people would look at me and try to talk to me in Chinese, and I'd be like, 'Oh, I can't say anything to you,' that really fueled me to be intentional about my Chinese learning while I was abroad and reconnect with this language that I so quickly pushed aside when I was growing up."

Wong spent time learning about international images and how countries perceive each other, especially from a career perspective.

"You need to look at the way that countries look at each other's news and consume each other's news," she said. "If you're an international journalist or international station, to be careful about the way that you present that country and your reports and everything. So that was a really good class.

**SCHOLAR** continued on page 29



**Inspiring  
the next  
generation  
of journalists  
to always  
go beyond  
the first  
question.**



We're proud to support the young, curious minds behind ThreeSixty Journalism. See how we build, grow and protect brands at [PadillaCo.com](http://PadillaCo.com).

**padilla**  
connect with purpose



A podcast that explores themes related to health, health equity and community.

iTunes | Spotify | Stitcher  
[centerforpreventionmn.com/podcast](http://centerforpreventionmn.com/podcast)



**BlueCross  
BlueShield**  
Minnesota

Center for  
Prevention

Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® of Minnesota and Blue Plus® are nonprofit independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

## Lights, Camera, Action at TV Camp

NINE THREESIXTY JOURNALISM students created their first video news packages during ThreeSixty's TV Broadcast Camp. Their stories focused on health equity, specifically physical activity in underrepresented communities.

Students' mentors were broadcast journalists from WCCO, FOX 9, KSTP, KARE 11, TPT, BMA Cable, the University of St. Thomas and the University of Minnesota Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

The camp is powered by a partnership with the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield and Padilla.

Watch their stories online at [threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/video-broadcast-camp/](https://threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/video-broadcast-camp/).

**At right:** TV campers Blessing Kasongoma and Emil Liden run the control room at St. Paul Neighborhood Network, where students practiced producing and hosting their own shows.



**Above:** Nine ThreeSixty students completed TV Broadcast Camp. From left to right (standing): Sophia Schach, Emil Liden, Josie Morss, Datelle Straub, Tristan Xiong, Samira Mohamed, Jacqueline Martinez, (kneeling): Blessing Kasongoma and Safiya Mohamed.



## First Digital Audio Storytelling Camp Is a Hit

LED BY ST. THOMAS Journalism, Digital Media Arts and Strategic Communication Assistant Professor Dr. Peter Gregg, Digital Audio Storytelling Camp gave eight students creative license to narrate, produce and share their personal essays through audio storytelling. The program was put on through a partnership with the YWCA Girls Inc. Eureka! program.

Listen to their stories at [threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/digital-audio-storytelling-camp/](https://threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/digital-audio-storytelling-camp/).



**Above:** Seven of the students who participated in Digital Audio Storytelling Camp are part of the YWCA Girls Inc. Eureka! program, which empowers young women considering STEM careers.



**Dr. Peter Gregg** teaches students the "art of Foley," which involved using everyday objects to make sound effects at Digital Audio Storytelling Camp.



ThreeSixty campers learned how to record in the field for their stories featuring the artists at North Minneapolis nonprofit Juxtaposition Arts.

Listen to student stories at [threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/radio-broadcast-camp/](https://threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/radio-broadcast-camp/).



## From MPR News, It's Radio Camp!

EIGHT STUDENTS HAD the opportunity of a lifetime to attend a weeklong workshop at Minnesota Public Radio News. Students worked with professional mentors to produce their first radio story about Juxtaposition Arts in North Minneapolis, with a few airing on the station. This master class is open to advanced ThreeSixty students who have completed News Reporter Academy.

# 20 Students Finish First Professional Assignment at News Reporter Academy



ThreeSixty's News Reporter Academy students ventured to the Star Tribune's newsroom in Minneapolis to learn more about how newspapers are thinking digitally.

PHOTOS BY THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM'S News Reporter Academy is a two-week course for advanced writers held at the University of St. Thomas College of Arts and Sciences St. Paul campus.

Students spent their first week exploring their role in the media landscape. They then had lessons with professionals relating to digital audio and visual storytelling, as well as emerging and engaging media and communications fields. The second week shifted gears as students worked on their first professional assignment published in the Pioneer Press and Star Tribune and in this ThreeSixty magazine.

The theme for News Reporter Academy, in partnership with the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, was health equity. The stories focused on physical activity in underrepresented communities.

Once those assignments were complete, students had a college exploration day, learning about the Journalism, Digital Media Arts and Strategic Communication program at St. Thomas. They also visited the University of Minnesota's Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication.



ThreeSixty Student Peyton Burruss explores virtual reality storytelling in the University of St. Thomas STELAR Lab.



At the camp celebration, ThreeSixty Student Evelyn Lillemoe shares her experience learning about Twin Cities Native Lacrosse.



First impressions count, and students learned how to make a good one with help from Star Tribune Columnist Neal Justin. Justin is seen here shaking hands with ThreeSixty reporter Samantha Butterfield.



ThreeSixty Alumnus Dymanh Chhoun, WCCO photographer, taught students about video production and photography.

# Native Lacrosse Mixes Competition and Ceremony

**John Hunter teaches his community about cultural traditions and healthy living.**

THEY DON'T WEAR protective gear; they have beautiful wooden sticks; their goal is simply a pole; and their rule book consists of only one idea: respect.

It is a far different game than the one John Hunter, founder of Twin Cities Native Lacrosse, learned in his youth. He has played modern lacrosse since he was 14, but when he realized that modern lacrosse was only accessible to a small minority of people and Native lacrosse was basically nonexistent in the Twin Cities, he decided that needed to change.

Hunter didn't play the traditional Native version of lacrosse until he was in his 30s. Growing up as part of the White Earth Nation of



**Evelyn Lillemoe**  
St. Paul Academy

Minnesota and Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, he had only heard stories of the game.

"I was raised in my culture, so although I knew that we had played the game, I just understood that there wasn't anybody really that was playing it right now," Hunter said.

Lacrosse started in Native communities in the Americas long before European colonizers came to the continent and took lacrosse for their own. Hunter started Twin Cities Native Lacrosse to revive the

cultural game and to make lacrosse more accessible to Native youth.

Prior Lake High School athlete Nina Polk learned about Twin Cities Native Lacrosse from a neighbor who was involved in the program and had spoken to her mother about it.

For Polk, one of the most unique parts of the program is that everyone on the team is Native. Polk has played volleyball and basketball and currently runs cross country. Most of the teams she has been a part of consisted of almost all white people.

"That was a big challenge for me, because I wasn't able to connect to a lot of people as well as on the Twin Cities team," Polk said.

Polk had been introduced to modern lacrosse first, but she was underwhelmed.

"That didn't catch my eye. I wasn't really interested," Polk said of the modern game. "But when they showed me the [woodlands]



A young lacrosse player with a traditional wooden stick looks for an open teammate.



PHOTOS COURTESY DAVID JOLLES

Prior Lake High School athlete Nina Polk plays the game with a traditional wooden lacrosse stick.

stick, then that's when I really started playing."

Obvious differences between the two versions include modern lacrosse's colorful sticks, protective gear, large goals in which to fling the ball and referees watching each player's every move. In Native lacrosse, there are no set rules; instead, they teach players to be respectful. Players are accountable to themselves rather than a referee.

"When you say there's no rules, it actually forces ... that mindfulness and that connectedness. It forces the two teams before the game to have a real discussion about, 'OK, this is a competitive game. We are going to have some understanding about what's too far,'" Hunter said.

The two games differ not just in equipment and rules, but also on a deeper level. Native lacrosse is full of tradition, meaning and ceremony. At Twin Cities Native Lacrosse, they play both Native and modern versions of lacrosse.

They have community games, which are a chance for the community to come together. Everyone who attends gets the opportunity to play. They also have competitive games, a chance to acknowledge others' talent, and even rare healing games, done to remind the players about the deeper meaning of the game.

"In even our most social games, there's always that kind of component of restoring balance or creating

this sense of healing," Hunter said.

Often the team gathers before the game, and athletes can share why they are playing the game, whether it is for someone who couldn't play, for someone who is sick or another reason.

"That game represents a chance to help others," Hunter said.

This idea of healing is also relevant in the program's focus on health for its athletes. In addition to exercise, the program always provides healthy food, often traditional Native foods, and water at games.

This focus on exercise and diet is especially relevant in the Native community. According to the Indian Health Service, Native people have experienced lower life expectancies and disproportionate disease burdens compared to other Americans. This difference is largely due to discrimination, lack of access to education and disproportionate poverty.

Hunter hopes this program will continue to grow in its commitment to community and wellness and enlighten athletes, while he continues to learn about this cultural tradition.

"I'm still learning about [the meaning behind Native lacrosse]," Hunter said. "I just got back from a trip talking with an elder. I asked, 'What is it that the players ... need to understand?' He just said, without offering much explanation, 'It's more than a game.'"

# The Hoop that Keeps Rolling — Passing on the Tradition of Hoop Dancing

**Micco Sampson passes on the Native American tradition of hoop dancing to his son and his community.**

MICCO SAMPSON NEVER doubted his son would learn the art of hoop dancing. A renowned hoop dancer in the Twin Cities, Sampson has started to pass on the tradition he strives to keep alive to his 4-year-old son, Nokose.

“I had hoops in his crib when he was born,” Sampson said.

Before he was able to show his son the art of hoop dancing, Sampson had to learn it himself.

Growing up in the Los Angeles area, Sampson and his family were one of the only Native American families in his community. Standing up for himself and his culture was something he had to do often.

“Part of standing up for ourselves was understanding and knowing who we were,” Sampson said.

Hoop dancing allowed him to do just that.

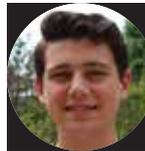
Hoop dancing is a form of Native American dance that incorporates the use of hoops. The modern variation of the dance started roughly 100 years ago. However, the hoop is an object that has been used for thousands of years and, it plays an important part in everyday life.

“We say that this hoop represents our world and everything in it,” Sampson said.

Incorporating western scientific teachings, Sampson explained the hoop’s greater significance.

“A circle is defined as a sheet with infinite size and infinite angles. That means it keeps on going,” Sampson said. “So, each time you slice that circle, you’ll find more and more sides. Hence, our explanation of we all have a part in the circle.”

Being able to teach valuable lessons through the art of hoop dancing is one of the reasons why



**Emil Liden**  
Minnetonka  
High School

Sampson feels it is important to carry on the tradition.

“Underlying within those dances are those lessons and those teachings of where they come from,” Sampson said.

One way Sampson is able to teach through his dancing is by repeating the phrase “heal it” instead of the more common “killed it” after each dance.

“In these moments right after we do something good, especially with our art, it should be something healing, rather than killing,” Sampson said.

Sampson enjoys teaching these lessons because he knows during much of history his people were prohibited from doing so. After the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Native Americans were finally given the right to practice their culture.

Today, Sampson carries on the tradition as a hoop dancing instructor at the American Indian Center in Minneapolis. The hoop dancing classes serve as a fun way for people of all ages to learn about Native American culture and engage in physical activity. Exercise like this is important for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

According to the American Diabetes Association, diabetes rates are 2.2 times higher in the Native American community. Sampson’s classes help address these issues with engaging physical activity.

