PROGRAM YEAR **2025**

threesixty JOURNALISM

NEWS AND STORYTELLING FROM MINNESOTA YOUTH

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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

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KENZIE O'KEEFE

ThreeSixty Community,

We live in turbulent times: surging technological change, political violence, collapsing systems, and deepening division. As a youth program leader (and a mother) I feel a duty to resist despair and contribute to a better future.

ThreeSixty is my anchor to hope—and I know many of you are right there with me. Through journalism education, we equip young people with critical thinking skills, inspire connection across difference, and, story by story, repair the fraying civic fabric of world.

Our 2024-25 program year (the content of this magazine) was ambitious:

- We grew programming to meet rising demand while planning for long-term sustainability; we piloted three new programs and expanded from 200 to 250 annual hours and 120 to 154 seats.
- We built professional skills while filling local news gaps: 47 high school student stories were published by local outlets including the *Minnesota Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, MinnPost, Sahan Journal, KARE 11,* and *Minnesota Public Radio*. Our alumni held internships at the *Star Tribune, Pioneer Press,* and *North News*.
- We invested in local and national community building, traveling to New York, Seattle, and Philadelphia, and convening peers at St. Thomas and the McKnight Foundation to advance equitable journalism education as a shared project.

One summer radio camp source wrote after a student interview:

"Your questions were thoughtful, your energy was grounding, and your editing? Impeccable. I'm honored my story was held by someone as brilliant, intentional, and gifted as you."

That's what ThreeSixty is about: rigorous reporting that connects us in shared humanity. May you have that experience in the pages ahead.

In service and gratitude,

Kenzie O'Keefe
kenzieokeefe@stthomas.edu

threesixty JOURNALISM

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UNIVERSITY OF St.Thomas
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Empower our students to find their voices, think critically, and become active participants in a democratic society—through journalism and beyond. Support ThreeSixty today!

THREESIXTY YOUTH BOARD LEADS AND LEARNS IN INAUGURAL YEAR

By Denise Huang, *Staff*

IN THE SUMMER OF 2024, ThreeSixty launched the Youth Leadership Board as part of our commitment to formalizing youth's influence. In just a year's time, the Board has already brought us steps closer to our vision of a more just and a more accurate media world.

We started off strong with three founding members, **Alexis Aryeequaye**, **Aketzally Murillo Alvarado**, and **Gwynnevere Vang** who helped set a clear vision: youth should be involved with ThreeSixty beyond scheduled programming.

It was also a chance to deepen relationships, which has always been a core part of ThreeSixty's work. Aketzally shares that becoming part of the Board was a way to "foster some of the connections I made through ThreeSixty and learn to lead with them."

By fall, five more members joined their ranks—**Daphne Kleinschmit**, **Margarita Rosales Alarcón**, **Areeba Memon**, **McCall Vickers**, and **Anais Froberg-Martinez**. The eight represented the full diversity and range of the Twin Cities metro, not just in identity and community, but also in access to journalism and media education.

The Board made a splash in its inaugural year. They took on highly visible responsibilities like speaking at Homecoming, interviewing Soledad O'Brien, and presenting at the Minnesota High School Press Association's annual conference. They likewise held quieter, backend roles like co-designing the Capitol Reporting Workshop and attending strategy sessions. Board members have lent their voices on urgent issues, publishing stories about the attacks on immigration, teenage mental health, and the state of higher education.

Their perspectives have made ThreeSixty stronger and more resilient at a time when media literacy lacks, newsrooms close, and audiences across the nation struggle to find accurate, truthful reporting that they trust.

ThreeSixty's inaugural youth leadership board:
Front row (left to right): Margarita Rosales-Alarcón, Lexi Aryeequaye, McCall Vickers
Back row (left to right): Anais Froberg-Martinez, Areeba Memon, Aketzally Murillo, Daphne Kleinschmit

Seeking solutions (and a little fun), the Board wrapped up its year with a learning trip to New York City. In a packed four day "J-Crawl," the group met with journalists at Hearst and attended a panel on the fourth estate with **Soledad O'Brien** and **Rose Arce** at Columbia University. The group also stopped regularly for boba and pizza, not to mention a Broadway night out with *The Great Gatsby*.

