



Education: Young Twin Cities journalists' work published. A4-



PROGRAM YEAR 2024
threesixty
JOURNALISM

NEWS AND STORYTELLING FROM MINNESOTA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

St. Thomas
Rose-Maria Athley

UNIVERSITY OF St. Thomas
ThreeSixty Jour
College of Arts
ABOUT THESE REPORTS
These reports were produced as part of the ThreeSixty Journalism Institute for high school students. The institute is a partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. ThreeSixty is a nonprofit program dedicated to providing journalism and entrepreneurial training to high school students and leadership.

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ABOUT THREESIXTY

ThreeSixty Journalism is a multimedia storytelling program for Minnesota youth. Grounded in the principles of journalism and focused on contributing to more accurate narratives and representative newsrooms, ThreeSixty offers technical, ethical and entrepreneurial training for fulfilling careers in storytelling and civic leadership. The program has been housed at the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas since 2001.

[Learn more at threesixty.stthomas.edu](https://threesixty.stthomas.edu)

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR, KENZIE O'KEEFE



This magazine is publishing nearly a year to the day that I began leading ThreeSixty Journalism.

Five workshops, 200 hours of programming and more than 100 students served later, I'm amazed by what our small but mighty team and our huge community of industry supporters were able to accomplish during our 2023-24 program year. We launched two entirely new workshops, evolved ALL of our curriculum, launched a Youth Leadership Board and kept our commitment to

racial equity in storytelling at the center of what we do – 94% of the students we served were of color.

As my predecessor Chad Caruthers told me when I took over: ThreeSixty works. I've experienced the truth of that every day this year as I've watched students get swept into a flow state by a compelling story and heard from alums seizing jobs in the industry and using their talents to evolve it.

No doubt, there is much work to be done. Journalism remains overwhelmingly white; the financial crisis facing local news continues to create news deserts and ThreeSixty has more than two applicants for every one workshop spot we are able to offer.

I am motivated by the opportunity in the challenges that face us. I see the solutions in the brilliance of our students and in initiatives like Press Forward, the funding and policy initiative to revitalize local news. Strong democracy requires a strong information ecosystem, and ThreeSixty will remain focused on architecting that future.

In service and gratitude,

Kenzie O'Keefe

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High schoolers, want to make the news? ThreeSixty is looking for youth storytellers to tackle today's biggest topics. Register for our workshops at threesixty.stthomas.edu and stay up to date on year-round opportunities on Instagram [@threesixtyjournalism](https://www.instagram.com/threesixtyjournalism).

THREESIXTY YOUTH LEADERSHIP BOARD

The ThreeSixty Youth Leadership Board launched in summer 2024 to ensure youth have a formal role in guiding programming and editorial strategy for the program. The three founding members will be joined by additional members, chosen from a competitive pool, during the upcoming program year.



ALEXIS ARYEEQUAYE

Rosemount High School, Class of 2026

"I joined the Youth Leadership Board to showcase my leadership skills and be a liaison between the students and the staff."



AKETZALLY MURILLO ALVARADO

FAIR School for Arts, Class of 2025

"Being a part of this board will let me properly advocate for issues important to me with support from a group I can bounce ideas off of!"



GWYNNEVERE VANG

University of St. Thomas, Class of 2026

"I'm on the youth board because I want to amplify the reason why youth voices matter in the ever-changing and growing world of media."

THREESIXTY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The ThreeSixty Leadership Council serves as an industry advisory board for the program.

Duchesne Drew, *Chair Emeritus*
Minnesota Public Radio

Samantha HoangLong, ThreeSixty Alum
Sahan Journal

Chris Havens
Target

Shane Kitzman
Thrivent

"I serve on the ThreeSixty Journalism Leadership Council because I believe in our collective responsibility to help prepare the next generation of diverse media and communications professionals to share their stories and perspectives as they embark on their future careers."

Bianca Jones
Northside Achievement Zone

"Being on ThreeSixty's Leadership Council is a chance to give back to the community and to help make sure the next generation of journalists reflect the communities they serve. Journalists of color are becoming increasingly vital to shed light on stories that have gone unnoticed for far too long."

Pauleen Le
WCCO TV

Dr. Wendy Wyatt
University of St. Thomas

Dr. Peter Gregg
University of St. Thomas

Amanda Theisen
Sunrise Banks

Andy Ybarra
University of St. Thomas

Laura McCallum
Minnesota Star Tribune

Miles Trump
Cargill

Frank Bi, ThreeSixty Alum
Minnesota Star Tribune

"We all know that who you know in your industry sometimes matters as much, if not more, than what you know when it comes to your job search. Some of the biggest barriers for talented young people interested in breaking into journalism, especially youth of color, include lack of exposure to the field and lack of connections. ThreeSixty tackles both problems at once."

Frederick Melo
Pioneer Press

AYANNA MELANDER

By Theresa Malloy Lemickson, Staff

AYANNA MELANDER, member of the North Community High School class of 2024, is ThreeSixty Journalism's 2024 Scholar. This award grants her a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Emerging Media at the University of St. Thomas College of Arts and Sciences, beginning in fall 2024.

Melander plans to major in journalism, and her passion for reporting runs deep. In her scholarship application, Melander describes the morning of May 26, 2020, when her mom woke her up to go pray for a Black man who died in Minneapolis. She would later learn his name was George Floyd. A CNN reporter took a picture of Ayanna and her mother, Mauri Friestleben, praying on the spot where Floyd was murdered.

When she saw the image, Melander saw her future: "That was when I knew this was what I had to do. I started to write. I signed up for the journalism class. I scoured the news every day. And my passion for journalism flourished."

Her high school journalism career led her to report for her community newspaper, North News, and ThreeSixty Journalism.

Her North News instructor and youth program coordinator, Azhae'la Hanson, has high hopes for Melander's future.

"In the time Ayanna has interned with North News, she has been invaluable to our team. She leads with empathy and is in constant pursuit of sharing the truths and triumphs of her peers and the community of North High and North Minneapolis," Hanson said. "We will miss her! And we are



"That was when I knew this was what I had to do. I started to write. I signed up for the journalism class. I scoured the news every day. And my passion for journalism flourished."

so proud that she can bring her talents to St. Thomas. She is a leading force for the future of journalism, and we can't wait to see her shine."

Melander joined ThreeSixty in the summer of 2023, participating in the News Reporter Academy supported by the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Melander profiled Dr. Micah Prairie Chicken, a psychologist with the Indian Health Board. The story was published in the Minnesota Star Tribune and MinnPost.

The following week, Melander participated in ThreeSixty's PR & Advertising Camp, creating a campaign to address social media addiction. Melander presented the final campaign at Weber Shandwick.

She spent the rest of her summer as a North News intern, honing her reporting skills.

"Ayanna is an exceptional journalist whose community-minded passion for reporting is a superpower. We are constantly impressed by her presence, leadership and contribution to our classroom and beyond," said Theresa Malloy Lemickson, ThreeSixty program manager. "I am so excited to watch Ayanna continue growing in confidence and making her mark on St. Thomas and in the Emerging Media Department."

Melander's career aspirations are to write about environmental and civil justice.

"Winning this scholarship means that I can thrive in an institution that prepares me for the real world and shapes me into the writer and journalist that I aspire to be," she said.

Melander was selected from a competitive pool of applicants who attended ThreeSixty Journalism programming. The scholarship is worth more than \$160,000. ThreeSixty supports four students attending St. Thomas with the scholarship annually.

Stay connected.



WONSER MONGRUE

I am now a freshman at Howard University in Washington, D.C. I am studying under the major of political science and hoping to double minor in strategic communications, so that I can be a policy advisor for a health government agency. Even though I am not working in journalism, I am choosing a career path that encourages the thought of communication and initiative with many global topics.



ISABEL SAAVEDRA-WEIS

I just moved to New York City to pursue a Ph.D. from NYU! I'll be studying English and American Literature, with a specialization in U.S. Latinx stories. My long-term goal is to obtain a teaching position as a college professor, but I haven't closed the door on journalism completely! My experience working in media has deeply inspired my approach to producing work as a scholar - accessibility and community-based story-telling is the name of the game! I was recently selected to be part of NYU's Public Humanities Fellowship, which offers students opportunities to learn how to better connect their academic expertise to the non-academia world. I really hope to continue to use my media training throughout my doctoral training, and as a professor down the line.



KATELYN VUE

I'm the housing reporter for the Sahan Journal, a digital newsroom dedicated to telling stories about immigrants and communities of color in Minnesota. It's my passion to write and uplift communities of color and immigrants like mine, so that's the work I get to do everyday, which makes me feel very grateful to do. I was recently awarded Young Journalist of the Year by the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists, along with two other awards.



THUY-SA TRUONG

Currently I am in Southeast Asia with my family for my graduation trip going to South Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia. After the trip I will return to Minnesota and jump straight into university as a student at the University of Minnesota in Carlson School of Management hoping to double major in Data Analytics and Management and Information Systems.



GLORIA NGWA

Gloria Ngwa is a recent graduate of Washington Technology Magnet School's Class of 2024 and is an incoming freshman at Medill School in Northwestern University, majoring in Journalism and Marketing Communications. This summer, she participated in the Summer Journalism Intensive from Center for Broadcast Journalism. She also co-facilitated Listen Up! Youth Radio's Summer Media Intensive.

GWYNNEVERE VANG

By Anya Capistrant-Kinney, Staff

GWYNNEVERE VANG, a junior journalism student at the University of St. Thomas, was selected to be the ThreeSixty Journalism and Society of Professional Journalists college intern during summer 2024.

This internship, funded by the St. Paul Jaycees, provides a Twin Cities media outlet the ability to employ a college student for the summer. Vang chose the Pioneer Press.

“When they came to meet me, it felt very genuine and sincere ... they wanted to improve my skills as a journalist and help me out with my career,” she said.

The program ensured that Vang would report on a majority (51%) of non-crime news specific to St. Paul. Vang said that she enjoyed reporting on the local community the most.

“I got to talk to Fartun Osman, a National Olympic Somali coach ... her story was really inspiring, how sports are important for her community,” Vang said of a story she covered for Somali Soccer Week in St. Paul.

Vang is also ThreeSixty’s 2022 scholar and an inaugural member of the New York Times Corps, a mentorship program for college students from

underrepresented communities. She said that her experience at ThreeSixty helped prepare her to work in a professional newsroom.

“ThreeSixty helped me become more comfortable as a journalist. It has also helped me figure out what direction I want to go in (in the journalism industry),” Vang said.

Vang hopes to continue the profiling work she did with the Pioneer Press into her professional career, where she has strengthened her interviewing skills.

“I’ve done a lot of interviewing, which has been a lot of help because I’m usually nervous when I go and interview other people for stories,” Vang said.

She honed these skills and more with the internship, where she especially wanted to build her portfolio to prepare to enter the

industry.

Another valuable experience for Vang was networking with senior reporters as a college student.

“The people that I do interact with, they’re very knowledgeable, and they helped me out a lot with just figuring out how to format a story,” Vang said.

But Vang’s passions lie outside the newsroom: on the ground, interviewing people and covering the community. It’s this sentiment that continues to inspire Vang’s hopes for her future in the industry.

“I like being out there and talking person to person.” Vang said, “It makes it more genuine, getting to know people’s personality.”



“ThreeSixty helped me become more comfortable as a journalist ... it has also helped me figure out what direction I want to go in (in the journalism industry).”



FRANK BI

Frank Bi is a journalist, technologist, educator and nonprofit leader committed to building sustainable business models for digital media. He is the Director of Tools & Technology at the Minnesota Star Tribune, the Senior Vice President of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) and an Executive MBA candidate at New York University’s Stern School of Business.



FEVEN GEREZGIHER

I’m a reporter and producer at MPR News in St. Paul, part of a team working to engage younger, diverse audiences. This year, I won MPR News’ first award exclusively for a TikTok. I received an Eric Sevareid Award from the Midwest Broadcast Journalists Association for my video “Why the new Minnesota state flag is not as bad as you think, according to a flag expert.” Last year, a TikTok I produced was part of award-winning team multimedia coverage of the 2022 elections.



DANIELLE WONG

After participating in a competitive nine-month scholarship program from Taiwan’s Ministry of Education to intensively study Mandarin in Taipei, Danielle has returned to Minnesota and currently works as a communications manager at Digital Promise, a global nonprofit working to expand opportunities for every learner. Danielle leads strategic communications for Digital Promise’s Center for Inclusive Innovation to elevate the power and potential of involving student, family, community and educator voices in a school district’s process to solve pressing challenges in education. Danielle also serves as the Twin Cities Theatres of Color Coalition’s Coordinator, where they oversee operations and communications to support and advance deep investment in local BIPOC theatres, and previously worked as the Digital Content and Strategy Associate at Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC.

I just graduated from Brooklyn Center High School and am going to college at Mount Mary University on a full-ride scholarship. I plan to major in Justice Studies with a concentration in social justice. I recently finished an internship where I hosted a podcast on YouTube and Spotify, The Voices of Rondo Podcast, that covered systemic racism within U.S. transportation policy. That experience definitely won’t be the last time I use journalism/media to express my passion for activism.