“When you’re doing it, you



**Nokose Sampson, 4, shows off his own customized hoops with a little help from his dad, Micco Sampson.**



**Micco Sampson and son, Nokose Sampson, 4, demonstrate a traditional Native American hoop dance.**

realize that you’re getting a workout. Then it’s very empowering for participants,” Sampson said.

Deanna StandingCloud is a Minneapolis parent who knows Sampson’s classes are truly fun and empowering. Her son, Nigozis, takes hoop dancing classes with Micco at the American Indian Center. The classes not only offer her son a chance to engage in physical activity, but also an opportunity to connect with Native American culture.

“I think it’s important for the Native community to have access to the hoop dancing practice,” StandingCloud said. “Within this one hoop dancing lesson, there’s all these disciplines that can go into it.”

Parents like StandingCloud know of the importance of things like hoop dancing. From the lessons it teaches to the physical activity it requires, hoop dancing can empower communities like those of Native Americans in Minneapolis.

Through Micco Sampson’s work, the tradition of hoop dancing is being kept alive. Passing it on has become his work, and pass it on he will.

# Building Bicycles and Building Community

## Tamales y Bicicletas uses bicycles and urban farms to build community in Minneapolis.

FOR JOSE LUIS Villaseñor, everything and everyone is connected.

“I always like to say we are all indigenous from somewhere,” Villaseñor said. “Community gives us an opportunity to talk about what we have in common.”

The son of Mexican immigrants, Villaseñor has spent 15 years working with homeless youth, Latinx students and immigrant families. In conversations with the community, he found a need for job security and healthy, affordable food access. This all inspired him to search for an inclusive way to highlight Latinx culture. The result: Tamales y Bicicletas.

According to its mission, Tamales y Bicicletas is dedicated to strengthening Latinx and immigrant communities through bike projects, green farming, cultural empowerment and environmental justice. Today, two of the nonprofit’s projects are an urban farm and a bike shop.

For the urban farm, Tamales y Bicicletas gathers community



**Blake Ford**  
Twin Cities  
Academy

members in late winter to discuss what foods to plant in spring. When spring arrives, community members help put the seeds into the ground. However, there’s a bigger picture.

“We also talk about how food is not just food, but it’s also a medicine,” Villaseñor said. “So not only do we have these conversations within our own communities, but we also try to educate people outside of the community, about the importance of supporting urban farms and ... to support initiatives led by people of color in their communities.”

Ashley O’Neill Prado, community garden coordinator for Tamales y Bicicletas, emphasized that a community garden’s purpose extends beyond food production.

“The name Tamales y Bicicletas is actually kind of a symbolism



COURTESY NEVADA LITTLEWOLF

**Tamales y Bicicletas’ Solution to Pollution Bike Tour in Minneapolis’ East Phillips neighborhood, an educational bike tour about environmental justice on Earth Day.**

for precolonial food and taking the power back to make our own food,” Prado said. “So in indigenous cultures, there’s a lot of different ways to make tamales, but those recipes and tamales existed before the colonizers came. That’s why it’s called Tamales y Bicicletas because [we’re] thinking back to pre-colonial food and how we’re trying to refine that.”

As for the bike shop, Villaseñor said when he was younger, he and his family couldn’t afford a bike for him. So, he would find bikes that others threw away, fix them and ride them. Tamales y Bicicletas’ bike

shop pays homage to that.

“We literally fix people’s bikes, give away bikes, and encourage youth and young adults to come in and learn about basic bike repair,” Villaseñor said.

Getting to this level with a bike shop, urban farm and other opportunities, though, was challenging.

“(It) is very rare there are organizations and projects that are led by those that are directly affected by food inequities and environmental inequities,” Villaseñor said. “So it was very difficult for people to really believe the vision.”

Tamales y Bicicletas has

volunteering opportunities every other Friday and Saturday, as well as projects like the Urban Farm Institute. The Urban Farm Institute’s main purpose is to educate Latinx and other marginalized youth and their families about urban farming and sustainability to create greater access to healthy foods and practices.

Over the summer, Tamales y Bicicletas is doing a Northside food justice bike tour with Appetite for Change, Oak Park Center and other community organizations to highlight the need for food security in North Minneapolis.

The goal of Tamales y Bicicletas is to be a place where Latinx and other marginalized communities can come together through good food and outdoor activities. With Villaseñor’s clear passion, there’s nothing stopping this nonprofit from pedaling on forward.

“It is something that comes from my heart,” Villaseñor said. “When I talk to young folks, it may sound cheesy, but I think it’s important to follow your heart. A lot of this work that I’ve done in my community around issues of food security, environmental justice, is something that gives me hope, and place to land when things become difficult in the political climate or in our communities.”

## How Gardens and Bicycles Are Changing a Community

### Jose Luis Villaseñor’s childhood inspired him to make change in his community.



**Austin Kuo**  
Wayzata  
High School

ON EAST LAKE Street in Minneapolis sits an easily missed shop built on struggle and hard work.

The shop is just one outreach of the nonprofit Tamales y Bicicletas. Run by Jose Luis Villaseñor, the son

of Mexican immigrants who has spent the last 15 years working with homeless youth, Latinx students and immigrant families, Tamales y Bicicletas was created to fulfill the needs of underserved communities in Phillips area of Minneapolis, serving Midtown, East Phillips and West Phillips neighborhoods. The organization focuses on empowerment and cultural traditions and uses food and bicycles as teaching and community engagement tools.

“It’s proven that biking contributes to . . . creating balanced core muscles in your body. That allows you to have an opportunity to reflect and be physically active to reduce stress,” Villaseñor said. “I always found . . . growing up, bicycling and being in nature . . . working with my father in his garden, [offered] opportunities to reflect on life.”

Villaseñor’s childhood is a continual influence on Tamales y Bicicletas.

“I grew up having to take bikes away,” he said, “and I would take them and fix them up, and make them rideable, [then] give them to my friends . . . or have a new bike because I found someone throwing

a bike away.”

Poverty drove Villaseñor to learn about bike repair. Now, he uses it to enrich the community by teaching youth about bike repair, as well as providing bikes to community members in need.

While access to working bicycles is an important part of healthier communities, garden-fresh food provides another healthy option. Tamales y Bicicletas has an urban farm to teach young community members traditional crop strategies geared towards eating healthy foods and promoting healthier lifestyles. Often lower-income communities do not have easy access to the comforts of healthy eating. Tamales **BICYCLES** *continued on page 14*



House of Dance Owner Jake Riley shows off his breakdancing skills.

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCEAVE



COURTESY JAKE RILEY

Jake Riley hosting House of Dance's first fall showcase in fall 2018 at the Edina High School Fick Auditorium

# Living the Dream: How Hip-Hop Became His Business

## Minnesota's first hip-hop studio brings people together in an active, inclusive environment.

JAKE RILEY STARTED dancing 15 years ago and opened House of Dance, Minnesota's first studio with a focus entirely on teaching hip-hop styles. By opening the Hopkins studio in 2014, Riley achieved one of his dreams.

Ever since Riley started dancing, he felt that the hip-hop community needed to grow and Minnesota needed a good hip-hop dancing studio.

"In 2014, there were people



**David Xu**  
Wayzata High School

teaching at other studios, where their main styles were tap, jazz, ballet and maybe modern," Riley said. "But why can't we have a studio that's dedicated to hip-hop?"

This studio was a place for him to build a hip-hop community and

make dancing an inviting and engaging activity.

Forming a good community is one of Riley's primary goals. Like many people, he enjoys being around other people with similar passions.

Riley saw that hip-hop broke down many boundaries. He knew that dancing could bring a diverse group of people together.

"When I was in high school, Asian people sat with the Asian people, and white people sat with

the white people, and hip-hop broke those barriers down," he said. "It breaks those gender, race, ethnicity, income, where you're from, religion — all those boundaries away. I don't really care about any of that when we're dancing together. I think that's powerful."

Riley strives to make House of Dance a safe and welcoming place.

"We treat everybody the same, whether it's our student who's been with us for five years, or students going to come in tonight for the first time," he said.

Throughout the years, Riley saw many changes in the students who went through his lessons. He is confident that he has made a big impact on their lives. He talked about a student who had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

"Long story short, five years later, he is the star player on the soccer team," Riley said. "He still has that same energy, but he knows how to focus his natural ability and energy."

Riley believes that his lessons played a part in the growth of that student.

"He told me so, and his parents told me," Riley said.

This is just one of the many success stories that Riley has encountered.

"We've gotten multiple emails like this where people will say, 'I just

want to thank you because before this, my son or my daughter was getting bullied at school,' or, 'My son never, ever was open in public settings. My son was so shy, he never (wanted) to do any activity. Now he's finally found an activity that he loves to do,'" Riley said.

Forming close relationships is an important part of House of Dance. Riley connects with his students and teaches them much more than just dancing.

"We're so close to the parents that if I find out that he's messing up in school, or when kids miss school, or if one of our students is disrespected, or they're bullying a kid, I'll have a sit-down life talk with them. It's bigger than dance," he said.

Students and parents appreciate Riley's efforts to form a tight community. Mother Metallica Ponce had trouble finding a good place for her son to learn to dance. She was delighted when she discovered House of Dance.

"Jake has taken us in like family and we really appreciate it," Ponce said.

After many years, Riley is finally content with the hip-hop community. He is optimistic for the future of hip-hop and hopes more young people will take action and change things they aren't happy with.

### BICYCLES from page 13

y Bicletas wants to give them that opportunity; not to mention gardening can be a very fun learning experience.

"In college . . . there were opportunities to work on a local farm, so I started doing that. And I was an education intern there. It's actually a really fun job," said Ashley O'Neill Prado,

Tamales y Bicletas' urban farm coordinator.

In the next five years, Tamales y Bicletas hopes to expand and help more people.

"[We are] trying to be more innovative and [connect] with communities around sustainable transportation and food justice," Prado said. "I'm also really excited that we're working on a project to get a new greenhouse."

Tamales y Bicletas is a reflection of Villaseñor's childhood experiences.

"I was able to turn a negative into a positive growing up poor," he said.

Through bikes, gardens and other community projects, the organization helps others turn their lives in a more positive direction. One thing is for certain: The hard work of

Villaseñor and his team is not overlooked within the community.

"I think the thank you is like the call I got at 11:30 last night saying, 'Hey, can you fix my bike?'" Villaseñor said. "Or we're feeding community members organic vegetables, and they enjoy it. You know, that's the way we get a thank you."