But what stood out the most for the Board was meeting other like-minded youth—the student leaders of the NYC Youth Journalism Coalition. While both groups shared a love for impactful storytelling, their NYC peers were also upstream advocates for student access to journalism education. Reflecting on the visit, members Anais and Margarita shared that "although we are in different circumstances, meeting YJC made us think hard about how students could impact the state of news in Minnesota [...] we can be the advocates to bridge the gap between student journalism and the bigger, daily struggles."

As the Board charts ahead, they bring grit, confidence, and awareness of what's at stake. ThreeSixty is thrilled to be alongside the next generation of Twin Cities' very own storytellers and journalists.

ThreeSixty's youth leadership board is made possible by generous program supporter, Mark Zeug.

THREESIXTY'S INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Samantha HoangLong
Sahan Journal

Chris Havens
Target

Bianca Jones
Northside Achievement Zone

Shane Kitzman
Thrivent

Deb Sakry Lande
Author, Communications Consultant, Youth Coach

Pauleen Le
Project for Pride in Living

Frederick Melo
Pioneer Press

Laura McCallum
Minnesota Star Tribune

Andrea Pierre
Minnesota Public Radio

Amanda Theisen
Sunrise Banks

Miles Trump
Best Buy

Dr. Wendy Wyatt
University of St. Thomas

Andy Ybarra
University of St. Thomas

Duchesne Drew, *Member Emeritus*,
Minnesota Public Radio

ANGELINE PATRICK PACHECO IS OUR 2025 SCHOLAR

By Kenzie O'Keefe, *Staff*

ANGELINE PATRICK PACHECO of Johnson Senior High School is ThreeSixty Journalism's 2025 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 2025.

Patrick Pacheco discovered journalism through her high school creative writing teacher, Allan Olvera. Both Olvera and journalism helped her develop social confidence and courage that she says has changed her life and helped her develop a vision for her future.

"Journalism has really, helped me push myself to grow as a person," she said. "Pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone makes you realize that the worst case scenario isn't really that bad and it rarely ever happens. A lot of the time it's good."

Patrick Pacheco records an interview during the Capitol Reporting Workshop in February 2025.

Angeline Patrick Pacheco sports her new St. Thomas sweatshirt after receiving news of her full ride scholarship.

Patrick Pacheco first got involved with ThreeSixty through the Fall 2024 Op-Ed Writing Workshop; her piece, which argued for more arts funding for Saint Paul Public Schools, was published by *MinnPost*. Patrick

> **"Pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone makes you realize that the worst case scenario isn't really that bad and it rarely ever happens. A lot of the time it's good."**

Pacheco also participated in ThreeSixty's Spring 2025 Capitol Reporting Workshop.

She found ThreeSixty through *Pioneer Press* reporter Fred Melo, a ThreeSixty Leadership Council Member, who she worked with during the 2024 Summer Journalism Intensive at the Center for Broadcast Journalism then led by journalists Georgia Fort and Marianne Combs.

"It was a lovely experience to work with all of those people and figure out my own voice," she said.

Patrick Pacheco chose to attend St. Thomas both because of her scholarship and because she believes the university "offers a lot of good really meaningful connections and future opportunities."

She looks forward to exploring the University's student club offerings, especially rock climbing and music.

Ten years from now, she imagines being an established journalist either in a newsroom or on her own. Born and raised on the East Side of St. Paul, she hopes to be telling stories about her community. "I would love to write [stories] that addresses some issues there, brings attention, and brings about change," she said.

Patrick Pacheco was selected for the ThreeSixty scholarship from a competitive pool of applicants who participated in ThreeSixty Journalism programming. ThreeSixty supports four students attending St. Thomas with the scholarship annually.