ERICA LEE

Aisha Eady is the founder and creative director of Aisha Eady Studios, a digital design agency that helps organizations establish a stellar impression online. As a trained journalist with a background in nonprofit communications, she writes on topics including self-development, spirituality, the new world of work, the lived experiences of Black women, beauty, and lifestyle content. Her work has appeared in the Minnesota Star Tribune and Newsweek magazine.



AISHA EADY



RIGHT:
Karen Boros (second row, center) pictured with the St. Thomas journalism department faculty. (University of St. Thomas archives)

BELOW:
Karen Boros, right, pictured with a friend. (Marcia Fluier)



PIONEERING REPORTER AND PROFESSOR KAREN BOROS LEAVES MAJOR ESTATE GIFT TO THREESIXTY

By Anya Capistrant-Kinney, Staff

FORMER ST. THOMAS professor Karen Boros left an estate gift to ThreeSixty Journalism, which allows the program to continue its commitment to producing high-quality content by diverse youth across the state. Boros died at age 82 in September.

“Individual gifts like the one that Karen gave us, allow us to put the money where it’s needed most in the moment,” said Director of ThreeSixty Journalism Kenzie O’Keefe.

Boros’ long career in journalism started in television, where she worked across multiple Midwest stations, including WCCO-TV, CBS News and MPR. Karen then started her career as a journalism professor at the University of St. Thomas and worked there for 19 years before retiring in the early 2000s.

St. Thomas Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Wendy Wyatt said that Boros left a

profound impact on both the St. Thomas and journalistic community.

“Everybody (at St. Thomas) knew Karen because they recognized her from her days in news. She just gave everything to try to help build the journalists of tomorrow,” Wyatt said.

Amanda Theisen, a former student of Boros, said that one of Boros’ main goals as a professor was to help students get into the industry successfully.

“She had a way of helping you realize what it takes to be successful in the industry ... she took it very seriously to make sure that when her students left her class, they were fully prepared for what a career in journalism would be like,” Theisen said.

As for Boros’ gift to ThreeSixty, O’Keefe said that her gift will go toward helping pioneer new programs for students, specifically the

Capitol Reporting Workshop, first held in March 2024.

Another part of these pilot projects was creating a program to invest in students.

“Our program is all about creating access and reducing barriers to participating in journalism for our young people. Often, students must choose between making money or participating in extracurricular activities. We want to take away that choice (by paying students),” O’Keefe said.

It’s these gifts that help to sustain the program for years to come.

“I’m not surprised that Karen left such a large gift to ThreeSixty ... to continue the legacy of the program and to ensure that we are diversifying newsrooms and making sure that people who are telling the stories reflect their communities,” Theisen said.

SCHOLARS ON THE MOVE!



JAYDIN FAIRBANKS is a sophomore at the University of St. Thomas. Last semester, he interned as a photographer for TommieMedia, St. Thomas’ student-led news organization. He plans on studying abroad in Japan in the fall.

NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT BRINGS MINDFULNESS TO THREESIXTY CURRICULUM

By Anya Capistrant-Kinney, Staff

AFTER YEARS working as an international war correspondent in Iraq and Afghanistan and climbing the journalism career ladder, Ernesto Londoño struggled.

“Newsrooms are frenetic places and the work we do takes a heavy toll. Starting a serious meditation practice in 2018 was a game changer for me,” he said.

Londoño, a St. Paul resident born in Bogotá, Colombia, is now a Midwest correspondent for the New York Times. He is also pursuing a graduate degree in Mindfulness Studies at Lesley University.

“(Mindfulness) allowed me to manage stress and difficult emotions more skillfully ... I’ve long felt that we could do a better job at giving young journalists better tools to navigate the ups and downs of a stressful line of work,” Londoño said.

He spent the summer bringing what he’s learned to ThreeSixty Journalism students, teaching mindfulness practices for journalism and writing in both the program’s Multimedia Storytelling Institute and College Essay Workshop.

His lessons for ThreeSixty included making sound judgements, navigating difficult conversations, breaking through writer’s block, and tackling the journalist’s inner critic.

Londoño’s lesson on interviewing covered navigating interviews with possible vulnerable or adversarial people and included a video appearance by New York Times podcast host Lulu Garcia-Navarro. Garcia-Navarro discussed her interview methods as a seasoned reporter.

Londoño also taught a lesson on reflective writing with the help of a guest video appearance by novelist Curtis Sittenfeld. The lesson taught students the importance of revising and self-editing.

As for Londoño’s experience with ThreeSixty, he said that he is committed to youth journalism.

“We need a new generation of journalists that is motivated and eager to rise to the challenges we face. There’s a lot we can do to prepare, support and enable them — and that starts in the classroom,” Londoño said.

Mentoring young journalists is familiar to

Londoño: he credits his own mentors as a youth for guiding him into the industry.

“When I was starting out, I was fortunate to have good, generous mentors,” Londoño said. “They taught me the basics and gave me an appreciation of the power and value of an informed citizenry. But perhaps most of all, they helped me overcome self-doubt.”

Londoño recently published his memoir-exploration, “Trippy,” which explores the role medicinal psychedelics can play in healing mental health. His personal experience helped students to further understand what it takes to be a journalist.

“(Students) asked smart questions, they conveyed a commitment to conducting themselves ethically as journalists and they’re clearly motivated to tell vital stories about our communities,” Londoño said.



ThreeSixty College Essay Workshop students pose with Ernesto Londoño. Londoño returned to help kick off ThreeSixty’s last workshop of the summer with a lesson on mindful writing.



FRANCISCA ARAVENA is a strategic communications senior at the University of St. Thomas. This past semester, they studied abroad at the University of Melbourne, Australia. During the fall, they worked as a Student Content Creator Intern at the Division of Student Affairs. They are hoping to attend law school after they graduate.

Homecoming 2024

Over 150 attendees raised more than \$90,000 for ThreeSixty programming and cast ambitious visions for a more equitable industry during our annual fundraiser and community celebration on April 12 at the Granada Theater in Minneapolis. Thank you again to our sponsors: Best Buy, The Minnesota Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Spokesman Recorder, MinnPost, Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal, and the Women's Foundation of Minnesota.

Photos by Sai Kallur (St. Thomas '25)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

1. Current ThreeSixty students and program alums were an integral part of the night. They DJed, hosted, shared impactful stories, and networked with other attendees.
2. NBC National Correspondent **Adrienne Broaddus** received ThreeSixty's annual Opening Doors Award. Broaddus is a former KARE11 reporter and volunteered for ThreeSixty during her time in the Twin Cities. **Mukhtar Ibrahim**, founder of the Sahan Journal, received the Widening the Circle Award. Sahan Journal currently employs three ThreeSixty alums: **Katelyn Vue**, **Dymanh Chhoun** and **Samantha HoangLong**.
3. ThreeSixty student **Everett Parker** (Augsburg '28) served as the celebration's DJ.
4. **Duchesne Drew**, Minnesota Public Radio president, is a longtime champion of ThreeSixty and currently serves as a member emeritus on the program's leadership council.
5. Veteran broadcaster and small business owner **Sheletta Brundidge** co-hosted Homecoming alongside ThreeSixty student **Marquan Harper** (St. Thomas '28).



WINTER NEWS TEAM CAPITOL EDITION

Twenty student reporters covered important policy issues impacting young people at the beginning of Minnesota's legislative session in February.

By **Theresa Malloy Lemickson**, Staff
Photos by **Brandon Woller**, St. Thomas

Twenty ThreeSixty journalists can now add political reporting to their reporting toolbox after completing Winter News Team: Capitol Edition. The workshop was framed around the question: How can democracy work for young people?

Over four weeks, high school journalists were tasked with legislative reporting, covering policy issues that explored how democracy works for young people. From school resource officers to the bonding bill to ethnic studies and the trans refugee bill, youth took to the halls of the State Capitol, interviewing both elected officials and community advocates.

This was one of ThreeSixty's most ambitious workshops to date.

"ThreeSixty reporters learned that democracy needs communicators to function," said **Program Manager Theresa Malloy Lemickson**. "Our students thought critically about how these legislative issues impact young people and asked important questions to legislators and advocates with

that in mind."

WONSER MONGRUE said the workshop highlighted the power individuals have to raise awareness on an issue that matters to them.

"It takes a passionate individual to identify areas of crisis. Whether or not it's hyper-focused by the media, it is with you to make a difference." She said.

CHARLIE QUICK saw how respectful and ethical reporting is an important skill for journalists reporting on political matters.

"I learned about the importance of building relationships and trust with legislators, while holding them accountable," he said.

The first day kicked off with a presentation from **Fatima Moore of Firefly Advocacy** who explained how the legislative process works. Students worked with professional journalists to prepare for their interviews at the Capitol with assignments based on social justice issues they had interest in covering.



Then they spent President's Day, Feb. 19, at the Capitol, conducting interviews and seeing democracy in action. Students showed up on a day off of school, dressed to impress and ready to report.

The experience was followed by a Saturday editing session to add final touches to stories with editors.

DYLAN LEUNG shared how his editor showed him new ways to approach his story.

"It was interesting seeing how different this article was from the ones I would traditionally write. I really liked how great the product turned out!" He said.

The students' work was published in the Minnesota Star Tribune and at threesixty.stthomas.edu.



ThreeSixty reporters Marquan Harper and Dylan Leung interview Rep. Cedrick Frazier.



REPORTER REFLECTION

I FOUND MY VOICE AT THE CAPITOL

By Marquan Harper, *Twin Cities Academy*

As a young adult who has spent my entire life in St. Paul, the Capitol has always been a prominent fixture in my cityscape. Its majestic architecture stands as a constant reminder of the power and significance that lie within those walls. Yet, despite its proximity, the Capitol has often felt like a distant realm, reserved for the select few who navigate the intricate corridors of politics.

Growing up, I viewed politics as something separate from my identity—a realm dominated by older generations and disconnected from the realities of my everyday life. It was easy to feel disengaged and apathetic, believing that my voice held little sway in the grand scheme of things. I sensed that many of my peers shared this sentiment; politics seemed like a world apart, irrelevant to our lives as young adults in St. Paul.

However, my recent experience at the Capitol has challenged these perceptions in profound ways. Tasked with interviewing lawmakers about the restoration of voting rights, I found myself thrust into the heart

of political discourse, surrounded by fellow young journalists who shared my passion for civic engagement. Together, we embarked on a journey that would redefine my understanding of politics and my place within it.

Walking through the halls of the Capitol, I couldn't help but marvel at its grandeur. Yet, amidst the opulent surroundings, I discovered something unexpected: a sense of empowerment and belonging. Engaging directly with lawmakers and witnessing the inner workings of government, I realized that politics wasn't just a distant spectacle; it was a tangible force that shaped the world around me.

Surrounded by individuals who were committed to amplifying the voices of our generation, I felt a renewed sense of purpose. Each interview, each conversation, became an opportunity to advocate for change and challenge the status quo. As I listened to lawmakers discuss the importance of restoring voting rights, I understood the gravity of our mission—to ensure that every voice is heard, regardless of age or background.

My experience at the Capitol has transformed my perspective on politics. No



“My experience at the Capitol has transformed my perspective on politics. No longer do I view it as a distant realm; rather, it is an integral part of who I am – a citizen with the power to effect change.”

longer do I view it as a distant realm; rather, it is an integral part of who I am—a citizen with the power to effect change. Moving forward, I am committed to staying engaged, to bridging the gap between the Capitol and our communities, and to advocating for a more inclusive and representative democracy.

In the heart of St. Paul, amidst the towering spires of the Capitol, I have found my voice. And I am determined to make it heard.

Marquan Harper is a freshman at the University of St. Thomas.

REPORTER REFLECTION

AFFIRMING MY CALL TO SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK

By Erica Lee, *Brooklyn Center High School*

The collaboration I did as a Capitol news reporter for ThreeSixty Journalism has allowed me to look within and figure out the kind of social justice activist I want to be.

My life's calling is to tackle racial and urban injustice within North Minneapolis, my community. This passion for social justice has led me to advocacy work in various cities across the Twin Cities. However, throughout all the work I've done, something has been missing that this workshop made me aware of: community.

I used to want to ride solo as an activist and take on all these heavy, systemic issues by myself. Despite this, I had the opportunity

to collaborate with a fellow participant in this program to conduct interviews with committed lawmakers and trailblazing advocates to write a news story about the legalization of marijuana and the importance of social equity and education being highlighted throughout the process. If I hadn't worked with my partner on this project, the final product wouldn't have had the same level of depth, meaning and significance. Thanks to this joint effort, I had someone to share and receive opinions from, to learn new things with and most importantly someone to share the weight of the work with.

This experience truly reminded me of the importance of community and showed me that the kind of social justice activist I want to be is the one that works with the community, not just for it. You can aspire to change and revolutionize anything, but if you don't have a strong network of connections, there's only so much you can accomplish.

There's an African proverb that encapsulates my main takeaway from this experience which reads, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Erica Lee is now a freshman at Mount Mary University.