# Sunisa Lee

THE ROAD TO THE OLYMPICS  
BY THE NUMBERS

6

Age Sunisa Lee  
started gymnastics

10

Years Sunisa Lee  
has been training  
professionally

11,091

Number of athletes  
expected to participate  
in 2020 Olympics  
in Tokyo

SOURCES: USA GYMNASTICS,  
JESS GRABA, SUNISA LEE, THE INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

1964

The last time  
the Olympics were  
held in Tokyo

# Olympic Hopeful

*Minnesotans on the current US Women's Gymnastics Team*



1984

*The last time a Minnesotan represented the U.S. in women's gymnastics at the Olympics*

2020

*Olympics in Tokyo, where Sunisa could become the first Hmong-American Olympian*



**Clockwise from left: Sunisa Lee gives an interview to an Italian media outlet following a competition in Italy.** COURTESY JESS GRABA. **Sunisa Lee with her coach, Jess Graba, after a competition in Italy.** COURTESY JESS GRABA. **Sunisa Lee and her Team USA teammates sign autographs at a competition in Italy.** COURTESY JESS GRABA

# Olympic Hopeful Sunisa Lee Leaps Toward Historic Moment for Hmong-American Community

## Sunisa Lee could make history at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo as the first Hmong-American Olympian.

BEFORE SUNISA LEE started lessons, everyone urged her parents to put her in gymnastics. At a young age she was already able to do flips and handsprings, impressing family and friends. She learned new skills either on her own or by watching YouTube videos.

Today, after 10 years of professional training, Sunisa Lee is on track to become the first Hmong-American Olympic gymnast. If she makes it to Tokyo next summer, she'll be the first Minnesotan to compete on the women's



**Evan Odegard**  
Nova Classical Academy

gymnastics team in the Olympics since 1984.

"I think all the Hmong community is excited for that," said Yeev Thoj, Sunisa Lee's mother. "You know, she will be the first one if she makes it."

Thoj and her husband, John Lee, put Sunisa Lee in gymnastics when

she was 6 years old. At the time, gymnastics was not a popular sport in the Hmong community.

"I think that Sunisa was probably one of the first," Thoj said.

Once Sunisa Lee joined gymnastics, she quickly climbed to the top, accelerating quickly through levels and making her way toward becoming an elite gymnast. Now, as part of the National Team, she is setting her sights on the Olympics.

"It's very nerve-racking," Lee said. "I feel like there's a lot of pressure, but I'm really excited for what next year has in store for me."

The next year of her career may be historic. To make it to Tokyo in 2020, Lee will have to stay healthy and keep working hard. Achieving her goal will be worth all her hard work.

"It's a huge thing in the Hmong community if one of our own makes

it," Thoj said.

The importance of Sunisa Lee's story has given her solid support from her community, both financially and emotionally. She frequently receives messages of support. People ask her for pictures and autographs. Friends and family pitch in at fundraisers run by her parents.

"They've supported me through it all," Sunisa Lee said. "I just feel like I have to do good for them."

Being a role model comes with pressure as well.

"It's actually kind of scary," Sunisa Lee said. "I feel like I just have to be perfect. Everyone expects me to make the Olympics and when people are always telling me that it's really nerve-racking."

Even with the pressure of representing her community, Sunisa Lee excels at her sport. The support she

gets works to push her closer to her Olympic dream.

"People will text me all the time and be like, 'You're such an inspiration,'" Sunisa Lee said. "I think it's really cool that I can inspire people to want to be better and to keep pushing themselves."

"There are a lot of people who look up to her," Thoj said. "There are a lot of girls who go to the gym to be like her."

As she works toward the Olympics, Sunisa Lee will show the world what she can do and continue to be a role model for young gymnasts.

Sunisa Lee continues to practice at Midwest Gymnastics six days a week, six to eight hours a day. Her hard work is leading her toward a monumental moment for a community that she inspires and whose support she will never forget.



3

Number of times  
the US Women's  
Gymnastics Team has  
won Olympic Gold



1996

The first time the  
US Women's Gymnastics  
Team won Olympic gold



**Clockwise from left:** Sunisa Lee with teammate Emma Malabuyo at a competition in Italy. COURTESY JESS GRABA. **Sunisa Lee performs her floor routine.** COURTESY JOHN LEE. **Sunisa Lee with her mom, Yeev Thoj.** THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE. **Sunisa Lee, along with the rest of Team USA, train for a competition in Italy.** COURTESY JESS GRABA

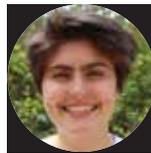
# Balancing Life as an Olympic Hopeful and Teenager

**Sunisa Lee is training for the Olympics, but she is still a teenager who enjoys spending time with her friends and family.**

**BOLD. GRACEFUL. POISED.**

Successful. Minnesota elite gymnast Sunisa Lee's moves are fueled by passion and drive that keep viewers hooked on her performances. Training locally and only 16 years old, she is well on her way to becoming the first Hmong-American gymnast to compete in the Olympics, setting her sights on the 2020 Summer Olympics.

Lee began her gymnastics career at the age of 6 but spoke passionately about how she started out by watching YouTube videos at



**Fran Aravena**  
Wayzata High School

home before trying out at Midwest Gymnastics with a friend. Lee recalls how her parents and family were always supportive of her dream of being a gymnast, even if they did not completely understand at first.

"When I was younger, I was (practicing) flipping, and I asked

my dad to make me (a) beam. So he took two wooden planks and made a beam," Lee said. "I thought it was the coolest thing ever! I did backflips on it all the time. That's when I first started learning."

Jess Graba is currently Lee's head coach and the owner of Midwest Gymnastics, where she trains. He said he immediately noticed a spark in her when she was 6 and first began attending the gym. Even though she started three years later than most of her peers, she was able to quickly catch up.

Lee said gymnastics became serious for her when she was 9 after participating in her first elite competition. She said that is when gymnastics became complicated, but she was always confident in her skills.

"Usually when I get there (to the venue), I eat breakfast. Then I have a whole playlist I listen to,

and it just pumps me up," Lee said. "... and then it usually ends up in a dance party and a concert."

Lee's first national competition was the 2015 Women's Junior Olympics. Since then she has participated in various national competitions, most notably the 2018 U.S. Gymnastics Championships. She has placed first in at least one event in all her international meets since 2017.

Although Lee is an elite athlete on the road to competing in the Olympics, she still tries to balance that with being a normal teenager. It's not always easy. She currently attends South St. Paul Secondary, which she says is very supportive of her career and is always there to help her succeed academically. However, because of her fame, Lee sometimes struggles to connect with her fellow classmates.

She spoke about how most of her friends are from gymnastics groups because they understand each other better. Because they do not live in the same area, she tries to video chat with them every night.

Lee shared how close she is with her five siblings because they can

get her mind off gymnastics.

"We always go to the mall because I don't want to stay home. I'm always home or I'm always at practice. It's OK (to) just go do something. I really love it because I don't think about gymnastics then."

Even though Minnesota is not a top state for aspiring gymnastic competitors, Lee continues to train here because of her strong bond with her coach. Her 9-year-old sister is also currently training at Midwest Gymnastics. Lee spoke fondly about her and said she loves watching her show off new skills.

"I think I've inspired a lot of gymnasts or a lot of girls to start being in gymnastics, at least at my gym a little bit," she said. "Sometimes my dad will be like, 'Oh yeah, those parents over there were talking to me about how your daughter inspired (ours) to come here and how much they love her.'"

Even if the Olympics are not in her future, Lee has big dreams to give back to the gymnastics community in St. Paul. She hopes to open her own gym in St. Paul and continue to inspire young women to join the sport she loves.



206

Number of countries expected to participate in Tokyo 2020

78,985

Tons of recycled electronics collected to create medals for Tokyo 2020



**Clockwise from left:** Sunisa Lee stands on the all-around podium at a competition in Italy. COURTESY JESS GRABA. Coach Jess Graba and gymnast Sunisa Lee. THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE. Sunisa Lee performs her balance beam routine. COURTESY JOHN LEE. Sunisa Lee poses with her teammates and their medals. COURTESY JOHN LEE.

## Lee and Graba: A Winning Combination

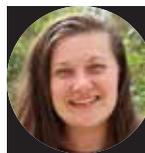
**Coach Jess Graba has guided Olympic hopeful Sunisa Lee to the top of the gymnastics world.**

BEHIND EVERY ELITE athlete is a devoted coach. For Sunisa Lee, Jess Graba is that coach.

Graba, who has coached many elite gymnasts, saw a spark in Lee when she was just 6 years old. Ten years later, she's on track for the 2020 Olympics.

"First time I saw her, I saw that she was good," Graba said.

She stood out amongst other gymnasts as being extremely



**Josie Morss**  
Lakeville North High School

talented, working hard, having a good attitude about failure and not being afraid to try again, Graba said. Preparing for failure is especially important in gymnastics.

"She has a lot of talent," Graba

said. "That combined with a really good attitude. She works really hard. It's really hard to find someone that works extremely hard and can take a lot of failure and has enough talent to compete at that level."

"A lot of times you fail. At least in our sport we're failing 95 percent of the time," said Graba, a former gymnast who opened Midwest Gymnastics in 1995.

Gymnasts often spend hours attempting to perfect one specific skill. People watching on TV are wowed by the sheer skill and the talent they possess, but behind the scenes it takes patience, perseverance and commitment to master such feats.

Gymnastics quickly took over Lee's life, and she continued to succeed as she climbed to the top.

"He's really motivating, and he helps me get through a lot of stuff," Lee said. "We argue over gymnastics."

Graba and Lee travel extensively all over the world and will possibly travel to the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

It would be a first for both, but it is not their main focus.

Graba works hard to instill that learning the skills is more important than winning the competition to keep Lee on an even keel.

"We don't try to celebrate too much because it's not about the victory all the time," Graba said. "A lot of times it's about the process. It's about the daily grind."

Graba, while highlighting the importance of mastering the skills, allows Lee to express herself in her routine. Individuality is important for teenagers and especially

athletes.

"We try to give her as much freedom as we can," Graba said. "What she wants to do with her expression, what she wants to do with her routines and that sort of stuff so that she has a lot of ownership of it."

Minnesota, although not historically known for its elite gymnasts, has progressed within the past few years.

Last year, the national team featured two gymnasts from Minnesota, which is impressive for a team with only 12 girls.

Lee is competing for the chance of a lifetime that few gymnasts achieve. She competed in the U.S. Championships Aug. 8 - 11. She placed second in the all-around, and is continuing her journey toward the Olympics. Win or lose, Graba will always be by her side.

# Our Streets Minneapolis Gives Communities a Lift

## Nonprofit works to include voices of underrepresented communities in transportation decisions in the Twin Cities.

LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES IN Minneapolis are used to being divided by streets running through them. A street can be a barrier few want to cross. But a transportation advocacy group wants to use the streets to unite people.

Our Streets Minneapolis is a nonprofit geared toward encouraging biking, walking and rolling in Minneapolis. What sets it apart from other community programs?

“I think our focus on marginalized people really makes us different,” Executive Director Ashwat Narayanan said.

Founded nine years ago as the Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition, the focus of the nonprofit has shifted



**Sam Stensgaard**  
Roseville Area High School

to a goal of community outreach and involvement using alternative forms of transportation. The nonprofit hopes to give historically underrepresented groups a voice in a process that often concerns them, but one they haven't been able to control.

Some in Minneapolis haven't heard of Our Streets, but they probably have heard about the proposed 800-car ramp that was going to be built for the Minneapolis

Federal Reserve building. Our Streets had a big part to play in the Planning Commission rejecting the ramp proposal.

Narayanan was firm as he described how the ramp would hurt the city. More parking and more people driving in a particular area would interfere with Minneapolis' plan to reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2040. That plan requires driving in the city to be reduced by 37 percent.