ST. THOMAS SCHOLARS: WHAT THEY ARE UP TO

ANGELINE PATRICK PACHECO

In her last summer before college, Angeline spoke at the National Education Association's Racial & Social Justice conference in Portland, where she met many amazing, passionate educators. In the Twin Cities, she completed an internship with *North News* in Minneapolis, focused on writing about the changes that are happening with our government and how things will in turn affect the community. She also wrote freelance stories for the *Sahan Journal* and *Pioneer Press* in August. Additionally, she worked with CLUES (Communidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio) through their Earn to Learn program to create a documentary centering local artists. She is so excited to join the class of 2029 at St. Thomas this fall and endlessly grateful for the support ThreeSixty provides.

JAYDIN FAIRBANKS

Jaydin Fairbanks is excited to start his third year of college this fall. He has been renting his first apartment and recently landed a new part-time job as a security guard over the summer. He looks forward to taking more digital media classes and capturing additional photos for *The Crest*. Jaydin also plans to host a small film festival in the Twin Cities this coming January, showcasing Native American films and possibly more. One of his goals for the upcoming school year is to become a more competent storyteller so he can convey his message more clearly and intuitively.

GWYNN VANG

Gwynn Vang is in her senior year of college and plans to graduate with a journalism degree and a minor in digital media arts. The Emerging Media department has given her the opportunity to refine her reporting skills and grow into a multimedia journalist through a variety of classes. One of the most valuable skills she has learned is how to use a Sony XDCAM to record her own video packages. Last semester, she reported on how streetlamp wire thefts affected St. Paul, producing both a video and a text story. She is currently part of the *New York Times* Corp, a mentorship program for college students from underrepresented communities, and will be traveling to New York in the spring.

AYANNA MELANDER

Ayanna wrapped up her first year at St Thomas. She worked part time as an Editorial Assistant with ThreeSixty over the school year and summer. In that role, she helped run the ThreeSixty Instagram and had a big hand in shaping student experience. She is also a mentor through Black Girl Advocate.

ALUMNI: WHERE THEY ARE NOW

31 in Professional and College Newsrooms
6 in Advocacy & Policy
16 in Media Storytelling
8 in Public Relations/Strategic Communications
26 have volunteered with ThreeSixty

We love to hear from our alumni. Find us on LinkedIn @ThreeSixty Journalism and tell us what you're up to.

FAAYA ADEM

Faaya recently graduated from the University of Minnesota with degrees in journalism and geography. She also completed her time with the *New York Times* Corps, where she was mentored by John Eligon, the Times' Johannesburg Bureau Chief. Currently, she is working at AMPERS (with ThreeSixty alum, Jamad Jama) as a web and social content assistant and a producer for the North Star Stories and MN90 projects.

LAURA LEE

Laura Lee is part of the ThreeSixty Journalism inaugural class. She is currently an evening anchor for *Northern News Now* based in Duluth, Minnesota. With more than a decade of television news experience, she was recently promoted to executive producer and content manager. She also remains the co-anchor for the 6p.m. & 10p.m. newscasts. She recently won a Murrow for her special report, "Through the Ice" looking at the dangers of ice fishing amid a historically warm winter.

ISABEL SAAVEDRA-WEIS

Isabel is entering her second year as an English and American Literature PhD student at New York University. She specializes in Latinx literature, performance studies and popular culture studies. This past spring, she presented a paper on Mexican-American music titled 'From criminal to crusader to "Chuco Suave"' at the 2025 NorthEast MLA conference in Philadelphia. This summer, Isabel did some community engagement work with New York Theatre Ballet and The Latinx Project.

STACY DAHL

Stacy Dahl is a freelance journalist and founder of She Who Strayed, a website that offers travel tips for women who want to travel and share their adventures with a community of other travel-minded women. She is also working on her memoir: *"She Who Strayed: One Woman's Solo Journey Across the Globe"* which documents her three-year journey living in China and solo traveling throughout Asia and Europe. Currently she is pursuing her M.A. in English & Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University and is set to graduate in 2026.