Q+A

FUNDING HELPS HOMELESS YOUTH

By **María José Plotts**, *Homeschooled*

James Lewis works at The Link, a nonprofit dedicated to helping youth and young families. Lewis specializes in helping homeless youth find housing and other resources. Lewis explained how the new legislation has helped support young people without housing. The money given to The Link has been used to reach numerous communities and provide many different programs aimed at helping young people without resources and strong support systems.

Minnesota has made much progress over the years with how it provides for the homeless, Lewis said. The Homeless Youth Act passed in 2023 nearly tripled the amount of money funding programs supporting homeless youth. Lewis said Minnesota is closer now than ever to accomplishing its goal of ending youth homelessness.

ThreeSixty also interviewed Kristy Snyder from Youthprise and Rep. Heather Keeler about their work with homeless youth.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How did you become involved in this work?

I do have a personal experience with homelessness. When I was really young, I was born in Milwaukee. When my family moved to Minneapolis, we were homeless for a while. Fortunately, that was the only time I've ever experienced homelessness. In terms of the work, I have been working with youth and family services and [people] experiencing homelessness since 2000. I've had a pretty good opportunity to work with mainly youth and families but also single adults.

Q: What programs does Minnesota provide to help homeless young people and prepare them better for life?

The Homeless Youth Act funds are the most flexible funds that we have to work with in our service field, so it is the best money that we have. It allows us to be completely flexible. The definitions are really inclusive. ... There's not really a limit to who we can help. It really supports all the programming that we do in the youth service world. There's a whole continuum of services, and this money allows us to support all of those programs.

What I've learned over my career is that

there's a completely different approach to adult services and youth services. We've worked really, really hard to extend the age of what youth is for us. For us youth is up to age 24. So when you're in that youth service field, you don't just get housing, you get case management support and connections to resources. It's just a full wraparound kind of support when you're talking about youth who are experiencing homelessness. In the adult world, it's a little bit more cold, and you just get a cot to sleep on or you get a bed or a unit of housing and you're kind of out on your own to figure the rest out from there. There's a very big difference between services for adults and services for youth and the Homeless Youth Act is responsible for a lot of that.

Q: Why a distinction between the type of aid for adults versus the type of aid youth need?

It's so important to have a different response. A lot of times, people who are adults experiencing homelessness, they've had a chance to live like they have life experience. They've probably had full-time employment or have had housing at one point. Their needs are a little bit different because their development is different. They're fully aware of who they are, hopefully, if they're healthy adult. And on the youth side, it's unfortunately a lot of times they ended up being homeless or experiencing homelessness for circumstances that they're not in control of ... our foster care systems, our juvenile justice systems, they're failing, and that is causing youth to be homeless. Young people are still developing. Their brain development is so important.

The reason why we want to offer so much extra support, besides just a place to lie down, is to help them continue to develop.

[We want them] to be able to advocate for themselves and to be able to identify their strengths and build networks of support. Then there's also a component of family unification that we never want to let go up. We want to make sure that they're connected to their people who care for them.

Q: What is the importance of this initiative to provide more flexible aid through cash handouts?

The flexibility piece is everything. One of the biggest challenges in the work we do is the money. A lot of times it's just restrictive on what you can do and who you can help, and that's where the problems come up. This flexibility just allows us to be really creative.

What's been so amazing is that, after all these years of working and advocating begging and pleading for more money, last year, we totally kicked butt. We had the biggest increase in funds that we've ever seen, it was just amazing ... We got \$30 million out of the \$50 million that we asked for. Now we're up to about \$42 million every two years.

The cool part is that we are seeing a direct correlation to the increase in homeless youth funds and a decrease in the amount of youth that are experiencing homelessness. We know it's working, and we're going to keep pushing and pushing at this until we get to a level that we think that we need to actually end youth homelessness. I've been doing this work for about 24 years and ending youth homelessness has always been the goal. It's never felt like it was obtainable until now. We are really in a good place in our community.

We got a lot of new energy and support around prevention. What's really cool is that the Homeless Youth Act funds and supports the whole continuum of services that we have. We started with prevention – we want to try and keep people from becoming homeless. If they are experiencing homelessness, we have people do street outreach. After street outreach, there's emergency drop-in centers. And then it goes into housing options. And HYA supports all of that.





REP. SENCER-MURA ON ETHNIC STUDIES

Q+A

By Ethan Vang, *Centennial High School*

The Minnesota Legislature passed the ethnic studies bill in 2023 requiring all schools to have ethnic studies. This is a way for students and teachers to learn about other cultures and for students of color to feel more included in history and school. Supporters of the bill hope students learn the ability to see and understand another person's perspective, culture, heritage and history.

This bill was supported by Rep. Samantha Sencer-Mura (DFL, Minneapolis) who is Japanese American, because she felt like her culture wasn't talked about a lot in high school. She said, "I want to make sure that history is also being taught so I can see myself." During World War II her grandparents were interned, and their experience was different from what was taught in school about the Japanese.

All schools in Minnesota are required to have some type of ethnic studies by 2026. In some schools, students are required to take ethnic studies. In others it's an elective class. Sencer-Mura will continue pushing this bill and wants to make ethnic studies a required class for all Minnesota high-schoolers.

ThreeSixty also interviewed Youth 4 Ethnic Studies leaders.

Q: Why 2023? Why not earlier?

I supported this bill and really tried to champion it because I thought it wasn't the experience that I had as a student right and how much I would have benefited and how much classmates would have benefited from having ethnic studies programs.

I can't totally speak to what happened before I got involved, but I will say this: This bill did not have bipartisan support, meaning Republicans did not support this bill, and I know, there was earlier versions of the bill I don't believe that Republicans supported, so it was just really not possible to pass this bill until Democrats had control of the trifecta, like we did starting last January.

Q: What would be the outcome of ethnic studies?

This bill was actually really students outside of the metro who were asking: We want that same education, and our school district is not going to just independently do it. We need some push from the state.

For me, a history that is important is I'm Japanese American, and my grandparents were interned during World War II. When my family talks about what World War II means to them, it is kind of different outside of maybe what the mainstream narrative about we were fighting Japanese during World War II when we won the war, and it was like this really positive thing, right?

And yet, for my family, it meant something different. Then for two to three years, my family was interned. If I'm sitting in a classroom, and we're talking about World War II, I want to make sure that history is also being taught so I can feel like I can see myself – the windows piece of it is the ability to see other cultures. I think that that is a critical piece. When I think about what are some of the skills that I see sometimes adults missing, it's that ability to see and understand another person's perspective, history, heritage, to be able to put the way they feel in context for why it might be different than the way I feel.

Q: Do you think ethnic studies being required would improve graduation rates, attendance rates?

California is the first place to have actually made ethnic studies a graduation requirement, and they have done research on some of the schools that have had ethnic studies courses for a while that show students' engagement increases, students' academic achievement is increased. There's a small body of research that tells us that, and I definitely think that that is a goal – the hope to see positive correlation between offering these classes and students doing better in school.



Ethan Vang interviews Rep. Samantha Sencer-Mura about the ethnic studies bill passed in 2023.



Q+A

REP. FINKE ON TRANS REFUGE STATE

By Keira McNiff, *Great River Montessori School*

In 2023, 503 anti-trans bills were introduced across the U.S., with 85 of them being passed in Congress, according to the Trans Legislation Tracker. In response to this influx of anti-trans legislation, many states have sought to become sanctuary states for transgender people seeking gender-affirming care, with Minnesota becoming one of them. During the last legislative session, Minnesota passed a law allowing transgender people to seek gender-affirming care in Minnesota without being penalized or prosecuted in their home state for doing so.

Rep. Leigh Finke (DFL, St. Paul), Minnesota's first openly transgender legislator, spoke with ThreeSixty reporters about what becoming a trans refuge state means for Minnesota and the future.

ThreeSixty also interviewed Kat Rohn from OutFront about advocacy efforts the organization is leading.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Now that the Trans Refuge Bill has been around and in action for almost a year, have you been seeing the progress you hoped for?

We passed the bill at a time when about five states had banned gender affirming care for minors and vulnerable adults. Now it's about 27. The urgency of the bill just continued to grow. We didn't know whether to expect people to come here to access care from their homes, or if they were going to move here. Since we passed the bill, we have seen a lot of people coming. There's a group called Minnesota Trans Intersex Resource Network (MTIRN) that has formed to manage the need that the trans refuge bill created. It's a process – protection is a promise that you make forever. This year, we have more bills to help us fulfill that promise.

Q: Could you tell me about some of those bills?

I have a bill going to the Workforce Committee. It's \$1 million for a group called PFund, which would be distributed through small grants to local organizations supporting incoming or recent arrivals. It helps us get a little bit of stabilization for the first couple 100

families and many, many more young people who have come to the state.

We also have a bill that would clarify gender affirming care for health insurance coverage. It's really important to make sure that insurers are covering all of the elements of gender affirming care, which is a complicated form of health care. It's easy for insurers to cut certain pieces out of their coverage, rather than cover the whole spectrum of care. These bills are two of many examples.

Q: There's been a lack of gender affirming health care providers. What are your long- and short-term goals?

That's a huge problem, because we were already short on the number of people who are able to provide gender affirming care compared to the need before the Trans Refuge Bill. We need to increase the number of people who are providing it, and we need to increase the number of locations where those providers live. Not all trans people live in the city. It's difficult to find a way to get more people to practice a certain kind of health care through policy.

What I'm interested in doing is finding a recruitment tool. Say you live in Missouri, and your patients are moving out of Missouri because healthcare is being restricted. I want to find a way to get those providers here as well – to recruit them to fill that gap. It's going to be a long-term problem that we'll have to work on. There was a national shortage of workers in all fields. It's not unique to us in our healthcare, but we're trying to find a way to solve it.



ThreeSixty reporters Keira McNiff and Alexis Aryeequaye pose with Rep. Leigh Finke after interviewing her in her office.

Q: It's a big election year. Do you think that this bill, and the follow up bills, are going to be hot-button issues?

Trans lives and health care will be an issue in elections, not because of us (trans people), but because of the opposition. They want to make it a big deal, and that has never been a good idea for them. They never actually win elections when they complain about trans people.



Q+A

INSIDE THE BONDING BILL WITH CHAIR LEE

By Aketzally Murillo Alvarado, FAIR School for Arts

The committee chair for this year’s investment bill is led by Chair Fue Lee (DFL, Minneapolis). The Capitol Investment Bill is more commonly referred to as the “bonding bill” because the state typically relies on borrowed money — bonds — to invest into public works projects. Bonding bills typically run on a two-year cycle. The first year being the budget year, when they decide how to allocate taxpayer money, and money they already have in general. The second year is typically the policy year, which tends to focus on how to allocate borrowed money as well as passing policies that don’t cost anything.

This year is the policy year, so the legislature is prioritizing investing into well-planned projects, infrastructure and zero-cost policies. Even though the legislative session only recently began there has been some thought on projects such as the light rail and Hennepin Energy Recovery Center. The HERC is a facility located in downtown Minneapolis that burns garbage to generate energy and greatly affects the air quality around it in the process.

ThreeSixty also talked to the DNR about how it is requesting support from the bonding bill.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Would you like to see funds go to having the light rail expand into North Minneapolis?

I think whatever projects we fund, I really want to represent what a lot of the community wants. There are some concerns with some of the residents who will be impacted, and businesses, and I do agree with them. If we’re going to have one of the best forms of transit, we must provide support for those businesses and those residents that will be impacted. So that’ll be an ongoing conversation over here.

I think we do need some form

of transit there to help connect our residents to other parts of the region. I’ll be supportive of whatever project ends up there by making sure our residents are being heard, and actually get the resources that they need. Having money for light rails, or projects like that, will be a nonstarter for my counterparts on the other side of the aisle, so that will be a tough one. Fortunately, last year, we were able to pass a law to allow for the Metropolitan Council to raise revenue through taxes so that if they want to move forward, I think actually use some of the funds that they were able to raise to put towards that project.

Q: Will the HERC be impacted by this year’s bonding bill?

Last year, it was in my budget that I required them to have a plan to shut down the HERC. Right now, they’re not moving forward with that plan. ... I think that I would still want to require them to have a plan to close it down. If you’re asking me, are we going to have funds to, shift or repurpose that? I don’t think we will have that capacity in our bill. We’re still going to put the challenge on Hennepin County to come up with a plan to really listen to our citizens to shut that down.

Q: Is there a major concern that the 2024 bonding bill does not cover that you think should be considered?

I think this will probably fall more into one of those three goals that I have around advancing racial equity. Typically, we can only fund nonprofit projects with general fund cash, but we might not have some cash available this year. So just taking a step back, bonds were borrowed against state debt, and so that’s why we need to only fund public projects where we have cash on hand that we can use to pay for projects. Without cash this year, we might not be able to support community organizations that do crucial work in all of our communities across the entire state.