“Every time someone drives a car, it's not just them who pay for gas,” Narayanan said. “It's society that pays for a lot of externalities that come from driving a car.”

Narayanan is passionate about his work. His eyes light up as he goes over certain projects and events, or when he talks about what inspired him to join. He explained that he saw the consequences of poor transportation in his home country of India.

“I've seen people trying to just get to work on very, very **LIFT** continued on page 21



Members of Our Streets' Bicycle Connectors program.

COURTESY CINDY YUE



Our Streets Minneapolis Executive Director Ashwat Narayanan.

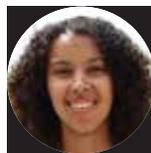
THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE

# Paving the Way to Better Communities

## Our Streets Minneapolis is dedicated to improving transportation throughout Minneapolis.

SOME PEOPLE ACROSS Minneapolis are not able to access safe modes of transportation. Our Streets Minneapolis is a nonprofit organization that encourages safe modes of transportation to improve community building. The group wants people to see their streets as more than somewhere to drive a car.

“Cities should be for people and not just for cars,” said Ashwat



**Peyton Burruss**  
Richfield High School

Narayanan, the executive director of Our Streets Minneapolis.

Our Streets Minneapolis creates a community for minority groups around alternative forms of

transportation, including biking, walking and rolling. Their purpose is to make streets better for people. They do this by hosting volunteer groups, by getting minority voices to present their opinions and by hosting events called Open Streets Minneapolis.

The history of transportation has hurt minority groups.

“Transportation essentially has been a tool to perpetuate racism and segregation,” Narayanan said.

He said interstates that were built years ago destroyed certain communities and created a divide.

Minority groups, including black, Latinx and indigenous communities, still have not recovered from those decisions that were made years ago. Transportation systems affect how people can access jobs and whether they are able to walk safely on their streets. The minority communities are unable to

have that access, Narayanan said. Now, Our Streets is trying to use transportation as a connector for different communities.

Our Streets wants to serve Minneapolis communities that have historically been left out and make their voices heard by the city and the state.

One of Our Streets' initiatives is the Bicycle Connectors program, which provides financial support to other local organizations working to provide minority communities with bikes. They also work to inform underrepresented groups of transportation plans and try to make their voices part of the decision-making process.

Our Streets has formed relationships with many members of the Minneapolis City Council. Past members of the Our Streets board are now members of the council, including Minneapolis City Council

President Lisa Bender. These relationships ensure that people in power are hearing minority voices.

Narayanan personally reaches out to individuals in the community. He connects with them to understand their perspective and what they want from transportation systems. Building those personal relationships is a key component to the organization.

“I'd say it's the No. 1 thing,” Narayanan said.

Our Streets hosts a seven-part community event over the course of the summer called Open Streets Minneapolis. The first 2019 event was on June 2 on Lyndale Avenue. Streets in neighborhoods with heavy traffic are blocked off and filled with vendors and artists of different cultures to encourage people to see their streets as more than somewhere to park their cars, Narayanan **OUR STREETS** continued on page 20



THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE

Girls on the Run Twin Cities  
Executive Director Mary Uran.

COURTESY REBECCA STUDIOS

Girls on the Run participants prepare to start the annual 5K.



COURTESY REBECCA STUDIOS

Kaylina Smith, recipient of the  
first Girls on the Run Star Power  
Alumnae Award

## Local Group Changes Thousands of Young Girls' Lives

**Girls on the Run Twin Cities invites girls from every community and background to build self-confidence and find friendships through running.**

IN COMMUNITIES AROUND the Twin Cities, thousands of young girls face substantial difficulties due to a lack of physical activity. According to the group Active Living Research, studies have shown that lower-income groups and racial and ethnic minorities have limited access to safe, well-maintained parks and recreational facilities.

Ilhaan  
Dhegadub  
Park Center  
Senior High  
School

In addition, children from low-income backgrounds are statistically more likely to live in neighborhoods with higher crime rates. These factors have

contributed to higher rates of obesity and low exercise rates in children of these communities.

However, Girls on the Run is changing that narrative for countless young girls.

Mary Uran, executive director and co-founder of the Girls on the Run's Twin Cities chapter, first discovered the program in Washington, D.C., 12 years ago. After moving to the Twin Cities to finish her master's in public health at the University of Minnesota, she was shocked there was no local Girls on the Run council.

She saw that young girls in the Twin Cities faced the same issues with lack of exercise as those in D.C. Since Uran started the local chapter in 2012, the program has

grown from 24 members to more than 3,000.

The program has a 10-week season and is offered to girls in third through eighth grades. During the season, running is used to inspire and motivate young girls and encourage lifelong health and fitness. Throughout the season, the young girls also train for a 5K, which they run at the end of the season with a family member or friend of their choice.

The program aims to include girls from all different communities, backgrounds and family incomes. Despite some discomfort in the Somali community with girls exercising outdoors, Uran emphasized how Girls on the Run shows girls from the community "they're welcome, whether through the images that we use, or even how we speak to what the program is about."

According to Uran, Girls on the Run works hard to remove any barriers to access. The group does not restrict a girl from joining due to financial difficulties. Over half of their members participate in the program with some form of financial assistance. Running equipment, translated materials and help with logistics such as transportation are available to those who need it.

Girls on the Run also supports their students in other ways. Kaylina Smith is a recent high school graduate who was awarded the group's first Star Power Alumnae Award. She first participated in Girls on the Run in fifth grade at Edgerton Elementary in Maplewood. The program made a lasting impression on her.

"It showed me how important it is to work hard to reach your goals and make dreams become a reality," Smith said at the ceremony. She will be attending Minnesota State University Moorhead this fall.

**OUR STREETS** from page 19 said. Our Streets removes the cars and replaces the open space with dancing, face painting and fun activities. It gets its funding for events from donations. Open Streets encourages walking and biking through neighborhoods and rethinking the way people view streets.

There are many ways to be involved with transportation in communities, but it's most important to understand how the decision-making process works and to reach out to local officials. It is also important to stand in during City Council meetings and voice what change should be made.

Our Streets always looks for more

volunteers. They have volunteer groups called the Pedestrian Work Group and the Downtown Bikeways Work Group. They also ask for volunteers during Open Streets events.

The organization recognizes that change starts with people. This community focus is what makes a difference. Those interested in taking part or donating can visit its website at

[ourstreetsmpls.org](http://ourstreetsmpls.org).

In the future, Narayanan wants Minneapolis to be more equitable for other modes of transportation. He wants to shift the balance from cars to biking or walking.

"We think that the real change comes from if you can build a strong community," Narayanan said.

# Bringing Hip-Hop to Hopkins

**A hip-hop studio is breaking boundaries and expectations alike.**

MOST PEOPLE AS kids have no idea what they want to do when they grow up. This wasn't the case for Jake Riley, current studio owner and director of the House of Dance, a hip-hop breakdancing studio in the Twin Cities.

Riley discovered hip-hop at an early age.

"When I was 12 years old, I went to a friend's birthday party where they were breakdancing," Riley said. "A little while later I went to a middle school talent show, and I saw the same kid and his friends doing breakdancing, and I was like, 'That is really cool.'"

Riley had just found his passion.

Riley said before breakdancing, he was somewhat lost as a person and troubled. He said finding breakdancing was a real turning point in his life.

"Breaking gave me something productive to do and gave me a new set of friends," Riley said. "A set of diverse friends that I could do a shared activity with that was healthy and engaging."

Over the next few years of his life, Riley continued strengthening his skills and friendships in break



**Josiah Lemm**  
Blaine High School

dancing, competing in places across the United States, including Miami, San Diego and Houston.

In August 2014, Riley opened House of Dance in Hopkins, which, according to their website, is Minnesota's first studio dedicated to hip-hop.

Seeing the growth of the studio in the two years after House of Dance opened, Riley realized the studio was an actual business opportunity and something he could build his life around. In 2016, Riley went to North Hennepin Community College to get his associate degree in business administration, along with a certificate in entrepreneurship, to help run House of Dance.

Since opening in 2014, the studio has grown at a tremendous pace.

In 2014, House of Dance had six students and six classes. Now the studio has almost 300 students and 35 classes.

**LIFT** from page 19 overcrowded trains, for example," he said. "I've seen, you know, people get hit by cars and people just not being able to get where they need to go because of a lack of access to transportation."

This inspired him to look at opportunities beyond his study of transportation engineering and to look at the human element of transportation - how to build community.

Our Streets Minneapolis has gained increased legitimacy with

city government. Many former members of Our Streets have gone on to join government positions in Minneapolis.

"Council President Lisa Bender, for example, was on the board of Our Streets," Narayanan said. "And Park Board Commissioner LaTrisha Vetaw was the president of our board, so we've been pretty influential in making sure that people who support our mission also have a political stage to be able to make political decisions, as well."

How can you get involved in



Breakdancing student Sam Ohl freezes after a head spin during House of Dance's summer camp last year.

PHOTOS COURTESY JAKE RILEY



Instructor David Pellinen takes attendance with House of Dance's Hip Hop 4 Tots (ages 3-5) students.

Riley said one of House of Dance's goals is to provide an environment to learn hip-hop that wasn't around when he was a kid. "When I started breakdancing there wasn't a studio specifically for learning hip-hop," he

said. "There was maybe one breakdancing event a year, and it was very poorly organized."

He said another of House of Dance's goals goes hand-in-hand with the previous goal.

"Part of our goal is to break (down) negative misconceptions about hip-hop. So here, come in, look; we're going to be on time, we're going to be super professional," he said. "And we're going to teach your son or daughter a skill."

The main thing Riley drove home was the idea of finding your passion in life and doing what makes you happy.

"I don't even know what day it is. Tuesdays feel like Saturdays to me," he said. "I don't dread Mondays anymore because I love what I do."

He encourages everyone to find the passion that makes them spark. For Riley, it's hip-hop.

"Follow your dreams," he tells students. "That's what I'm really trying to say. There's no way you can live your dreams without following your passion."

your own community? Narayanan recommends gaining a deeper understanding of how transportation decision-making happens and then reaching out to your elected officials. Volunteering is also a good way to get a better understanding of the issues your community faces.

Regardless of what we do in our own communities, Our Streets continues to grow, Narayanan said. Our Streets members will step back for a while to figure out their next big cause. But once they're invested, they'll go full speed.



An Our Streets Open Streets event on Lyndale Avenue in Minneapolis earlier this year.

COURTESY HEATHER HANNIG

# Social Justice Unites Dancers and Audiences

**The dancers at Ananya Dance Theatre tell stories of social justice that invite the audience into their performances.**

KEALOHA FERREIRA LOOKED around the University of St. Thomas campus, scanning for the perfect place to pose for photos. She was immediately drawn to the fountain. She took off her shoes and improvised in the fountain. She moved very slowly, each step deliberate, every move with a purpose.

Ferreira has been dancing with the Ananya Dance Theatre since 2013. The company is known for its powerful social justice messages portrayed through dance.

She was cast in a show by Ananya Chatterjea, who was a



**Samantha Butterfield**  
Anoka High School

professor of dance at the University of Minnesota at the time. She was then invited to apprentice with the studio and is now an artistic associate, dancer and co-leader of the Shawngram Institute.

“I actually had a really difficult time deciding to join the company because it was so different, the form, its philosophy. But, as much

as I recognize its difference, I also recognize its depth,” Ferreira said. “There was something about the depth of the work that I was actually pretty afraid (of).”

She eventually decided to join because she recognized how important and beautiful the Ananya Dance Theatre’s work is.

Ferreira enjoys incorporating social justice into her dance. One example is a piece called “Roktim: Nurture Incarnadine” that the studio put on in 2015. It was part of a multiyear series entitled “Work Women Do.” Roktim was specifically focused on loving land, and Ferreira said she felt especially connected to stories from Hawaii, because that’s where she’s from.

“It was the first time that I was beginning to develop this understanding of how to bring myself into this work, and how I experience



**Ananya Dance Theatre Dancer and Artistic Associate Kealoha Ferreira.**

how this work holds space for all of us to bring our full selves into it and for all of our full selves to exist together.”

Ferreira said she hopes the audience becomes inspired and connected to her dancing, adding the audience is essential to the performance.

“How can maybe for just this night, only in this performance environment, can we move our audiences to a place of emotion, to a place where it touches humanity and human spirit, and use that as a

motivator to continue the work and continue forward?”

Ferreira and the Ananya Dance Theatre are working on a new piece called “Sutrajāl: Revelations of Gossamer.” The word “sutrajāl,” another word the studio created, means connection and intersection.

They bring pieces from the past, the present and imagination into all their performances, she said.

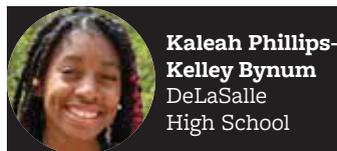
“That’s also inspiration for how we think about our connections to each other, both present and historical,” Ferreira added.

## The Community of Ananya Dance Theatre

**Dancers find a place where differences become collaboration.**

ANANYA DANCE THEATRE is a place where women of color can come together and express themselves through Indian dance. This St. Paul dance theater aims to give women of color a voice through dance.

Their way of dance is called “Yorchha,” a made-up word that consists of three movements. These movements are yoga; Chhau, which is Indian martial arts; and Odissi, which is classical Indian dance. However, Ananya Dance Theatre has also incorporated different styles of dance into Yorchha, which allows more creativity in performances.



**Kaleah Phillips-Kelley Bynum**  
DeLaSalle High School

Ananya Dance Theatre has 15 dancers of different ethnicities and dance backgrounds. Every year they come up with a different message they would like to spread.

This year’s theme is “Sutrajāl: Revelations of Gossamer,” which, according to the Ananya Dance Theatre website, is about a thread connection demonstrating how

people can be delicate but strong, spun together as a spiderweb. Spiderwebs are carefully constructed, but once the threads are put together, they are strong.

Each of the women come together to create stories and messages with Yorchha. Kealoha Ferreira is a dancer and artistic associate at Ananya Dance Theatre.

Ferreira works to bring different dancers together and create unity.

“It’s hard in a good way, because sometimes the work we do is about amplifying and sharing light on the stories of women from global communities of color,” Ferreira said. “These stories are often covered up, trying to be forgotten. In some ways there is a lot of digging and uncovering that can often bring up pain and trauma.”

Because of this, Ananya Dance

Theatre works to “get people to reflect” and “show the beauty of connections,” Ferreira said.

Performing for an audience can impact dancers and audience members alike. The emotion Ferreira carried during her first performance was different than her practice experience. When she was onstage, she said she felt the transferring of all her emotions into the way she was dancing, describing it as “larger than life.”

Ananya Dance Theatre practices biomythography, which is a creative method created by Audre Lord for her book “Zami: A New Spelling of My Name.” Biomythography is employed when choreography is partly researched, partly remembered and partly imagined. Every part of the dance is an important piece of choreography to share a touching message. When dancing, the movements are always exaggerated. The dancers are intentional in their movements. Some of the performances are inspired by African American activists like Lorde and

Sonja Sanchez.

The dancers must balance their dancing with their families and careers. A lot of them are parents, have jobs and are still able to tour weeks at a time and attend practices. They realize they are “knowingly choosing a hard life,” Ferreira said.

During the performances, the dancers show different perspectives through dance; all the perspectives show emotion through the facial expressions, arm movements, leg movements and the way they emphasize their gestures. Someone may be showing anger and sadness, while someone else is showing lust and desire.

The dancers at Ananya Dance have shown how they can use the art of Yorchha to bring people together. They have inspired the hearts and minds of their audiences through their movement and will continue to do so throughout the years.

“Ananya Dance Theatre is a place where we express ourselves through ways larger than words,” Ferreira said.

# Swimmers Synchronize Social Justice with Sport

**A Minneapolis-based synchronized swim team is committed to black liberation, equity in swimming/aquatic arts, body positivity in athleticism and queer visibility.**

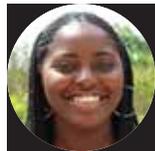
LOCAL SYNCHRONIZED SWIM team the Subversive Sirens is on a mission, and it's deeper than a swimming pool.

The Subversive Sirens started in 2016 as a swimming duo. The Minneapolis-based group has expanded since then, and so has their mission.

"We have to figure out what we stand for and what we believe in," said team co-founder Suzy Messerole. "So that really helped ... anchor, I think, our message, which is that we are learning to be free in the water, so that we can be free out in the world."

The team now has seven swimmers who are using their platform to dive into their goals: black liberation, body positivity, aquatic equity and queer visibility.

In 2014, co-founder Signe Harriday attended the Gay Games in Cleveland, Ohio. The Gay Games is an international athletic event that promotes equality and encourages inclusion. Harriday was inspired by the event and wanted to compete. She encouraged Messerole to join her in the next Games. The women chose synchronized swimming as their event, despite never competing in the sport before.



**Ayo Olagbaju**  
Patrick Henry  
High School

"We swim, we dance, we do yoga, how hard can it be?" Messerole said.

Four years later, they won a gold medal at the 2018 Gay Games in Paris.

Today, the Subversive Sirens use their swimming platform to advocate for groups they say need to be represented both inside and outside the pool.

"We each live this experience," said group member Serita Colette. "Pretty much all of us on the team are constantly doing work in social justice, in our lives and our families, so it's a really big part of who we are."

Colette recalled a recent example of the Sirens demonstrating social justice in their routines. At a competition in New York, their routine's song quoted Sylvia Rivera, a transgender Latina activist.

As the swimmers rose from the water, the song featured Rivera saying, "I've been trying to get up here all day." In the sound clip, Rivera was trying to get on stage at

the Stonewall riots of 1969 to speak about gay and transgender rights.

"For us, when we went to New York, it was like, let's highlight this amazing person, not just because it's cool, but because it's actually really important to point out this legacy," Colette said. "We need to continue to have these conversations both in queer spaces and out of queer spaces."

The group also represents many people of color who may not envision themselves as swimmers.

"There is a racist history with swimming pools—where they're located, who gets them and who gets lessons," Messerole said.

That history had lasting effects on the way many people view pools



Subversive Sirens members Suzy Messerole and Serita Colette.

and swimming.

"Particularly brown folks, or queer folks, were not given all of the resources," Colette said. "We usually have to fight for it."

"Being able to name that, we are also about equity when it comes to aquatics," Messerole added.

Through their advocacy work, the Subversive Sirens continue to change the way people see these issues. On their social media pages,

the Sirens are not afraid to post the ways they fight for marginalized communities. They share all the events they participate in, such as World Pride NYC. This dedication to aquatics and social justice is rare.

"Growing up, I didn't have that opportunity," Colette said. Now, the Subversive Sirens are becoming the role models they wish they'd had.



Subversive Sirens members (left to right): Jae Hyun Shim, Serita Colette, Signe Harriday, Zoe Hollomon, Suzy Messerole, Tana Hargest, Nicki McCracken.

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE

COURTESY MIKE LEVAD

# Social Justice Dance: A Healing Experience

**Ananya Dance Theatre tells under-told stories in its performances to find healing and connection.**

IT'S NEVER JUST dance, said Kealoha Alex Ferreira, a dancer and artistic associate from the Ananya Dance Theatre. It's hope, transformation and healing.

The Ananya Dance Theatre explores identity and history through artistic excellence and social justice, which can eventually lead to healing. A healing that can be transformative, according to Ferreira, who has been involved with the theater since 2013.

"There was something about the depth of the work (at Ananya) that really scared me," she said. "I was pretty afraid because I (could) sense how transformative the work



**Paula Akakpo**  
Math and  
Science  
Academy

was, and I knew that if I continued with this company, and with this form, I wouldn't necessarily be able to turn around from it."

The theater was created in 2004 by Ananya Chatterjea, a professor of dance at the University of Minnesota. Chatterjea created a way of dancing for the theater that was based on people's differences. She wanted to promote the idea that difference does not always have to be

divisive and to create a space that allows dancers to creatively move and connect.

"We're all different from each other," Ferreira said. "(We) find rootedness and also shared space ... especially at a time when difference is seen with a lot of turmoil."

The dance theater is comprised of women of color. The dancers are constantly researching under-told stories from marginalized communities. They work to make their performances fully human and emotional for the audience. Sometimes the research digs up pain, trauma and difficulties, and sometimes it is hard to move on.

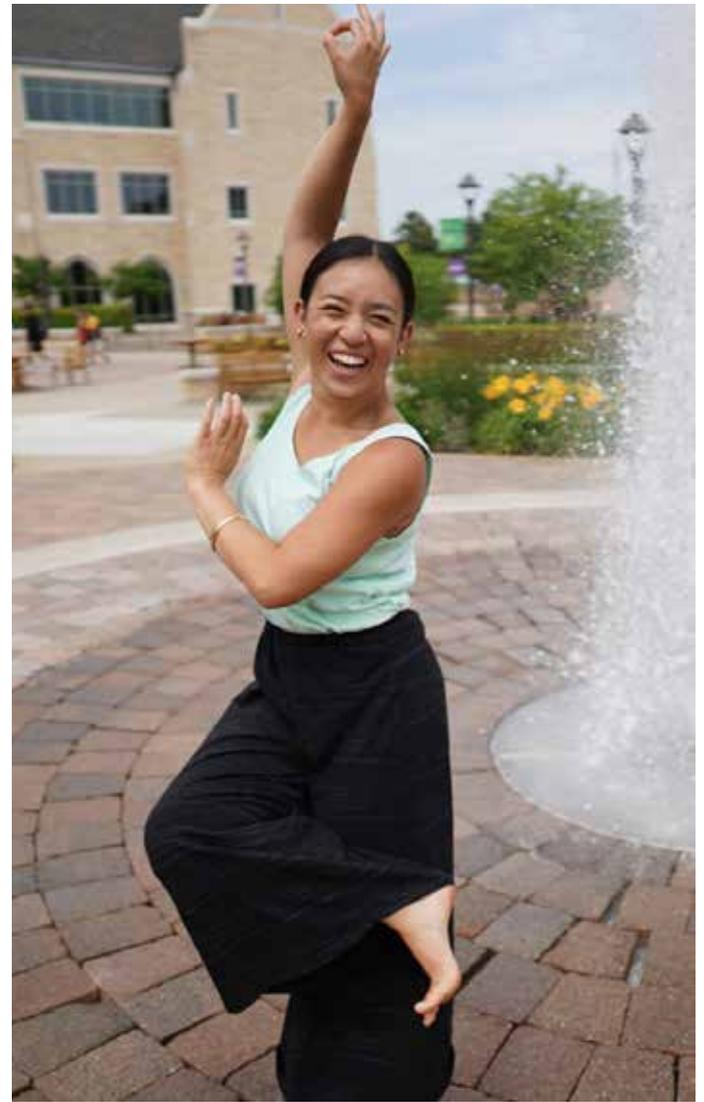
"How do we move through that place of pain and get to a place of hope?" Ferreira said. "Hope is always what we hold on to, both for ourselves, and what we hope to inspire for our communities ... So how do we do that? How do we get there? Through breath and breathing. Through tears, sweat and release."