THREESIXTY LAUNCHES MOST AMBITIOUS CAMP TO DATE:

Multimedia Storytelling Institute

Photos by Brandon Woller, St. Thomas

GROWING GINGER, JOBS AND JUSTICE

ST. PAUL PROGRAM GIVES TEENS JOB SKILLS AND HEALTHY FOOD TO ITS COMMUNITIES

By McCall Vickers, DeLaSalle High School, Nico Odegard, Nova Classical Academy, Aketzally Murillo Alvarado, FAIR School for Arts

WHILE SOME teens thrive in a classroom environment, teen interns from the Market Garden Program at Urban Roots are thriving by getting their hands dirty.

“Sometimes I just wake up and I am more excited for work than school,” said Sakura Vue, a graduate of Johnson High School who interns at the program.

First created in 1969, Urban Roots is a nonprofit organization located in St. Paul dedicated to providing youth of the Twin Cities, majority BIPOC and low-income, employment programs that train, educate and empower them through the lens of gardening and cooking.

“What we’re really doing is providing a place for students who have some kind of barrier to employment, to have their first job potentially, and learn job skills,” said Jaclyne Jandro, program director of Market Garden.

The Market Garden Program is one out of the three paid internship programs the organization provides where teens manage their own crop production and receive hands-on curriculum. Urban Roots has 85 interns in total across the three programs. According to their website, they grow and harvest around 10,000 to 15,000 pounds of produce each year.

“One of my favorite parts of the garden is when the supervisors would just like to pick fruit fresh from the dirt and just give it to us



ThreeSixty Journalism launched our inaugural Multimedia Storytelling Institute in July 2024. The three-week camp taught the technical, ethical and entrepreneurial basics of multimedia journalism inside the University of St. Thomas' brand new STEAM building, the Schoenecker Center. It was sponsored by **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota**. The Dow Jones News Fund provided additional support.

Eighteen students from 14 different high schools explored topics of community healing through the lens of health equity,

producing written and multimedia stories for professional publication. Guest instructors included **Ernesto Londoño**, correspondent for the New York Times, **Harry Colbert Jr**, managing editor of MinnPost, and **Greg Vandegrift**, journalism professor at the University of St. Thomas.

More than 30 industry volunteers supported students as they reported and completed their work.

Reporting, editing, and publishing partners included the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, MinnPost, Padilla, WCCO TV, KARE 11,

KSTP, FOX 9, the University of MN Hubbard School of Journalism & Mass Communication, Seavert Studios and Minneapolis Voices.

Stories from the institute have already been published by the Minnesota Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, MinnPost, KARE11, KSTP, KMSP, BMA Cable Network, Minneapolis Voices, and the Delano Herald Journal. Padilla supported with media relations.

The Multimedia Storytelling Institute is an evolution of past ThreeSixty programming, including News Reporter Academy and TV Broadcast Camp.

MULTIMEDIA STORYTELLING

to try it," said Tiara Jamons, a rising senior at Johnson High School who interns at the program.

According to Vue and the other interns at Market Garden, they gain essential job skills like building connections and communicating with others. In other job settings they would have to know these skills beforehand, but Market Garden makes it their priority to give teens the skills they need to succeed in life.

"Like no matter what you're doing there's always somebody that knows somebody and that always passes on to you," said Layla Ali, a rising junior at Johnson High School who interns at the program.

Through the management of about 1.5 acres of land across multiple urban gardens and the harvesting of over 50 crop varieties, interns are learning the importance of healthy foods through their exposure to multiple types of vegetables and cultural cuisine.

"Ever since I started working here I feel like I am being or been more conscious of

what I'm putting into my body," Jamson said. Her experience working at Market Garden has also provided an opportunity to try new produce she isn't normally exposed to.

Located in East St. Paul, Jandro describes the area as a food desert, which is a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food and those who have been denied that access due to systemic injustice.

Not having access to healthy food can lead to an increase of health problems like high blood pressure or diabetes which causes further dependence on the healthcare system. Market



ThreeSixty reporters interview Jaclyne Jandro and Urban Roots interns at the University of St. Thomas on July 15, 2024. Urban Roots is a nonprofit that teaches BIPOC people how to garden.

Continued on page 30

REPORTER REFLECTION



By McCall Vickers,
DeLaSalle High School

The ThreeSixty Journalism program has been an impactful experience for me in many ways, but the top three are: the people and relationships formed, the subjects and topics studied and the welcoming environment.

The ThreeSixty program has helped me form relationships that are essential as I explore a career in journalism and seek formal education in the field. During the program, I have connected deeply with my peers, who share similar passions and challenges, creating a supportive network that encourages

mutual growth. Our relationships will last well beyond the three weeks. The instructors and industry coaches have provided mentorship, guidance and real-world insights that have helped develop my skills. The individuals I've interviewed for stories have broadened my perspective and taught me the importance of empathy and ethical reporting. These relationships not only enrich my learning experience but also offer a foundation of support, knowledge and inspiration that will be instrumental as I advance in my journalism career.

The ThreeSixty program has expanded my understanding of journalism. The instructors provided comprehensive insights into the field, helping me grasp the intricacies of journalism ethics, equity and professional standards. I've had the opportunity to practice essential skills such as researching, writing, broadcasting and interviewing, which have helped me hone

my craft. It has equipped me with the tools and confidence needed to pursue a career in journalism. The program's emphasis on real-world application and critical thinking opened my eyes to the challenges and responsibilities of being a journalist.

Also, the ThreeSixty program has provided a uniquely welcoming environment that has helped me, a typically shy person, discover and become comfortable sharing my voice. The supportive and inclusive atmosphere encourages open dialogue and makes room for every participant's perspective. This nurturing space has allowed me to express myself freely without fear of judgment. The program's emphasis on mutual respect and understanding has empowered me to contribute confidently, fostering a sense of belonging and self-assurance that I will carry with me as I continue to pursue my passion for journalism.

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY CLINIC FINDS DIFFERENT WAYS TO SUPPORT THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

THE ORGANIZATION USES TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS MEDICINES TO HEAL GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

By **Anais Froberg-Martinez**, *Minnetonka High School*

Anira Mohamud and Amina Said contributed to this report.

DR. ANTONY STATELY is a fourth-generation survivor of boarding schools.

These American schools were engineered to strip Indigenous children of their culture. They created decades of historical trauma that would manifest itself into alcohol and drug usage.

When he sees his community suffer, Stately's empathy is fueled by the pain of his own experience.

An enrolled citizen of Oneida with parents from White Earth and Red Lake, Stately was raised in South Minneapolis. He is now executive officer and president of Native American Community Clinic.

The clinic's patients come from Minneapolis' urban Native American community. By providing Indigenous medical treatments, patients are valued in a way that Western healthcare often overlooks.

A large part of the clinic's mission is to treat health disparities— something familiar to many Indigenous communities. It does this through food, housing, and health insurance.

Its latest initiative is a housing complex above the clinic, at 1213 East Franklin Ave.

Sending someone away with a box of pills isn't enough, Stately said. People need a place for safety and security. Stately believes that only assessing a physical person is what holds healthcare back. His clinic sees patients as more than a body.

After moving back to Minnesota to familiarize his Dakota sons with their culture, it became more clear to him that change was needed for them to grow up differently.

Dr. Antony Stately can still recall whispering to his two sons nightly: "Thank you for saving my life."

According to a Dakota creation story, Stately said, twins helped create the world. His sons, now high school seniors, changed his perception of his own world.

"They just introduce such amazing capacity for you to imagine what is possible ... such a tremendous gift," he said.

How Stately got here

Stately grew up in a complex environment.

His grandmother was Oneida, but Stately said his parents shaped his perception of himself as an Indigenous man.

Even early in his adolescence, he was introduced to the generational cycle of alcohol and drugs— something that everyone around him viewed as a part of life.



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Anira Mohamud interviews
Dr. Antony Stately in July.

To restart his life, Stately moved to Los Angeles. There, he got his Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

Despite all he had been through, South Minneapolis would always be a part of Stately. Upon returning with his sons, he found his community suffering more than when he had left. “And that was heartbreaking,” he said.

After being hired by a local tribe to run their behavioral health program, Stately realized the people he treated weren’t just patients. They were relatives, and people he grew up with.

The issue at hand

High rates of substance use and alcoholism in his community had been the buildup of decades’ worth of trauma, Stately said.

Medical papers referred to them as “disorders of despair,” he said.

Besides boarding school and an occasional trip to the reservation, his life in South Minneapolis created a barrier between him and the rest of the world.

Getting out of the city helped him form relationships, which Stately said is a

fundamental Indigenous principle.

“When you are sick or unwell from addiction and using substances ... your relationships are not good,” he said.

With these values in mind, the clinic opened its traditional healing program in 2018. The program teaches people to be good relatives to themselves, others and all living things, Stately said.

Before starting the program, he hired a woman to smudge and bless the place. At

the end of the ceremony, a man named Frank came in.

He had been a patient for eight years and dealt with homelessness for around a decade. He asked for some medicine, and the woman held the bowl of smudge to his face.

“He had big tears in his eyes,” Stately said, “He wanted that medicine.. And that was a transformative and really big change moment for me, because I realized that Frank is our typical client a lot of the time.”



REPORTER REFLECTION

By **Anais Froberg-Martinez**,
Minnetonka High School



“Don’t let Ana go into journalism,” was an exact text from my mom to dad, attached to an article about how

journalism is a “dying career.” It was on a news website, which is kind of ironic.

I got into journalism around a year ago, because I loved U.S. politics and had my heart set on becoming a White House correspondent. My real dream was to be at the forefront of history, notebook in hand.

In retrospect, my questionable choice to apply to the \$7,000 New York Times summer program might have contributed to their viewpoints. Especially because I had no prior interest in journalism.

I wanted to convince my parents that I was the next big thing, even if I didn’t believe it

myself. So I spent a month crafting my 2,000-word application to ThreeSixty’s Multimedia Storytelling Institute, and I got in.

I wasn’t sure what I expected out of the camp, and I had second thoughts after I got assigned to write about the Native American Community Clinic. Previously, I had been desperate to make it to some esteemed newspaper, but I didn’t even know if I was worthy of writing at all. The fact that my background was entirely different only fueled my doubt.

While preparing for my interview with Dr. Antony Stately, the CEO of the clinic, I was scared of being uncomfortable. ThreeSixty staff told me that Stately was open about his personal life, but I was still afraid of sounding insensitive in my article. These articles were getting published in the Minnesota Star Tribune, and the last thing I wanted was for my first article to ruin my reputation.

In our interview, Stately talked to me about his journey with alcoholism and substance abuse. He told me that these issues— often called “disorders of despair,”—were the product of a generational cycle. Stately, who is a survivor of Indigenous boarding schools,

talked about how being separated from his culture caused significant damage to his community. This damage was often repressed, manifesting itself into alcohol and drugs.

My time spent with him made me realize that I was afraid of acknowledging the problem because I thought it would make it worse. So many people thought it was enough to make a few reservations and ignore the traumas that Indigenous people went through.

The Native American community had been hurt, and for centuries, Western society tried to cover up problems instead of working through them. They needed to heal, and that takes effort and time. It takes understanding, and an ability to address hard questions.

Through ThreeSixty Journalism, I learned that reporting with integrity means portraying all facts, even those that can cause a disruption in our comfortable lives. I thought being an ethical reporter meant avoiding making anyone uncomfortable.

Now, I think that a true journalist isn’t afraid to prioritize the truth over the often-warped perception we see today.

KENTE CIRCLE ADDRESSES MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

MINNEAPOLIS ORGANIZATION WORKS TO HELP MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES GET THERAPY

By Honor Vang,
Centennial High School

Amira Mohamud and Alexis Aryeequaye
contributed to this report.

LEELA WILLARD is driven to help people in marginalized communities have access to better mental healthcare.

Willard, who uses they/them and she/her pronouns, got into becoming a therapist at Kente Circle after she went to a mental healthcare conference hosted by Kente Circle. They said that was the first time they had a feeling that being a therapist was for them, especially after she learned about Kente Circle’s mission and purpose. When there was a spot open for associates at Kente Circle, she went for it.

Willard became a therapist so she could help create a safe space for people of color to share their stories, as well as getting them through their difficult times and trauma. Willard also works with Blue Cross Blue Shield’s Gender Health Service division to get healthcare to people who are nonbinary and transgender.

Willard is a therapist for Kente Circle. Kente Circle is a mental health agency located in South Minneapolis founded in 2004 that provides culturally relevant therapy for families, couples and individuals.

“I just really want to create safe connections, help people be introspective about their life,” Willard said. They also wanted to help people “really be able to learn how to authentically show up and work through trauma and difficult times.”

With Kente Circle being located in such a culturally dense area, just near blocks from George Floyd Square, their work directly addresses the racial disparities in therapy.

Based on the current U.S Census Bureau



Kente Circle’s Leela Willard speaks with ThreeSixty reporters at the University of St. Thomas on July 15, 2024. The Minneapolis-based organization works to help marginalized communities get access to mental healthcare. (Brandon Woller/University of St. Thomas)

report, 83% of therapists are white, while the other 17% of therapists are from minority groups.

KFF Health News reports that over 50% of the white community are looking for therapy, while only 39% of African Americans, 36% of Hispanic/Latinos, and 25% of Asians are seeking mental health treatment.