The theater is also inspired by the Occupy Movement and has created its own response, #occupydance, which aims to use dance as a mode of civic action and empower people of color.

"With your dancing you can occupy. You can occupy space, you can activate space ... you can utilize your dance to stand for issues," Ferreira said. "Dance as activism, dance to bring people together."

Dance heals, she said. Healing happens when dancers push their bodies, hold space for others and surrender to the pain together instead of letting it fester inside of them.

Dance can be a healing experience for dancers. It can also be a transformative experience for audiences. Ananya Dance Theatre's audience is essential; dancers want



THREESIXTY JOURNAL/SMARK VANCLEAVE

**Ananya Dance Theatre Dancer and Artistic Associate Kealoha Ferreira.**

people to reflect and think about how they are connected to the issues they are dancing about and feel a sense of hope.

The theater's next performance, for example, explores the concept of connection through spiderwebs and delves into people's common histories.

"How can maybe for just this night, only in this performance environment, can we move our audiences to a place of emotion, to a place where it touches humanity and human spirit, and use that as a motivator to continue the work and continue forward?" Ferreira said.

At Ananya they are hoping to call the audience to action, whether the stories told through the performances inspire watchers to call their legislators, have talks with

their local community or create new artistic work. They want observers to see themselves reflected in the dance and have a sense of rejuvenation and invigoration.

As time goes on and minority groups continue to fight for inclusion, many people do not feel like they are being reflected in dance, according to Ferreira. As Ananya Dance heads toward its 15th anniversary, dancers continue to show that dance can also be fierce activism.

"There's also something that's deeply empowering about owning our stories and being able to dance them on a stage to showcase them," Ferreira said. "I think ... there's also an empowerment in this form that leads us to a place of being able to choose hope."



COURTESY RANDY KARELS

**Dr. Alessandra Williams performs in Ananya Dance Theatre's 2018 performance titled "Shaatranga: Women Weaving Worlds."**

# Swimming is Just the Beginning for Subversive Sirens

**The Subversive Sirens are a synchronized swimming group hoping to inspire all bodies to get in the water.**

SUZY MESSOROLE AND Signe Harriday do not match the standards of what many people think a typical swimmer looks like. That is something they are trying to change.

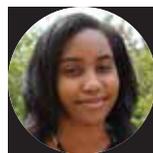
The two founders of the Subversive Sirens use their identities as plus-size, queer people to show that all body types are welcome in the sport of synchronized swimming.

Both Messorole and Harriday were discouraged by the messages they believe society had implanted and wanted to make a change starting in the swimming pool. As a result, they created a team that promotes the body positivity movement, a social movement that encourages a positive body image and self-acceptance.

"I had someone say to me two days ago, 'I'm super inspired. I think I'm going to buy a swimsuit and get in the water,'" Messorole said. "If the reason you're not getting in the water is because of these cultural messages and not wanting to be seen in a swimsuit ... that's the issue."

Messorole and Harriday did not intend to create the seven-member synchronized swimming group that Subversive Sirens is today. They started the group because Harriday wanted to compete in the Gay Games, a worldwide sporting event that takes place every four years to promote equality for those who identify as LGBTQ.

"We looked up on a computer all



**Asa Williams**  
Cherry Hill East  
High School

the possible sports. We both were like, 'Oh, aquatic arts.' Both of us are swimmers," Messorole said.

In 2016, they decided to learn the sport of synchronized swimming and began practicing for the 2018 Gay Games in Paris.

The two women did not let their body types discourage them from competing.

"I started posting our videos on social media, because we were just so proud of ourselves for learning this stuff. Then two other people were like, 'I want to do that.' And we're like, 'OK, let's make a team.'"

Messorole said once three others joined the team, they started promoting a message of radical inclusivity and using synchronized swimming to push a body positive message.

"I think our message ... is that we are learning to be free in the water so that we can be free out in the world," Messorole said.

Messorole said for most of her life she received negative messages about her plus-size body. "When I was in eighth grade, we moved to a town that was large enough to have a dance studio. I love dance, and I took the class up until the costume arrived. Then, I made up a reason, and I know my mother did

not believe it," Messorole said. "I dropped out ... because of how I felt in that costume."

Growing up being uncomfortable in their own skin gave the members of the synchronized swimming team motivation to challenge society's standards.

"We've been talking as a team, just with language around body neutrality as well, to think about: what does it mean to always wake up and be like, 'I feel really positive about my body?'" said team member Serita Colette, who also works to challenge beauty standards and ideals

surrounding physical fitness. "Some days you wake up and you don't, and that's OK. I think it's OK for us to reckon with just, our bodies are constantly changing, our feelings around our bodies are changing."



Subversive Sirens members Suzy Messorole and Serita Colette.

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE



Subversive Sirens team members (left to right): Jae Hyun Shim, Serita Colette, Signe Harriday, Zoe Hollomon, Tana Hargest, Suzy Messorole, Nicki McCracken.

COURTESY MIKE LEVAD



COURTESY REBECCA STUDIOS

Girls on the Run participants huddle for a cheer before the organization's annual 5K.

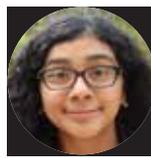
## Girls Find Confidence and Empowerment in Running 5Ks

**Girls on the Run offers a safe and encouraging place for girls to be physically active and socially engaged.**

A YOUNG GIRL'S goal may be to complete a difficult run with her friends, but the self-assurance she develops before taking a single stride often winds up being more important than any part of her route. Girls participating in the Girls on the Run nonprofit program often find that what they gain goes well beyond completing the annual 5K.

Designed to encourage personal development and sisterhood through physical activity, Girls on the Run Twin Cities is open to girls in third through eighth grades all around the state.

Established in 1996 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Girls on the Run is now active in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., as of 2015, it has served more than 185,000 girls. Focused on giving its participants courage-building attention and



**Jacqueline Martinez**  
Harding Senior High School

a comfortable environment, the program provides transportation and athletic wear to those who need it. Each girl has her own adult chaperone for the 5K, called a running buddy, whom they are encouraged to pick.

"Girls' confidence peaks at 9," said Mary Uran, the executive director of Girls on the Run Twin Cities. "(After which) they have all these external messages from the outside world that tell them that girls need to be one way, or their potential is not limitless."

Uran believes Girls on the Run is a safe place for participants to develop

into competent individuals and to close the physical activity disparity gap between young girls and boys.

Uran was not very athletic as a kid. A self-described academic, she didn't find running until later in life. However, her passion isn't running; it's helping young girls build a strong character. Uran found her passion after she moved to Washington, D.C., around 12 years ago and trained for her first half-marathon, finding connection and confidence in the running groups. After discovering the D.C. chapter of Girls on the Run, she volunteered as a coach for several seasons. When she moved to the Twin Cities, she was shocked to find that, despite the active philanthropic community, there was no local council of Girls on the Run.

She launched the Twin Cities council in 2012, starting off with just 24 girls. By 2019, approximately 3,000 girls and 800 volunteer coaches came from nearly 200 locations around the state to take part in the 5K held every year in the Twin Cities.

Cassie Maresh, community engagement and access manager



THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK VANCLEAVE

Girls on the Run Twin Cities Executive Director Mary Uran and Community Engagement and Access Manager Cassie Maresh.

for Girls on the Run Twin Cities, frequently visits with the different teams and says the coaches get as much out of the program as the participants, if not more.

"I've been able to witness ... when (a girl) comes to practice very shy and timid and see by the end, she's high-fiving her teammates," Uran said. "That direct impact is something that has motivated me to deepen my work with Girls on the Run and be a huge advocate for how necessary it is for us today."

For Uran, one of the best examples of positive changes girls can get from the program can be seen at Vista View Elementary in Burnsville. She was impressed with the girls' leadership, initiative and interaction with the whole school. During the running season, the

school community rallies around and cheers on the girls.

Some Girls on the Run participants are now headed for college. Roseville Area High School graduate Kaylina Smith, who joined the program in elementary school and will be attending Minnesota State University Moorhead this fall, received the group's first Star Power Alumnae Scholarship Award.

In her acceptance speech, Smith said Girls on the Run helped her find her individuality and build her confidence. "As a woman, I believe we need to support the other women around us," Smith said. "Society is consistently pitting us against each other. ... Girls on the Run taught me that I am my own person and I am the only one (who) can define who I am."



COURTESY REBECCA STUDIOS

A Girls on the Run participant runs the annual 5K with her running buddy.

# Minneapolis Hoop Dancer Showcases Life Lessons

**Micco Sampson encourages his community to be healthy while learning about their heritage by teaching traditional Native American hoop dancing.**



Micco Sampson demonstrates traditional Native American hoop dancing.

HOOP DANCING IS more than just an activity. It is a way of life.

Micco Sampson, a professional hoop dancer, smiled at his 4-year-old son at the University of St. Thomas Anderson Student Center while he played with his own set of hoops, ones that were specifically made for him.

“The proportion ratios are actually very specific to the human body, to the individual doing it,” Sampson said. “If you didn’t have the right size hoops, it would look like you’re wearing oversized clothes, or maybe really tight clothes. It’s very specific to that.”

Hoop dancing is an indigenous dance tradition. At first glance, one might think a hoop is just a toy, something to play with, but it



**Tristan Xiong**  
Great River School

is more than that, Sampson said. In hoop dancing, your hoop is a representation of your story, your world and how you connect with it. In Native American culture, hoop dancing is a way of storytelling and healing.

Sampson teaches hoop dancing with his brother, at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. Students are taught the basics of hoop dancing and the rest is up to them.

“Part of that teaching is that it’s up to you what you want to do,” Sampson said. “I provide just the

simple instrument and the know-how. The introduction essentially is just giving you a hoop and giving you the space to be or feel comfortable and play with it.”

This is true for Deanna StandingCloud and her son, Nigozis, who attends Sampson’s lessons.

As a parent, StandingCloud wanted her son to be more active and try something new. When she discovered hoop dancing lessons were offered, StandingCloud seized the opportunity. After picking up her son from school he was playing on his iPad in the back seat; StandingCloud decided to take a detour to the Minneapolis American Indian Center.

“I knew that there was something

in there,” StandingCloud said. “I happened to be there on a Tuesday, and that’s when Micco was there. So I was like, ‘Oh, let’s just go do this, because my son has tons of energy, and he needs to put it somewhere.’”

Sampson’s hoop dancing classes are fun, StandingCloud said. He is a patient and uplifting teacher, she said, and his encouragement creates a comfortable environment.

Intense hoop dance workouts are also offered to those up to the challenge. Hoop dancing is a great activity to improve your balance, flexibility and aerobic ability. Students of all different levels and ages can have fun and learn about their culture. By the end of class, they are drenched in sweat and smiling.

“When you’re doing it, you realize that you’re getting a workout. And then it’s very empowering for participants, especially with kids, too,” StandingCloud said. “It’s important for the Native community to have access to the hoop dancing practice.”

Native Americans have the highest rate of diabetes and heart disease in the country, according to the American Diabetes Association. Having the hoop dancing classes, Sampson said, is an important way to include physical activity in a weekly schedule.

“This is a fun tool, literally a fun way to be able to entice people back to have not only that type of activity, but also the cultural aspects of it. The teachings behind it very well are incorporated and can be taught from any individuals,” Sampson said.

At its roots, the purpose of hoop

dancing is about connecting and telling your story, Sampson said. A hoop is a circle, a shape that is universally seen no matter what the culture you come from or what language you speak. It contains an infinite amount of sides and angles.

In a demonstration at St. Thomas, Sampson showed how hoops are symbols of our world. In one hand, he held a hoop that represented his own world.

“This is my perfect perspective. I’m only one person, so I only see the world from one angle,” said Sampson as he twisted his wrist until the hoop was on its side. “Until I run into another person,” he continued, gripping a second hoop in his right hand, “and we share stories. We intersect our worlds.”

Moving his hands closer together, the hoops intersected between each other, physically representing how two worlds can collide.

“You can really delve into each other’s world entirely, but also even explore it to another dynamic. We start to see more dimensions, not only of how your world is connected to theirs, but also indirectly how this was connected to others,” said Sampson, taking a third hoop and connecting it, adding another dimension. “These worlds ... start forming our world.”

Hoop dancing is more than an activity. It is an educational tool used to understand the past, the environment, the people around you and learn their significance in your world. Sampson carries this philosophy in his vision as he takes this knowledge and shares it in his classes.



Four-year-old Nokose Sampson with his customized hoops.

PHOTOS BY THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/MARK BROWN

# COLLEGE ESSAY BOOT CAMP

*Kicking students' college essays into shape!*

In College Essay Boot Camp, students use the fundamentals of writing to craft essays ready to submit to a college of their choice. ThreeSixty partnered with Cristo Rey Jesuit High School and Girls Inc. Eureka! for two sessions in the spring and summer.

## A Nightmare Changed My Life Forever

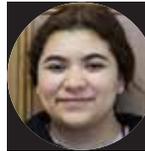
MY QUINCEAÑERA WAS supposed to be the day I shined.

It turned out to be a nightmare that changed my life forever.

After almost a year of planning, my friends and family were going to celebrate my transition from a girl to a young woman.

I wasn't planning on seeing my brother Douglas because his 7-year-old daughter recently died from health issues. He was the last person I expected to see that day. But he came for me, and I was so glad.

As expected, my party was great! When it ended, we cleaned up the



**Adrien Hernandez**  
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

event center, and my dad brought me home. When we pulled into my driveway around 3 a.m., my phone rang. No one calls me that late. It was my friend Arianna, and she sounded scared as her voice quivered.

"Arrestaron a Douglas," Arianna told me. This translated to "Douglas was arrested."

I couldn't believe it.

My dad was shocked. We didn't know where Douglas was. My first thought was they were going to deport him back to Honduras. Immediately I dialed his number. After a few anxious rings, he picked up, to my surprise.

"Where are you? What happened? Are you OK?" I asked.

"I'm in jail," my brother responded in Spanish. "I have to go because they're going to take my things. Tell Oscar to try to contact me." Oscar is my friend Arianna's husband.

A few days later, my family and I tried to see him at the jail. The officer at the main desk told us he was released. I had never felt so relieved in my entire life. We immediately tried to find him. We called his number, but no answer. We contacted family to locate him, but no one knew anything. It was odd. He was released, but nowhere to be found. At least, that was what

we thought.

After contacting many other jails, we found him. He was at an immigration detention center. When I found out, I was upset. I didn't understand why the police officer didn't tell us ICE took him. This whole time I was relieved, but there was another problem we needed to face. I had heard about people's immigration experiences. Now, my family was dealing with our own. When we contacted the immigration detention center, we were given 24 hours to pay \$5,000 for his bail.

I realized my parents were going to struggle. My grandma died a couple months prior and now another problem appeared. It was a lot for both my parents and me. I felt helpless. My family did not deserve this. I was only 15 years old. I could not help in any way. I was too young to provide financial help for my family. Others did, though. My parents borrowed money to pay for his bail, and he was released.

Now we are waiting for his next court appearance, which will determine if he can stay.

I did not have much to offer. But then I realized I do have one powerful tool – my voice. I once believed a single person cannot make a difference, but the truth is, it takes just one person, like me, to stand up for immigrant rights. In a society where my family is marginalized, I, the American-born Latina girl, gained the courage to speak up for those who are voiceless.

I attended marches and protests that advocated for immigrant rights. I encouraged and informed those around me to attend. I gained an interest in law and becoming a lawyer. I want to make my parents and brother proud. Because I know what it is like to live in fear and be lost, I can use those experiences and my chosen career to empower communities like mine.

## I Will Protect Families Like Mine

MARCH 21, 2014, my dad went to court. As my family and I arrived on the seventh floor, just before my parents entered the courtroom, my dad turned and said to my siblings and me, "No matter what happens, I will always love y'all." Then my parents entered the courtroom while my siblings and I stood out in the hallway waiting.

When my mom came out, my dad was not with her. She was crying in pain as if someone had died; they were resigned tears of knowing the person is still here, but you cannot feel, talk to or see them whenever you want.

She said the words: "Daddy is not coming with us."

My 11-year-old heart broke into



**Isis Knights**  
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

a million pieces. My head felt light, and my tears fell uncontrollably from my eyes. I couldn't speak. My relationship with my dad had always been strong. I was taught there is nothing wrong with crying. Cry when you need to, and in times like this, don't be sad—be ready to work to fix your situation. This is what motivates me.

Through middle school, I could see the sleepless nights on my mom's face. I witnessed her worry about getting laid off from her job

and having bills to pay by herself. The biggest thing that worried her was giving us the family life we had before my dad went away. At a young age, I helped my mom by cooking dinner and helping my younger siblings with homework, so my mom didn't have to feel overwhelmed.

While helping my mom and seeing my dad lose his chance to fight for his freedom, I began to find myself. I learned what I want to do. As a young girl I had an interest in law, but it has now become my passion. Seeing my mother get up to work every day and speaking to my dad about all the legal research he's done to get home helped me realize that nothing is given to me and if I want it, I have to go get it. I learned success comes with hard work, and I was prepared to work for it.

I started working, but my jobs weren't typical 14-year-old jobs. I

worked to find internships at places like General Mills and The Jay & Rose Foundation, where I confidently networked with lawyers and business professionals. Working allowed me to understand the value of investing time and bettering myself. Wanting to be a criminal defense attorney to protect people like my father, these jobs brought me a step closer.

In choosing my high school, I decided to go somewhere small with less distractions and a place where the expectations were always high. I set a goal of what my GPA needed to be. I limited myself from being outside. It was hard.

I wanted to hang out with friends, which was much more fun than doing homework, but I knew that if I didn't work hard now, it wouldn't pay off in the future.

I started using time management. I faithfully began to live

by the creed that every second is crucial, so I have to use it to the best of my ability. I continued to educate myself on everything. I asked questions about what things interested me and looked into why I enjoyed it so much. I surrounded myself with people with some of the same interests, but mostly people with different interests. I found out a lot more information that I didn't know, which expanded my way of thinking.

As I grew older I became resilient. I taught myself to always be focused, work hard and stay ready in everything I do, and because of that what I want will be mine. I learned the values of hard work. My life has never been easy, but I picked myself up and still continue to move forward with self-discipline.

## Nursing My Father

MY HEART WAS beating rapidly against my chest as I was getting out of my sister's car. I was visiting my dad again for the third or fourth time after he was first admitted a month ago. I looked down at my feet as I took extremely small steps toward the front of the hospital doors thinking about what he would look like.

The sterile white walls were breathing on my face, into one of the darkest and narrowest hallways of my life. As we rode the elevator, I prayed it would slow down, even stop, because I knew my eyes were going to overflow with tears the second I saw him. My hands filled with sweat as we exited the elevator.



**Sheng Yang**  
East High School,  
Anchorage,  
Alaska

Reaching for the doorknob, my hands were shaking. When I finally twisted it, the door creaked open.

He was sitting on his bed, and I examined him. Seeing how unhealthy and different he looked hurt my soul. He was getting skinnier; you could see his ribs piercing through his skin. His voice was raspy, and he looked so pale. There were many tubes going in and out of his body. His eyes looked dull, his body weak. He said some

days he couldn't even get out of the hospital bed.

I spent sleepless nights that summer looking at the ceiling, thinking about what would happen to him, wondering if he would get better. I never really saw my parents much that summer, but I understood why. My mother didn't want to leave his bedside. And my dad appreciated it — both my mom's love and his favorite nurse's care.

The nurses weren't all so great, though, and the moment I found out about the incident made me angry and upset; it changed my life.

It happened during one of the times my mom went home to cook. My mom said she learned from my dad that while a new nurse was on duty, she treated him badly. This woman threw a pair of hospital socks at my dad's face and told him he could put it on himself. She

continued to say he wasn't dead yet so he could change his own blood bag and clothes and check his own temperature. She was tormenting my very sick father — a patient she was getting paid to care for. He was upset and yelled at her to get out and send in another nurse.

I am so glad he stood up for himself — especially for an older Hmong man who didn't speak English very well. Our entire family was upset. My mom complained formally to the hospital. I wanted to go a second time.

I watched my mother care and love my father during his most miserable time in life. I watched her tell him he will be safe and that he will get better. I appreciate the people who choose to be nurses because the good ones were an example of being responsible for our most loved family members. They are

compassionate and sympathetic to their patients' well-being. My dad's favorite nurse had long conversations with him, joked around with him and even took him out on his wheelchair for walks inside the hospital.

Because of this, my mom and some of the nurses inspired me to become a nurse. They're my role models. Even the one nurse who failed to treat my father kindly taught me something: I would do my best for patients and families who are already suffering to help them stay positive, and I will do all I can to make sure the patient goes home and is healthy.

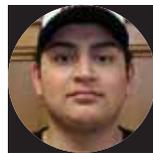
Three months later, my dad was discharged. He's back to his old self, laughing and being goofy. He's energetic, and the sparkle in his eyes returned.

## How My Mother Inspires Me

I REMEMBER MY childhood fondly: looking out the window at a beautiful lake, watching the latest Nickelodeon cartoons on a big flat-screen TV, driving an ATV through a muddy forest and eating snacks from a huge stainless steel fridge.