Additionally, “people don’t have access (to mental health care) due to not having access to financial means,” Willard said.

Not only is this about how many different racial or ethnic groups are therapists, but it is also about how Kente Circle and Willard are addressing disparities in mental health care. Offering a safe space to talk is one of the many ways they are addressing it.

“We get to have a conversation and you

get to tell your story, and I can help you see parts of that story, where maybe you’re able to have some insight or maybe be able to reframe things or restore things, reimagine yourself, like reimagine who you are as a person and the ways you show up in the world,” Willard said.

Another way Kente Circle wants to address disparities in mental health care in the future is to train barbers in therapeutic practices. This way, African Americans would have a safe area to tell their stories. Barbers and hairstylists could even be trained to be counselors.

Willard hopes marginalized communities see the benefit in therapy and how it helps people.

“I think that it’s more about helping people see the benefit of therapy and actually talking about what it is and what it isn’t,” Willard said.

REPORTER REFLECTION

By Honor Vang,
Centennial High School



Today I am sitting down to reflect on the time I have spent in the ThreeSixty Journalism Multimedia

Storytelling Institute that was about three weeks long. As a young journalist, I have faced lots of challenges throughout the time I have spent here at ThreeSixty. A couple of the challenges that I was faced with was the interview that I had and figuring out how to write the story.

The reason why I say that the interview was a challenge was because when my team and I were interviewing Leela Willard, I struggled thinking of questions I should ask. I was also worried about how I would phrase the questions so that Willard would understand them. As the interview continued, I got more comfortable and started to remember some questions I had for her. After the interview, I realized that as I get more comfortable, I start to have things to say and ask. This challenge has made me a better journalist by making me realize things I haven’t before.

The reason why I say that writing was a challenge for me is because I had to turn the interview my partners and I did into a text story. I was struggling on how to start the story, but with the help of my writing coach,

I slowly started to understand how to start my story. After my writing coach helped me start it, she left and left me an outline on what I should do. As I was reading the outline she gave me, I slowly understood what to do. I started to concentrate on my story and got it done. After that, I realized I wasn’t a bad writer. I just needed a guide to help me understand the situation that I was in. This challenge has made me a better writer by showing me I just need a little bit of guidance to understand things I didn’t understand.

To sum it up, ThreeSixty Journalism made me a better journalist and writer because it helped me realize small things in writing and gave me guidance of the things I was writing about.



FIGHTING FOR ALL MOTHERS

AFRICAN AMERICAN BABIES COALITION FIGHTS AGAINST MATERNAL HEALTH CARE INEQUITIES

By Aliyah Baker, *Roosevelt High School*,
Luke Azoulay-Haron, *Avalon School*

Daphney Kleinschmit contributed to this report.

ACCORDING TO a 2019 Minnesota Department of Health study, Black mothers giving birth in Minnesota are twice as likely to die due to pregnancy complications than their white counterparts.

Sameerah Bilal-Roby says she should have retired a long time ago, but instead she's too committed to improving maternal health, especially among women of color.

"(My) passion and commitment is addressing not only social determinants of health but addressing the crisis that is going on with the African American and American Indian community in birthing," Bilal-Roby said. "Our project really focuses on that, on training and education."

Bilal-Roby directs the Wilder African American Babies Coalition and Projects, which helps to combat the ongoing maternal healthcare inequalities and support healthy development of children and families. She began the work in 2005 and merged the coalition with the Wilder Foundation in 2017.

The coalition provides "training, education, and resource distribution focused

on building the capacity of health systems in Minnesota to provide culturally sensitive and high quality maternal and infant care to Black and Brown families," according to its website.

"Our work is really to impact systems and people who are training (mothers), how they interact with the families," she said.

Bilal-Roby says she empathizes with those she serves and is committed to doing everything she can do to combat injustices.

"You have a mother who is going through her period of developing the child and the racism in systems – housing, medical, food, clothing – that affects the mother," she said. "And if it is not equal, and adequate, it's going to (affect) her. All the stress around her is toxic stress and it will affect the baby in her womb, when she delivers and as she is trying to raise her family."

Bukata Hayes works as a vice president of racial and health equity for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, which funds the AABC. Hayes strategizes and integrates diverse, equity, inclusion and belonging efforts throughout the company. He said Minnesota does better than other states in maternal mortality rates, but "stark inequities" exist in Minnesota, too.

Black and Indigenous mothers have a higher rate of pregnancy associated deaths. While

Black Minnesotans make up 13% of the birthing population, they represent 26.7% of pregnancy-associated deaths. For American Indians, they represent 1.7% of birthing people, but 12% of deaths, according to the same MPH study.

"AABC not only supports our goals of advancing maternal health equity and equitable access to healthcare, but they also exemplify the importance of investing in community-led work," Hayes said. "It's community members who hold the solutions to the challenges they face and are creating

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ThreeSixty reporter Daphney Kleinschmit speaks to Sameerah Bilal-Roby of the African American Babies coalition. The organization focuses on addressing maternal health disparities. (Jason Daum/Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota)

REPORTER REFLECTION



By Daphney Kleinschmit,
Columbia Heights High School

Over the past three weeks at ThreeSixty, I made countless memories and learned many lessons. The days were filled with laughter, debates and hard work that came together to create something magnificent. ThreeSixty taught me more than journalism, it opened my eyes to the hidden disparities of Minnesota. I was forced to recognize my privilege and was enlightened on a new perspective of health care.

The maternal health disparity crisis that I learned about —through the work of the African American Babies Coalition — filled me with pain but also gave me hope. It was devastating to look at the statistics on BIPOC

communities and access to health care. But as I witnessed the hard work and passion that the director and workers had to build a healthy community, I saw a bright future.

Beyond health equity, ThreeSixty taught me things about myself. I learned that my aspirations and desire to lead will have their challenges. I learned that you can push yourself too hard, and it's OK to take a break. These values will stay with me and be present in my future newsrooms. There, I will not back down, I will work things out and I will have fun doing it.

ThreeSixty added fuel to my passion for journalism, and the moment when everything came together was priceless. I see me and my peers in the media years from now, having the same, if not more, passion to be heard. Each day, the spark in me was lit and I was on fire, rapidly producing and building a story. I wasn't alone in this process and created strong bonds with my news team and peers. In our news team, we challenged while simultaneously

supporting each other to reach new heights. We edited, discussed and laughed while making magic. Each individual I worked with was so special in their own way. I was astonished as professionals spoke about their media experiences and aspired to be them one day. As storytellers, everyone had their own story. A big part of journalism is listening, and I am forever grateful that I was able to listen to the reporters and learn their intelligence and determination. Every moment in ThreeSixty is priceless, but listening to everyone's story is what impacted me the most. Seeing my peers' faces light up as they smiled while explaining their backstory is what filled me with desire to show up again and again. Everyone inspired each other, and we created a family. ThreeSixty is an experience I wish to relive over and over. The resources provided pushed me to work hard. The people created a home. ThreeSixty made me realize that journalism is for me, and I will do everything to work in a newsroom five or 10 years from now.

BUILDING BETTER BIRTHS

BIRTH JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE SUPPORTS PREGNANT WOMEN OF COLOR BEFORE AND AFTER BIRTH

By **Areeba Memon**, *Wayzata High School*

India Rutten and Amira Ahmed contributed to this report.

BERNICE SIMS wouldn't have traded her birth experience for anything.

"The only thing I was allowed to pick up was my baby," said Sims, a consultant for the Homeplace program at Birth Justice Collaborative, who described how various "aunts, cousins, and nieces," helped make her maternal experience comfortable.

But Cyreta Oduniyi, COO of Homeplace, was put off by her birth experiences in Minnesota hospitals. During the birth of her child, she felt worried about the safety of herself and her baby after hearing "all of the horrific stories" from Black women about hospitals in the state.

This sentiment goes beyond suspicion. Black individuals are 2.3 times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than white individuals according to the Minnesota Department of Health. In a recent survey by Blue Cross Blue Shield, 59% of Black Minnesotans also describe discrimination as a key factor in their health outcomes.

It's for this reason that the Birth Justice Collaborative formed. The BJC works to address maternal health disparities for Black and Indigenous Minnesotans by providing a community that supports mothers from pregnancy to postpartum and beyond.

The Rev. Alika Galloway, CEO of Homeplace, explains that the problem BJC is combatting is the result of decades of white



ThreeSixty reporter Amira Ahmed (left) interviews a team from Birth Justice Collaborative on July 15 at the University of St. Thomas. The organization supports Black mothers to ensure they have a good birthing experience. (Brandon Woller/University of St. Thomas)

"We're really talking about a system of thought here, and a philosophical view that only white human beings have the right to be exclusive and that they alone are human."

Furthermore, she explains, white supremacy has kept African American traditions out of the equation. For many in the community, this denial of Black culture is the root of the maternal health crisis.

"We have forgotten that all of us are human beings and that therefore all of us deserve the same treatment," Galloway said.

BJC seeks to be the antidote to this problem. They include cultural knowledge in their effort to change healthcare policies and provide support for mothers.

Childbirth is a difficult process and many hospitals work to ensure basic needs are

left vulnerable. BJC's priority is providing the compassionate care that the Minnesota healthcare system lacks.

"Health encompasses so much more than the physical," said Leslie Hayes. "You can be alive, but if you're severely depressed, your baby is suffering, you're suffering. Like, you're lacking the connection that's supposed to happen after birth."

BJC aims to be the community that mothers need from pregnancy to postnatal.

"Our goal is to have an environment where when people walk into it, they feel the stress being released from their body," Bernice Sims said. "A place where they feel loved, cared for, nurtured."

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REPORTER REFLECTION

By **Areeba Memon**, *Wayzata High School*



I remember walking into Schoenecker Center feeling nervous about the first day of camp.

I didn't know anyone, and I didn't know what to expect from a group of people who came from all over the city. I knew I didn't want to be too early because I didn't want to be the first person to be there, alone and fidgeting in silence. Well, I wasn't; another girl got there first. As I sat down next to her, we started talking about why we were doing the program.

More students started filing in until we were all in the lobby, some awkwardly waddling and waffling around. More conversations started around us as the staff addressed the group. We followed the directions to go to the classroom and as we shuffled up the stairs, I noticed that all of these people looked a little nervous. I felt slightly better about not knowing what to do or expect.

Throughout the week, various presenters spoke to us about the importance of journalism and guided us through our processes/ projects. The presentations all varied, from the topics of ethics to television reporting to meditation, but there was one common thing that I kept noticing. Most of the speakers were incredibly nervous.

One radio host who had been on air for

more than two decades was still slightly shaking in his presentation. Another reporter, who had been in two wars in the Middle East, was sweating bullets. These professionals spent years in the field but still managed to get nervous in front of a crowd. I realized that even though someone could travel the world, meet different people and have years of experience, they could still be as nervous as a high schooler.

As the weeks went by, I let go of my inhibitions that made me feel nervous. I made friends and I did work that I've never done before, like being in front of a huge camera. Everyone has been nervous about something at some point of their life, so much so that it doesn't even make sense to be nervous anymore.



TASK FORCE WORKS TO RECLAIM INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

RECLAIMING TRADITIONAL TOBACCO USE IN NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES IS ONE WAY THE GROUP IS RECAPTURING HISTORICAL ROOTS

By Margarita Rosales, Venture Academy

Legend Primus and Ethan Vang contributed to this report.

SUZANNE NASH wants Indigenous youth to reclaim an understanding about the ways tobacco has been used in their community's cultural and religious practices.

"Our gift from God the creator was traditional tobacco," Nash said.

Nash sits on the Indigenous People's Task Force in Minneapolis, a community group focused on "restoring our cultural practices and using those cultural teachings as our teachings, as prevention around the work we do."

The use of traditional tobacco is important to Indigenous people for many reasons. For

instance, medicinal tobacco has long been used for physical and emotional well-being, according to the National Native Network, a tribal organization.

Many people view tobacco as a commercial product — such as cigarettes or cigars — but rarely as a spiritual product, said Nash, the task force's Tobacco Programs manager. Nash hopes that by "returning back to using

traditional tobacco the way it was intended," drug use could be curbed since tobacco is thought to be a gateway drug to harder substances.

Nash has lost people to addiction and lung cancer related to tobacco use. Nash's son also

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ThreeSixty reporter Ethan Vang interviews Suzanne Nash at the University of St. Thomas on July 15, 2024. Nash is on the Indigenous People's Task Force, which is working to restore traditional use of tobacco in Indigenous communities. (Brandon Woller/University of St. Thomas)

REPORTER REFLECTION



By Legend Primus, Roseville Area High School

Attending the ThreeSixty Journalism camp was a great experience for me. It pushed me to step out

of my comfort zone and try new things that I don't usually get to do. Last year, I went to the camp with my cousin, which was a lot of fun because I was with someone I knew and felt comfortable around. This year, my cousin couldn't come, and I almost decided not to go either. But I pushed myself to attend, and it taught me an important lesson: I don't always need someone familiar with me to feel comfortable. I learned to be OK with being uncomfortable and to handle new situations on my own.