That's all true — but none of those things were mine. All of them belonged to kids of rich white people whose homes my mother had to clean.

My mother came to the United States from Mexico in her early 20s, looking for a superior way of life than what she had living on the outskirts of Morelos, Mexico. In the U.S., she took the only jobs she



**Marco Beltran Galan**  
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

could get — cleaning other people's houses. She did that day after day, week after week, year after year, to support me and my three younger siblings.

The lake view was from a house that my mom had to clean to pay our rent. The flat-screen TV belonged to the child of the woman whose windows my mom had to clean to pay our electric bill. The ATV I loved to drive in the woods

and the fridge where I got snacks belonged to a kid I met when I helped my mom clean his mother's house every Saturday to buy a week's worth of groceries.

When I started to feel sorry for myself because I didn't own these amenities, I would think of my beautiful mother. As I saw her do backbreaking work day in and day out, sacrificing herself for me and my siblings — giving up any life of her own — I would think, "My mom doesn't deserve to suffer like this. I need to do more. I need to sacrifice, too."

So I gradually gave up sports and friends to help around the house and care for my younger brothers and sister. And our frequent moves to cheaper housing meant adapting to new schools multiple times, saying goodbye to old friends and

trying to make new ones.

It wasn't always easy, but whenever I thought, "Why me? Why does my life have to be difficult?" I thought about my mom. Even with my learning disability, attention deficit disorder and depression, I pushed forward, just like I saw my mother do with her suffering.

I pushed forward dealing with frustration, asking for extra help from my teachers, and holding in my thoughts and feelings. I knew the only way I could do more and be successful was by working harder on my academics. I remember enduring long nights of trying to complete and understand my school material.

Through all of these difficulties, my mom has been my greatest inspiration. She's been my biggest fan and supporter. She's taught me by her example that I need to sacrifice

for others and for myself to persevere in the face of adversity. The things I learned from her example will make me a more determined student in college and a contributor to my college community. My goals for the future are to get a college degree, establish a career and to become a greater contributor to society by giving back to my community, the Mexican American community.

With my determination to succeed in college, the pinnacle of my success will be walking up on the stage, smiling cheek to cheek, receiving my degree that I worked hard for and then gazing out into the crowd to find my mother applauding with tears running down her face.

### SCHOLAR from page 7

"And then democracy, just talking about democracy and how that affects the journalism world."

It wasn't hard for Wong to bring what she had learned back home. Leaving Taiwan, however, was a different story. As she faced an early morning flight back to the U.S., memories, friendships and a lifestyle she had grown into were hard to let go of. Wong called

it "reverse culture shock."

"It didn't really hit me that I was leaving until literally, like, the day before we left, because that whole week leading up to it, I had to move out, I had finals, I had final essays and projects and presentations that I had to do all in one week," she said. "It was really stressful for me. I didn't really even have time to think, 'Oh, my gosh, this might be the last time I'm seeing some of these

people in my classes and a lot of my friends.'

The night before we left, it was just me and my three best friends I made on the trip."

She added, "We just stayed up all night, holding each other and crying. It was so crazy to me, because I was thinking about how worried I (had been) to leave the U.S."

Wong said she learned a lot about herself overseas and wants to pass on the importance of that to younger journalists.

"If you can know yourself and you can have that good sense of self, it helps carry you and telling other people's stories, because that's the basis of empathy," Wong said. "It's understanding, empathy. It's the whole golden rule: Do unto others as how you'd want to be treated. And also how they would want to be treated, recognizing that you need to know yourself in order to tell other people's stories."

## Loving My Own Skin

I get STUCK! I don't know what to do. I don't believe in myself. I don't even understand ME! Is she better than me? Yeah, definitely? I grew up not knowing my values and comparing myself to others. I WILL NEVER BLEACH MY SKIN!

I grew up in Sierra Leone with one sister who is two years older. When I was 7, I started noticing the people who came around us only did so because of her. She was favored.

They would say, "Her skin is so radiant and beautiful." I wondered why she got all the compliments and not me. The only words used to describe me were "black diamond" by my mother. Women gave my sister gifts like candy and would



**Kadija Koroma**  
Cristo Rey Jesuit  
High School

celebrate her birthday, but they never did so for me. Very baffled, I became aware of their prejudiced attitudes toward me. They disrupted the bond I had with my sister. I hated them, and I hated myself for feeling miserable.

I WILL NEVER BLEACH MY SKIN!! I told myself. It was as if everyone followed the trend of bleaching their skin with creams and soaps.

We had a friend who lived in the building next to ours. Isabella was

light, too, and like all of my sister's friends, she became my friend. Isabella became focused on bleaching creams and oils.

One day my sister went to Isabella's apartment, and they began talking about people who bleached their skin. I didn't like how Isabella was a negative influence on my sister. My sister returned home with a bottle of Caro White.

There's a saying, "The older ones set the example and the younger ones follow in their footsteps." I followed in my sister's footsteps.

Is this worth it? What do you want? I wondered as I sat on the steps under the sun with my head cupped in my hands as the tears streamed down my face. I felt ashamed.

I appreciated I hadn't gone too far for me to reverse the process. Every time someone came close to me, I would keep my distance. I

didn't want to talk to anyone, but I was not shy. I learned to accept my friends and accept that others wanted to be around me, that they did not care about the color of my skin. For the first time I made my own friends.

It seemed weird women in America didn't bleach their skin; it was surprising that in America the focus was on racism and colorism. Living in Sierra Leone, I was never aware of racism, nor colorism.

I was only 11 years old when I became aware of this implicit bias. I searched for videos to help me learn more about colorism.

In 2014 finding videos on women who looked like me was nearly impossible. In 2016 more women came out and talked about how they learned to appreciate and love their skin.

Now in 2019, I see many women who look like me doing great things:

Michelle Obama, Lupita Nyong'o, Serena Williams and Beyonce all teach young girls to love themselves and fight for their greatness.

I loved that society was changing. I was changing; I learned to accept me. I did a presentation on colorism for school during my ninth-grade year, and my research woke me up to the effects of colorism and racism. One day my schoolmate was giving a presentation on colorism. The motivating sound from her voice in the video hit me. It felt as though the women were speaking to me. The words punctured my heart, and I couldn't help but cry. I could only let go of my pain by forgiving myself. I am learning to just be me because sometimes the best thing you can do for yourself is to just be. I WILL NEVER BLEACH MY SKIN.

## A Beautiful Girl

IT WAS THE first day of the third grade. I reluctantly walked into my new classroom. A tall, Caucasian woman stood at the head of the room writing the date on the board. As I entered the new setting, my body began to nervously shake. I scanned the room to find at least one familiar face. As I did this, a realization hit me that none of the other kids looked like me. Everyone surrounding me had straight hair and privilege. As a young girl, I always knew that I was different: I didn't look like anyone else in my school. Thankfully, I had my parents' guidance in the beginning stages of my life to teach me how to embrace myself.

At a very young age I was aware of the color of my skin. Growing



**Juma Waganda**  
Girls Inc.  
Eureka!

up, my family showered me with positivity and support. Many people of color tend to be ashamed of their skin. In my case, I slowly began to accept myself and thrive because of the color of my skin. I would have never been able to have such confidence without the encouragement from my parents.

My mother was adopted by a white family of farmers in the 1960s and lived in northern Minnesota. My mother's family is full of open-minded people. But many times they received a

lot of criticism for having a black child. As a mixed girl in northern Minnesota, she was the darkest shade of black the townspeople had ever seen. She was the only black kid in her entire school. The color of her skin resulted in her being bullied as a young girl. As she grew up, she continued to not fit in. She was either too white or too black. Because of her struggles she wanted to instill confidence and courage in her children. I look up to her because she persevered through adversity.

My father immigrated to Minnesota from Kenya in the 1980s. He worked hard to immigrate because he wanted the brightest future for himself and his future family. He is a proud African Rastafarian. However, it took time for him to accept his blackness after coming to America. Before he came to America he never knew he was black — the color of his skin never

mattered. In Africa prejudice is not based on race or gender, but rather the tribe that one is a part of.

My parents faced hardships throughout their lives, which they eventually overcame. Since they persevered through their struggles, both my mother and father became great role models for me. They taught me to accept myself and fight for what I believe in.

As a young kid, I wanted to look like my white friends. I wanted straight hair and a smaller nose. I didn't want to seem different than everyone else. I wanted to be "beautiful." Some kids at my school judged me for my black skin or having big, curly hair. Insecurities began to form at a young age. It was difficult to address, but with my parents' help, and my discovery of a nonprofit organization called Girls Inc., I am now a strong, confident and proud African American young woman.

Girls Inc. is a program with the mission to give girl, of all backgrounds the opportunity to learn about STEM. For the first time in my life, I was surrounded with girls who looked like me. Excitement rushed through my body. I wasn't the odd one out. Girls Inc. allowed me to see exactly what my parents instilled in me my whole life. Now I've created relationships with people in and out of school who accept me for who I am as a person and not based on my appearance.

My parents raised me to believe I could accomplish anything I put my mind to and rise above adversity. I plan to successfully complete college with the intention of becoming a role model to others. I want to exemplify to young girls what my mother and father instilled in me. Despite many emotional hardships I went through, I will not let these obstacles prevent me from succeeding.



ThreeSixty Journalism

# 2019 PROGRAM YEAR REPORT

June 1, 2018-May 31, 2019

## Student Demographics

African.....	10%	Hispanic.....	32%
African-American.....	29%	Caucasian.....	5%
Asian American.....	17%	Multiracial.....	7%

## Young Alumni Job and Internship Highlights

- Pioneer Press
- MPR News
- WCCO TV
- Star Tribune
- Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield MN
- MinnPost
- KRSM Radio
- Minnesota Timberwolves
- American Public Media Group
- Clarity Coverdale Fury
- Fox 9 News
- ESPN XGames
- The Current
- Andersen Corporation
- Greenspring Media

## Quotes from ThreeSixty Alumni

*"I'm very thankful that ThreeSixty has heavily supported me throughout many exciting opportunities, which include directing TommieMedia and interning at Under-Told Stories Project at PBS NewsHour in the fall 2019!"*

*- Samantha HoangLong, 2017 ThreeSixty Scholar*

*"ThreeSixty was the start of a journey for me. Thinking about how far I have come as a writer and journalist with the program is amazing, but the connections and relationships I have built within it are somehow even more valuable."*

*- Zekiah Chaudhry, 2018 ThreeSixty Scholar*

*"ThreeSixty has made dreams of college a reality. I am so excited to be at St. Thomas in the fall and just know that at the end of the long (but fun) four years I will be doing something I truly am passionate about in a field that needs more people of color and females."*

*- Heidi Sanchez Avila, 2019 ThreeSixty Scholar*



## FEATURING HMONG-AMERICAN WRITER KAO KALIA YANG

Thursday, Oct. 10 | 5:30 p.m.

University of St. Thomas, Anderson Student Center, St. Paul campus

Hosted by Matt Belanger, KSTP-TV

[link.stthomas.edu/threesixty2019](http://link.stthomas.edu/threesixty2019)



PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Sponsored by



ThreeSixty Journalism  
College of Arts and Sciences