As a young person, my role in media involves offering new ideas and perspectives, helping to shape how stories are told and keeping up with the latest trends. At this year's camp, I learned a lot about media and

journalism, especially about what happens behind the scenes. I really enjoyed getting to work with equipment in the TV studio and figuring out what each button does. It was fascinating to see how everything comes together to make TV content. This hands-on experience with production was a highlight for me, as I got to see the technical side of journalism up close.

In Week one, we focused on ethics in journalism. We had discussions about what is right and wrong when it comes to publishing stories. One of the most interesting parts was debating whether or not to share a story that could help many people but might invade someone's privacy. For example, we talked about whether to post a story that could assist a lot of people if it meant exposing personal details of an individual who didn't want their story made public. Making these decisions was tough because we had to balance helping the many against invading one person's privacy. It made me realize how complex journalism can be and how important it is to think carefully about our choices.

In Week two, we got to do actual journalism. We interviewed people and learned about the organizations they work

for. We recorded these interviews and then edited them to make them look professional. Being able to see our interviews turned into finished video package was really exciting. We also had the chance to be news anchors, presenting our stories and making our work look like real news media. This experience was both fun and educational, giving us a taste of what it's like to work in a real newsroom.

During the final week, we are reflecting on what we have learned and have to present our stories to family and friends. This is a great way to share what we have accomplished. We also are going on a field trip to the Minnesota Star Tribune. Although I don't usually follow the news, I feel like visiting the Star Tribune could be a good way to get some insight and see what goes on behind the scenes compared to what we see as a final product.

Overall, ThreeSixty's Multimedia Storytelling camp was a valuable experience. It helped me grow, taught me about media production and ethics in journalism and gave me more confidence in handling new situations.

Rubén Rosario received ThreeSixty's Widening the Circle award at our 2023 Homecoming fundraiser and celebration.



IN MEMORIUM

Legendary columnist **Rubén Rosario** was a pillar of ThreeSixty's Fall Op-Ed Writing Workshop. In July he died after a long battle with incurable cancer. We are immeasurably grateful for the time with Rubén; he inspired a generation of ThreeSixty students.



Check out ThreeSixty student Ben O'Leary's February 2023 profile of Rosario here:



Rubén Rosario's last workshop with ThreeSixty was in the fall of 2023. Seventeen students participated.

OPINION



FALL OP-ED WORKSHOP AMPLIFIES WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO MINNESOTA TEENS

Student voices were front and center at ThreeSixty's Fall Op-Ed Workshop, which was held on Saturdays in October 2023 at the University of St. Thomas.

Seventeen students participated in the workshop and created opinion stories for publication.

"The best part about the Op-Ed Workshop is watching students grow in confidence and take pride in sharing their voice," said Program Manager Theresa Malloy Lemickson. "This collection of stories is powerful and reflection of what's on the mind of teens in the

Twin Cities. They are stories that we are proud to share as well."

JAMAD JAMA said the workshop changed the way she thinks about sharing a difficult or hard opinion. "It made me realize that sometimes the most effective way to change the minds of people are to appeal to their own relationship with the problem," she said.

ETHIOPIA'S WEALTH IS MORE THAN ITS GDP



By **Ayida Akalewold**,
Roosevelt High School

How do you define whether a country is thriving? The most common metric used is gross domestic product,

which measures a country's standard of living based on economic wealth. But is that fair? Looking only at its GDP, Ethiopia is labeled as a country with high poverty rates, political instability, and high mortality rates. People often define "developing" countries by their poorness, but it's time to move past that way of thinking.

I was born in Ethiopia and moved to the

U.S. in 2015. Since living in the U.S. for nine years, I've gone back to spend time with my family. The summer of my freshman year, I went to Ethiopia for my cousin's wedding. On the drive to the wedding, I was mesmerized by how fast paced and vibrant life was. Lights shining in the buildings, bustling businesses everywhere and hard-working people. It didn't feel like a country filled with poverty, political instability and high mortality rates. It was clear to me that Ethiopia should be known for more than that.

Ethiopia is rich in its cultural heritage and its historical importance. In 1896, Ethiopia successfully defeated Italy, became a symbol of hope and empowerment for other African nations struggling against colonial power.

This inspired other African countries to stand against colonialism. Ethiopia is home to ancient civilizations and has diverse landscapes and mountains. Also, the next time you get some coffee, remember that some of the best coffee is exported straight from Ethiopia, such as the yirgacheffe bean, which is known for its light and floral taste.

Labeling Ethiopia as one of the least developed countries harms its reputation and makes other countries view similar countries negatively based on their GDP. But, we can change that perception. The next time you hear about a country that is considered less developed, remember that it shouldn't be defined by just its economic wealth, but also its culture and history.

SAY MY NAME CORRECTLY



By **Gloria Ngwa**,
Washington Tech Magnet School

"How do you pronounce your last name?"

Every time this question is asked, I grew ashamed of my last name. At the start of my eighth-grade math class, as we were getting name tags for our iPads, my teacher asked this repetitive question. It made my heart sink with contempt.

"None of your business," I replied sharply.

"That's kind of rude," he said, taken aback that I, a quiet kid, dared to talk back to an adult. The rest of the school year I resented that teacher because of that simple question.

In West African culture, your name carries great influence and power over your life,

especially your family's. The "N-G" structure in "Ngwa" connects me to my relatives who have similar last name structures, and this made me feel unique.

But the cultural value of my last name was soon ruined by vile and discordant pronunciation attempts when people's tongues tripped at the "N" and the "G" next to each other, so they would say NUH-GWA, emphasizing the "N" in my name to make it easy for them. But I don't recognize that name because that's not me. It made my cultural identity slowly chip away and it silenced me on correcting others.

Mispronunciation of cultural names is one of the many forms of microaggressions. According to Sender Dovchin in *The Conversation*, "microaggression is an act of symbolic violence that is not always intentional but is still hurtful and disrespectful."

This small form of microaggressions can become a small form of kindness when

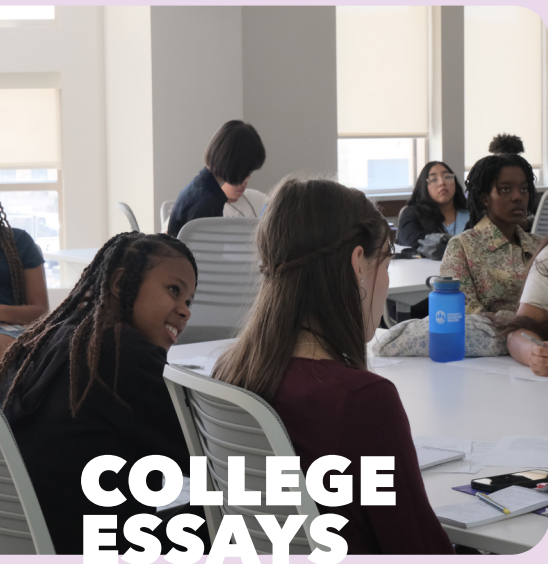
people show a genuine desire to learn how to pronounce it. It makes me feel like my name is worthy of respect.

But I also came to wonder, by staying silent, wasn't I silencing the significance, the ancestry, and the cultural emblem of my name?

Moving to the east side of St. Paul from Little Canada, I was able to make meaningful friendships with many Africans who restored the uniqueness of my cultural identity. I gradually became more confident in myself, which helped me feel empowered to correct other people.

Even though I didn't choose my last name, I chose to embrace it. So, for the record, it's pronounced [GWAH]; the "N" is silent, no longer me.

Gloria Ngwa is now a freshman at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.



COLLEGE ESSAYS

COLLEGE ESSAY WORKSHOP SERVES MOST STUDENTS EVER

Thirty-two students completed essays as part of the August 2024 camp.

Huge student demand and extra support from community partners fueled ThreeSixty to dream BIG when planning our annual College Essay Workshop for August 2024.

More than **thirty-two students** completed college essays as part of the intensive four-day workshop, culminating in a showcase where 10 of those students read their essays out loud to an audience of their proud peers and parents.

Curriculum supported students in producing technically strong essays while offering them insight as to exactly what college admissions offices are looking for from this part of a student's application.

Because students often feel pressured to surface trauma in college essays, particular attention was paid to examining that feeling of expectation and ensuring students chose topics that left them feeling accurately represented and empowered.

In addition to ThreeSixty staff, program support and instruction came from former staff from 826MSP and the Minneapolis South High Writer's Room, two student workers from the University of St. Thomas, and **more than 30 community volunteers**. Minneapolis Public Schools and Girls Inc. at the YWCA Minneapolis provided sponsorship support.



Salim Ali

South High School

My first memory was a funeral. I have no strong memory of the person who had died. All of the talking had just been murmurs, but the emotional strain on the people's faces remained vivid in my mind.

I have always come up with strategies or dreams for how to be remembered. Thinking of ways to become famous through being a movie star or being the first astronaut to land on Mars. Not even things I was truly interested in, all to be remembered after death.

Over 13 years later, I believe I have as much memory about this person as everyone else. We often don't remember the dead; Yet

we get so caught up on how to keep a legacy.

As I continued to get older, I experienced the death of a community member around my age. He was known for his sports skills and kindness to all. While I had not known him to be more than an acquaintance, many of my friends knew him. Their moods became somber for the next few weeks in remembrance of their friend. They left graffiti with his name up on the burned down building on the corner block, using old cheap spray paint to plaster his name unevenly.

As time went on, I watched as this person slowly faded from the memories of his loved ones. Replaced in thought with others who had his name, by other tragic deaths that people had going on in their lives. Watching as the rain slowly degraded the cheap graffiti into only a blur, until the building itself was torn down completely.

I realized that living to be remembered

by others is not possible because memories of the past fade. I started trying to live for myself. Doing activities like public speaking and participating in science related programs, which I was genuinely interested in, no matter what others thought of them. This eventually led me to be interested in gaining a degree in the science field.

Once I let go of the fear of being forgotten, I gained the power to truly be who I am. Speaking vocally about issues important to me, enjoying the tranquility of silence, no longer worrying about what others thought about me. The releasing of legacy helped me float above the expectations of others.

"Once I let go of the fear of being forgotten, I gained the power to truly be who I am."



Amina Said

Eden Prairie High School

At the end of each school day, all of us dispersed- some kids went to the park. I went right home and turned on the TV to "Tom and Jerry," an animated "cat and mouse conflict" with no spoken words. It was a lifeline for me.

Why? "Tom and Jerry" is the story of the big cat (Tom) dominating the show. But at the end of each episode, the small mouse wins- at first because his friend Nibbles, another mouse, helps him outwit Tom, but in the end, it's the tools that Jerry learns- how to use his smarts, that enable Jerry to independently step into his power.

I was the quiet girl. And since my 1st day of kindergarten quietness had trapped me- it

"He didn't decide my lack of speech was a lack of depth. Rather, Mr. Pottenger saw me for who I am—and I realized that the lessons he taught me I needed to use going forward."

was my Tom. My shyness inhibited me from asking for help, raising my hand, and making friends. My teachers largely left me alone. My grades were low.

My sixth grade math and homeroom teacher didn't leave me alone- and at first, I thought I'd met another Tom. "Amina, answer this equation up on the board," he said. My name being said by a teacher brought chills down my spine. Getting called on made me feel frozen. I felt as if everyone's eyes were on me and the thought of answering the question wrong put more pressure on me than before. I was angry- was he trying to trap me?

"I don't know," I said, my first attempt at a way out.

"I don't know is not an answer," he said. Confusion started to build up: I'd never had a teacher push me this hard. I took a while to answer the question. "-24 is the answer," I said. "That is incorrect," said Mr. Pottenger. He called on another student and I was relieved, glad that the attention wasn't on me anymore. But unlike other teachers, Mr. Pottenger kept asking me questions - a regular thing. My grades went up, astonishing my mom and me. I slowly learned that he was my Nibbles- Mr. Pottenger always had the best out for me, even if it was difficult, and it gave me the motivation and courage to ask for help and share my thinking. He told me that "Talking is not for other's well-being, it's for yours."

Working with my shyness and seeing something in me that others didn't. He didn't decide my lack of speech was a lack of depth. Rather, Mr. Pottenger saw me for who I am- and I realized that the lessons he taught me I needed to use going forward.



Cindy Lee

South High School

In seventh grade, my algebra teacher called on me to come to the Promethean board and show my work. All I could focus on was the absolute silence, those curious gazes fixated upon me, the heart-piercing murmurs I could hear from the back of my mind. It made me feel shivers all over as if the room had gone cold. I froze, unable to move or speak.

This feeling stayed with me. As a kid, I couldn't understand why I felt so afraid. While my friends spoke and laughed amongst themselves, I stood in the group not knowing how to interact with them.

I received constant complaints about my behavior. At times after class, my algebra teacher would ask to speak with me privately. She often wore a neutral expression, but her words were nothing positive. I vividly remember her arms nestled at her hips,

shaking her head with each word that fell from her very lips. "You should participate more," she would always say. Nothing more. Her advice never reassured me of course. It only made me feel even more miserable than I already was. I simply nodded in response, unable to understand why she, too, was incapable of asking why I struggled to even utter a word.

"It was true, you can't achieve anything as long as you don't consistently try."

Then, I received help from someone I never thought would change my life. One day, I texted my friend, Alex, sharing my frustrations. He told me he wanted to help. He proposed phone calls, which were used as a resource to practice speaking. We wrote out real life conversations for us to verbally read off like a script. Although my development was slow, I began learning how to maintain a conversation with another person.

I brought those new communication skills into the real world, conversing with my surroundings for the first time. It was a

terrifying experience. My throat parched and my stomach churned with each passing second. Failing to hold an interaction, Alex would reassure me. I remember his exact words, "I understand your struggles, but you gotta try and be tough. Real life is not easy."

That statement has stuck with me since. It was true, you can't achieve anything as long as you don't consistently try. This realization gave me the push I needed. Keeping this in mind, I joined the Asian Student Association and made friends. I no longer felt anxious to speak in front of an audience or an individual all simply because of this one statement that came from a peer rather than an adult.

Because of my admirable friend, I built the strength and determination to become a better speaker from our practices. Because of my friend, I want to become a better person as a whole. And because of my friend, I seek a social working career to offer support to those who struggle with speech and help them overcome their social anxiety. Attending this college will enable me to gain more confidence as a speaker. I look forward to joining and building a community and acquiring valuable social skills along the way.



Dallas Downey

Hopkins High School

An elder slowly approached me at the powwow, taking her time step by step. "Miigwech (hello in Ojibwe) Auntie, can I get you anything?" I asked. In Native culture, is it necessary to greet and respect your elders; they have wisdom and knowledge beyond your years. Her eyes scanned over me and my family, and her face contorted in confusion. I wondered if something was wrong, or if she recognized us. My thoughts were far from correct. She sharply said, "Are you even native? You don't look the part."

I was confused and shocked. Throughout my life, I have heard statements like this one, but never from someone who I am supposed to respect and honor, like an elder.

My family is a very nontraditional Anishanaabe family. Our looks do not resemble those of a stereotypical Indigenous person from our reservation. We are all mixed with African American heritage, making our hair kinky and brown, unlike the stereotypical, jet black, straight hair. Our facial features honor both groups, but that all too often leads people to ask us, "What are you mixed with?" because it's not apparent what we are at first glance.

I've danced in powwows since I was 5

years old, a traditional ceremony in Native American culture. They consist of dancing, native drumming, and singing to honor the ancestors and heal the body. The drum bridges the gap, it is a vital part of both cultures. I feel a spiritual connection to the beat that echoes in my heart.

Though I had my identity questioned by an Auntie, I dressed in my finest regalia and danced for hours. But I questioned myself the entire time. While I was supposed to be healing my spirit, I was instead interrogating it.

I was used to living in a world of duality. I have had to balance on the tightrope between both worlds, but the excessive examining questions and statements, like the one the Auntie asked, shook the line, causing me to lose balance and confidence in myself. While this time was tough, it set me onto a path of deep reflection. Am I really native enough? Will I ever be confident? If I could go back to the 15-year-old me, I would say, "You will find yourself."

But truly, in that moment, I felt broken and lost.

I went and sat on the rocks of the lake next to the arena, the wind blowing the ribbon and feathers of my regalia. The lake's mist brushed my face. I took that time to explore the intricacies of my identity and the hard questions I'd received all my life. I knew I needed to use them for reconciliation and restoration.

I spoke to another elder who shared

my Black and Indigenous roots. He lived these experiences as I had, his identity questioned since childhood. He grew up on my reservation, where Afro-Indigenous people were uncommon and viewed negatively as "impure" by many judgmental eyes. He shared his wisdom with me, powerful words that helped shape the confident identity I have today: Regardless of what others say, think, or do, pertaining to me, integrity in myself establishes my resiliency.

"If I could go back to the 15-year-old me, I would say, 'You will find yourself.'"

I don't believe it was the Auntie's intent to set me on this path of self-exploration, but I came to realize that she helped me. She unknowingly pushed me into a questioning time, which taught me a lesson, helping me discover the person I became, and who I am today.

I am now able to accept the beautiful duality and wholeness of who I am. The ability to self-reflect will help me in adverse experiences in school, work, and my future as a public defender. My initial vulnerability with my identity has now become a strength. I found myself throughout this inner exploration and can live freely and unapologetically knowing that nobody can take away the faith I possess in myself.



Muniratu Shaibu

South High School

“Oyah, let’s all take one last picture you guys!” This Friday night, it’s well past 9 p.m. and my body aches from being with my twin cousins all day long. Amir is finally here to pick me up and say goodbye to them. All of summer ‘21 had been filled with Jummah prayers at the mosque and Friday evenings in my cousins’ home. We’d be talking, laughing till our stomachs hurt, and sharing our desires for the upcoming school year as they kept my anxiety at bay. Though I was only 14, they looked up to me as rising seventh graders and I found comfort in being that figure for them. It’s almost as if my stomach hadn’t been churning all week, as we went all around town to prep our college bound boy, my brother Amir. The very day I dreaded so dearly since just before I hit the age of 12. Marzouk, my older cousin, is there through it all, the light

breeze, all energized as we run the errands. So as usual, I want to capture the moment, cradle it in my hand, and hold it close to my chest. We take the photo, the four of us gathered together, laughing at how you can barely see any of us in the photo, surrounded by the dimly lit parking lot.

Shortly after Fajr, the pre-dawn prayer, Marzouk is downstairs waiting for me, Amir, and our parents to come down. For the past week, I’m continuously in state of yearning for time to slow. Anxious for Amir’s adjusting process (who’s too nonchalant for my liking), but specifically, the day of Saturday, Aug. 21. There was once a home I knew, with my parents, Marzouk or ‘Zuk,’ and my brother of course. This is the home I knew, I was used to, and happy with. But then, Zuk leaves, once for college as well. I remember the day so vividly despite my shy age of 6. The boxes and luggage leave my sight and I rush into the room, tears blurring my vision.

As soon as I step into the room, the absence of him that once unfolded here pushes me to uncontrollable tears.

Sobbing and sobbing, Zuk kneels to hug

me. “You and Zuk were so close, none of us cried until we heard you with tears in your voice,” my mom recalls.

I would feel the wound of 6-year-old Munira all over again.

Just as I do when Amir and I are on the road for a stagnant trip to Mankato, with my dad in the backseat. We stay closely behind Marzouk and my mom, as I wonder how this ride would’ve been if I had chosen to ride with my cousin. Or especially if my dad had chosen to ride with him.

But I’m the youngest daughter, my mom’s last one. “The baby.” I wasn’t babied for long though.

I’m the one who watches everyone as they get their diploma, graduate, and leave.

Before I knew it, he was gone, with his laugh, his comfort, and his presence.

“I want to capture the moment, cradle it in my hand, and hold it close to my chest.”



Morgan Vang

Stillwater High School

When I think of my grandma’s garden, I am filled with both a sense of appreciation and annoyance.

Appreciation for her hard work and what the garden means to her. She came to this country with only the clothes on her back and with very few things that remind her of her homeland. Back in Laos, tightly sewn into the pockets of her well-worn pants was a bag of mustard green seeds. To her, these seeds represented everything about her home that she was forced to flee. In the region where she was from, mustard greens grew widely everywhere like weeds. They are a staple in many Hmong households and are eaten at almost every meal, such as pickled mustard green or boiled soup of mustard greens and meat. Today, those same mustard green seeds that she planted in the grounds of Providence, Rhode Island, are the same ones that she harvested and brought to a mostly white suburb of Woodbury, Minnesota.

Even as the mustard green seeds sit past the harvesting cycle, they continue to grow and thrive. Similar to her mustard green seeds growing in her garden, my grandma planted firm roots in Minnesota. The garden that she meticulously cares for has provided food for my family. We are fully stocked with a variety of frozen and dried vegetables, herbs and

fruits.

But every summer, I resented the garden taking me away from friends, sports and sleep. Before sunrise every day, I woke up by the voice of my grandma reminding me to go outside to tend to her garden. Gardening is a back-breaking, exhausting and time-consuming chore. From breathing in the dust, turning the soil, pulling the weeds, to hearing the sounds of birds singing and crickets chirping away. I felt constantly reminded that while bugs and birds were enjoying their morning, I choked on the dust while toiling in the heat of the burning sun on my face and my back. My hands and feet turned into an extension of her will to physically maintain her garden, while she couldn’t because of her health issues.

“My grandma’s legacy has instilled in me a desire to cultivate my own skills and to honor her memory through my professional ambitions.”

For the past two years, as my grandma’s health continued to decline; she can no longer walk outside without assistance. The garden represented her one source of joy and freedom. Every day, she stared longingly from the windows of her bedroom or the back deck to monitor the health of the plants that are growing. Before she got sick, her garden filled half of the backyard. But her sickness reduced the garden to potted plants placed in varying spots on the deck and front porch. Seeing her sorrowful look, the garden that was my source

of annoyance, blossomed as motivation inside me. During my sophomore year, I started to maintain the garden to help it thrive so that she would never have to worry. I also wanted her to be proud that one of her grandkids embraced her passion for gardening. My grandma would always tell me, “hlob cev tsis hlob siab (hla- th’ya- chie hla- sheia)” in Hmong, translating to “your body appears to be fully grown; however, your emotional intelligence is almost fully developed.”

I’m gradually learning to mature and value people in my life, especially my grandmother. I focused on stopping selfishly thinking of myself first. I started learning more about my grandma’s life. She was more than just a mom or wife. I learned that she was also a community organizer and entrepreneur. When the nearby grocery stores didn’t carry our Hmong vegetables, she used her broken English to persuade others to convert vacant lots to community gardens. She always found ways to sell her produce when she had a surplus, from going door-to-door or offering it to store owners to resell. As I prepare to pursue a business degree in college, I am motivated by the knowledge that I come from a lineage of resourcefulness and entrepreneurship. My grandma’s legacy has instilled in me a desire to cultivate my own skills and to honor her memory through my professional ambitions.

Last year, I participated in the Minnesota Business Venture program that exposed me to learn how to develop a business proposal and understand business concepts and ideas. My grandma, with her skills, helped me know that I would have that as a foundation to put forth an even stellar proposal.



Ethan Vang

Centennial High School

As the oldest son, I am expected to hold greater responsibilities in the Hmong culture. We are expected to represent our family by going out with our father, learn from our elders, and teach the younger generation in our community.

From the age of 6 years old, I was comfortable attending school in Minneapolis because I was surrounded by other Hmong peers in my community. In second grade, my family moved to the suburbs, where it was mostly white.

When I switched schools, I felt like I'd left something important behind; my identity. I felt very left out. At recess I would try to make friends but because of my color, I felt like an outsider. One time I brought papaya salad for snack time, a salad of papaya sliced into strands with tomatoes, Thai eggplant, peanuts, lime, fish sauce, sugar, chili, and garlic with a strong fishy, acidic smell. My white classmates would wrinkle their noses and say, "What is that smell?" or "Why does

it look like that?" even after I have told them countless times that it's a cultural food.

At the time, I didn't tell my parents because I worried about how they would feel, and I didn't see other kids my age experiencing the same feelings of isolation. But I reminded myself, and my parents constantly reminded me, of staying true to my identity. For example, my parents would pressure me to speak Hmong at home. Often, I felt like I needed to pretend for others to accept me, but I'm glad that I still continue to value my identity.

By the time I finished grade school I had turned these social challenges into motivation. I knew I had to rely on myself and become a stronger person.

"I saw many other Hmong students and for the first time, other students approached me to have a connection. I found my voice."

By eighth grade, more Hmong families moved into the suburbs. This really made me feel connected with my community because I never thought I would see someone like me at my school. I decided to take a risk to create a friend group where everyone can be comfortable around each other without

judgment.

When I started high school at Centennial High School, I felt that similar feeling as a kid of a fostered community. I saw many other Hmong students and for the first time, other students approached me to have a connection. I found my voice. In my sophomore year, I joined a school program as a peer leader to use my voice, helping freshmen feel welcomed and included. I remember helping a lost student find his classroom and facilitating ice breakers, making sure everyone felt embraced and important. Eventually my junior year came up and I got sent an email, offering a role as a peer leader commissioner to take the next step in leaving a footprint. I helped plan goals and tasks for other peer leaders to achieve goals together. I gladly accepted the role because I wanted to be a leader and represent my community. Taking on the role as a peer commissioner taught me how to lead others and express my thoughts. My hope is that I left a gift and legacy for the younger generations from helping others feel welcome and valued.

Reflecting on my growth as the oldest Hmong son in my family and attending a mostly white school, I've experienced a lot of challenges, but it has motivated me to influence and lead others. This is what I call leadership.



Arthur Wei

Wayzata High School

Every masterpiece holds a heart and soul poured into it by a creator. But each work of art only shows the result, not the tedious journey. Despite that, the journey matters just as much as the final result. I'm reminded of this every time I take out my sketchbook and pencil, turning to a fresh new page, ready to begin my next piece.

I started art lessons when I was 8. I had many teachers. One valued vibrant color, while another stressed a perfectly sketched silhouette. This left me with an ample amount of information, but little direction to develop my own style. All I could do was throw my thoughts at a sheet of paper and hope it would turn into a work of art.

But I kept at it since I liked how it felt. I enjoyed how art could transport me into other worlds, and how it could slow down my thoughts—sketching, shaping, editing, polishing. Every piece that I created reflected my current problems and feelings, bringing them to life. A warm sunny day on a playground with my friends would inspire me

to illustrate a shining girl in a rice field.

Art had felt like just a hobby for me until the first time I truly realized how impactful my art was. I was barely 12 years old. It was the first time I submitted art to a public competition. I had felt as proud as any kid who had just won an award. After we entered the art exhibition, an old man came up to me. "Hey lil man, did you draw something here?" he asked, squatting down right beside me. I nodded. "Which one of these did you draw?" he asked, pointing towards all the art pieces hanging on the wall. I pointed at my small canvas painting of a Prussian blue swan standing by a river. The old man stood back up, lifted his head, and let out a deep sound of laughter. "This brings me back to my days, livin' out by the Boundary Waters," he said, his eyes sparkling with reminiscence. I beamed up at him, not knowing at the time how much I had impacted that man's life and so many others. Every piece that I finished allowed a piece of me to click into place.

If everyone was hit by a roadblock entering sophomore year, then in comparison life had hit me like a bulldozer. The first time my lung collapsed was in December. I was hospitalized. It took me weeks to recover. It happened twice more over the next year. I grew more accustomed to hospitals after each lung collapse, and further away from my school life. I grew less and less motivated to complete

"Every masterpiece holds a heart and soul poured into it by a creator. But each work of art only shows the result, not the tedious journey."

schoolwork. I felt like my problems were overwhelming me. Pieces of me shattered.

I realized that I had to place all of my mistakes and fears somewhere to stay afloat. I would learn to pick up my pen or pencil and let my emotions lead me onto paper. People and places—real or imaginary—nothing couldn't be drawn. Drawing became a way for me to help bring out lost emotions within others, and also keep myself from falling back into my earlier setbacks. It allowed me to become my younger self again.

My years of practice with a pencil and paper have turned me into an individual artist, allowing me to better express my emotions. I would love to continue my exploration of the art of design, and how it can be used within society today. I am drawn to the forefront of the design industry where I will have my own heart and soul poured into it. Even if consumers never consciously seek to understand the story behind the product that they are using, I hope to connect people to the product. My journey will be the glue to tie it all together.



McCall Vickers

DeLaSalle High School

From belting out the catchy tunes of Disney's "Princess and the Frog" to laughing at Dreamworks' "Kung Fu Panda 2" until I couldn't breathe properly, watching movies has been a dominant aspect of my childhood. Because of these movies, the power of storytelling was instilled in me at a young age. I admired the way these films were able to convey such deep meanings while finding a way to make them relatable to younger audiences. I felt as if I was transported to an alternate galaxy during these movies.

I hold a place of immeasurable respect for Pixar movies specifically. As a kid, I never grasped what Pixar movies were trying to teach me. Now I understand and try to implement their life lessons in my life.

A particular movie that stood out to me was "Soul." I was 13 years old when it came out. The first time I watched the movie, I

was buzzing with anticipation to finally see a black male as the main character. But as the end credits of the movie hit my screen, I was puzzled. Usually, Pixar has deeper meanings within their movies, but I just couldn't figure it out this time. In the end I felt dissatisfied with the movie.

The second time I watched the movie was recently in my theology class and this time as the end credits appeared on the screen, I felt wet hot tears plummet from my eyes to my cheeks. Staring dumbfounded at the screen, trying to conceal my tears from my classmates, I understood now what I couldn't

"I know I love writing. I know I love storytelling. I know I love to give a voice to the voiceless and uncover the hidden stories of the world."

when I was younger. Life is a journey, not a checklist.

Throughout the movie, the main character, Joe Gardner, obsesses over a singular goal of his life, playing with professional musicians, that he believes is his life "purpose." When Gardner finally does play with the musicians,

he feels unsatisfied. It is not until the end of the movie when he realizes life is more than just filling out your achievements, it's about enjoying the journey of your life and experiencing the joy of being alive to the fullest.

Right now, everyone around me is forcing a narrative that I need to find my "purpose" of life, but what if my "purpose" is more than just a single planned out goal? What if I know what I like to do but don't have a singular blank? My life is not defined by how successful and famous I am, it's about the influence I have on those around me.

I was put on this earth to experience life for it is, if that means experiencing the bad and the good then so be it. If I am at least finding what gives me joy to keep going, then I'm living out my life's purpose. The best thing about living is experiencing.

I know I love writing. I know I love storytelling. I know I love to give a voice to the voiceless and uncover the hidden stories of the world. I also love going out to eat at fancy restaurants with my friends and listening to music while I walk around. These mundane actions are just as important.



Leah Gfrerer

Concordia Academy

When people ask me about my dad, I let my younger brother answer.

"He's dead," Gabriel says.

For me, it's not so easy. What I'd rather talk about is how my dad has influenced me, rather than how he's not here anymore.

My dad died of cancer when I was five years old, and in many ways, I still see parts of him in me. During freshman year orientation for high school, I accidentally signed up for cross-country. I found the morning runs refreshing and the teammates and coaches were a new network for my social circle. I realized I was my dad, a marathoner. We used to cheer him on with water and cowbells and yell "go faster!" He trained on his treadmill in the basement. Now, my brother and I use it for winter mileage.

I often revisit an audio recording of my dad on an old Android phone: We're annoying my mom about her cooking while she prepares dinner, probably stir fry, fried rice or an East

Asian soup. We don't hear a verbal "I love you," but our shared laughs and jokes embody how much we care for each other. I tease her now about her fluorescent flowered leggings and her slow driving. She laughs and tells me I'm just like my dad.

My dad worked as a mechanical engineer in the military and he tinkered with cars. I'm also interested in science, technology, engineering and math. If my friends mention their dad helped with a difficult math problem, I wish my dad were here to help.

"Even though he's not here, his presence is still felt in the things I love and the way I deal with tough situations."

I'd be lying if I wrote that I only grew and suffered no setbacks from losing my dad. At seven, doctors diagnosed me with epilepsy. It's under control now, but it placed stress on my mom to deal with that alone, with dad gone and her family in Malaysia. My mother is the kind of mom who always had a home-cooked meal for lunch, supported my dancing, running and being a cellist as much as she could and offered endless advice. In middle school, the pandemic lockdown reminded me

how that time would have been so different if he were there. He would have helped me solve that trick question in algebra, pace me and Gabriel on a run or two, and fill this quiet home with playful humor.

Through this hardship, I learned and grew from every experience. I embraced the outdoors and FaceTimed my friends more. I journaled about my dad to practice facing reality. These adversities taught me to manage stress, be more resilient, and embrace challenges.

My dad is a big part of who I am today. Even though he's not here, his presence is still felt in the things I love and the way I deal with tough situations. His passion for running, interest in engineering, and sense of humor have shaped me. I've learned to manage stress and face challenges head-on, just like he would have wanted. One day I want to be a biochemical engineer and I'm looking for a college/scholarship that can help me concretize my dream career. A school that is vigorous yet collaborative with a tight-knit community and professors that will support my endeavors. My mom will see me succeed because of her unwavering support, and my dad's legacy will continue to flourish.

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RADIO CAMPERS GO BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE ORDWAY

Each June, ThreeSixty and MPR News work together to put on Radio Camp — a week-long reporting experience at MPR where students produce professional audio stories mentored by MPR leadership and newsroom staff.

This year, 12 students participated. Each produced a story from an interview conducted with someone who works *behind the scenes* at the Ordway. Three of the pieces — produced by

MAURICIO BARRETO of FAIR School for Arts, **EKSEER ELHASSAN** of East Ridge High School and **LEONNA KIER** of South High — aired on Minnesota Now with Cathy Wurzer in July.

KRSM Radio and MIGIZI also contribute to Radio Camp with student recruitment and support.

Photos by Ben Hovland, MPR News



LISTEN TO THEIR STORIES



Radio Camp served 12 students from across the Twin Cities metro.

TOP TO BOTTOM:

1. **Margarita Rosales** works on her script with MPR News editor **Lisa Ryan**. Margarita interviewed the Ordway's director of production **Julia Erickson**.

2. **Amani Davis** concentrates on her interview tape during Radio Camp. Amani interviewed the Ordway's executive vice president and chief financial officer **Chris Sagstetter**.

3. **Kaya Williams** finishes recording her story in the studio. Kaya interviewed Ordway's director of arts learning and community engagement **Maia Maiden**.

4. **Mauricio Barreto** reviews his interview tape with support from ThreeSixty director **Kenzie O'Keefe**. Mauricio interviewed Ordway's vice president of programming and community impact **Tanya Gertz**.



Urban Roots
Continued from page 15

Garden’s goal is to restore the balance of healthy food accessibility and improve community health in the process.

“Food is medicine,” Jandro said, “focusing on food as a form of health care is an extremely effective way of prevention ... the impact that we have on interns’ families is significant. Being able to provide the resources and the networking and access to food and also basic needs is important.”

Urban Roots not only cares about providing resources for their interns, but providing resources for their community. Jandro discussed how Urban Roots gives back to their communities by working at local farmers markets, like Mill City Farmers Market in Minneapolis, and donating food to food shelves like CLUES, a Latino led nonprofit organization. Adult volunteers with Urban Roots also help with gardening while elementary schools bring students to learn about their programs.

“We are about bettering the health of the people we work with and providing resources for the communities around us,” said Jandro.

Fighting for All Mothers
Continued from page 19

pathways to health and healing.”

Bilal-Roby says the healthy development of babies requires healthy circumstances for families. Like plants, children are a product of their environment. AABC offers training and education primarily for healthcare providers. People often say a person is in the best hands when they are being cared for by a doctor, but she says mothers of color often aren’t.

AABC offers doula training, crisis training and perinatal care and education to support Black and Brown communities. It also offers both children and adults training on youth mental health and resilience.

“The causes of racial inequities in maternal health are multifaceted, but they speak to the increased barriers that Black and Indigenous communities face in accessing healthcare and the direct role systemic racism plays in determining health outcomes,” Hayes said.

Birth Justice Collaborative
Continued from page 20

They provide mothers with the community they need through initiatives such as Homeplace, a program that utilizes cultural and personal knowledge to uplift new mothers.

“Homeplace has been designed and established by a communal ethic and a communal collection of culture,” Galloway said.

Through Homeplace, mothers have a space that they can rely on throughout the birthing process and exchange valuable stories.

Galloway explained that while academic sources are valid, personal experience and stories are of equal importance.

“Within all of us is collective wisdom. Part of what Homeplace does is that it gives you permission and encourages you to pull up your collective wisdom and bring that to the table,” Galloway continued.

BJC strives to appreciate the importance of academic knowledge while still maintaining the same value of personal knowledge.

“What is written in our heart and what is written in our mind is as important as what is written in a book,” Galloway said.

Task Force
Continued from page 21

died of alcoholism.

“It makes you angry,” Nash said.

Higher tobacco use

Native Americans use commercial tobacco at higher rates than other BIPOC communities. In Minnesota, for instance, 59% of Native Americans smoke commercial tobacco, compared with 14.5% of the adult population, according to the Minnesota Department of Health.

In response, the task hopes to help Indigenous communities better understand the ways tobacco has been used traditionally, such as in ceremonial purposes, offerings and prayers.

Nash likened the use of tobacco in prayer to Christian traditions, such as the Catholic

church’s use of holy water.

“We offer it to the creator, to send that message. And that’s our gift,” Nash said.

Nash said Indigenous communities stopped using tobacco culturally because of pressure on Indigenous people to assimilate into the broader society.

Tobacco farming

Growing tobacco is also culturally important to native communities. Nash said the task force plants tobacco and waters it as a thank you gift to the Earth. “We thank the water spirits and say, thank you for that gift of water,” Nash said.

Nicole Christian, the farm site manager for the task force’s Indigi-Baby and Food Sovereignty Program, produces sustainable baby food for Native American communities. That includes ensuring that the ingredients in baby food, like wild rice, are sustainably grown.

Additionally, Indigi-Baby is often found on food shelves, so it’s accessible for low-income families.

“(We want to) give the mothers in our community peace of mind that their babies can eat well,” Christian said.

Christian hopes that with all of the tobacco grown by the task force, she will be able to teach her community techniques that will help them grow tobacco themselves.

It’s a process that has been made more difficult due to climate change.

She said that despite strong community support, the task force’s farm has struggled to keep its crops alive because of unstable weather conditions. “A lot of (our) challenges have been the weather,” she said. “That, I’m sure, will continue as we go forward.”

Despite these challenges, Christian is motivated to continue farming tobacco and other crops for the sake of her community.

Ultimately, the task force’s goal is quality over profit and to continue to foster Indigenous traditions in a world where companies — such as those that sell cigarettes and other tobacco products — prioritize revenue.

“I want them to know how much we care,” Christian said, “the youth are our future.”

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