JASMINE MCBRIDE

Jasmine McBride is currently the editor of the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* and was recently recognized with the 2025 MN SPJ Page One Award for Breaking News Reporting. She is also a proud mother to her toddler, Nazaara, who brings inspiration and joy to her everyday life.

KENDALL SHOSTAK

Kendall is currently majoring in journalism with minors in sustainability and theology at St Thomas. She is overall still exploring what she wants to do next in her career.. However, while taking "Environmental Challenges" at UST to cover general credits, she ended up wanting to know how to use a journalism degree to enhance the spread of sustainability and connect with the public.

DALLAS DOWNEY

Dallas Downey is a student Northwestern University in Chicago, majoring in Cognitive Science, with minors in Indigenous Studies, and Art, Theory, & Practice. He hopes to blend advocacy, cultural storytelling, and creative expression to uplift marginalized voices and create transformative change through representative journalism. Dallas also believes in the power of leadership rooted in community and belonging, and ThreeSixty Journalism, he says, helped propel that belief to set him up for the bountiful future ahead.

GLORIA NGWA

This summer, Gloria Ngwa had the opportunity to participate in the Center for Broadcast Journalism's POWER 104.7 Media Lab, where she hosted her own live show for the radio station. She was also a reporting intern for *Pioneer Press,* sponsored by the St. Paul Jaycees Foundation in conjunction with ThreeSixty and the Minneapolis Society of Professional Journalists. Gloria applied the skills she learned through through programs like ThreeSixty and at college right here in St. Paul. This fall she is sophomore at Northwestern University studying journalism. In the winter Gloria will be participating in the Medill on the Hill trip to Washington D.C., where she will report national news on Capitol Hill.

CAROLINE SIEBELS-LINDQUIST

Caroline Siebels-Lindquist just wrapped up a summer internship with the *Minnesota Star Tribune* in the opinion-editorial department. There, she was able to try on many different topic hats, but always through her own political and animated style. Now in her senior year, she's finishing up her bachelor's degree in Multimedia Journalism and Politics at Drake University, where one of her written pieces for her college political magazine, "Iowa in Crisis," discussing the state of abortion access, was recently declared as a Pinnacle finalist in the College Media Awards. Keep an eye out for her freelancing work at *The Woman Today* magazine.

PRO-BONO STRATEGIC PLANNING SUPPORT ENABLES THREESIXTY TO REFINE APPROACH IN A CHANGING WORLD

Pioneer Management Consulting is working with the program to craft updated strategic priorities.

Pioneer staff, SVP MN Executive Director, and ThreeSixty leaders gathered in person in June for the first of two workshops.

By Kenzie O'Keefe, *Staff*

IN EARLY 2025, ThreeSixty was selected for a competitive grant opportunity through Social Venture Partners Minnesota to receive more than $30,000 in pro-bono strategic planning support from Pioneer Management Consulting, a firm headquartered in Minneapolis. The grant also came with $7,000 of cash support.

Dr. Wendy Wyatt and Samantha HoangLong, members of ThreeSixty's leadership council, brainstorm during a workshop.

The goal for this year-long partnership is to equip ThreeSixty with refined strategic priorities and a plan to implement and measure them during a time of immense opportunity and challenge for journalism, youth programming, and education broadly.

According to senior consultant Liz Bolejack, Pioneer selected ThreeSixty for the opportunity because of "momentum and timing," "clear alignment," and the program's "collaborative spirit."

"The organization is clearly at a pivotal moment, with strong energy from funders, supporters, and the community. It felt like the right time to offer strategic support to help ThreeSixty move confidently into its next chapter," she said.

At the beginning of June, the ThreeSixty community was asked to complete a survey to help the program and Pioneer understand how they envision the future of this program. 62 community members responded, and those responses helped shape two subsequent strategic planning workshops involving students, staff, university representatives, and board members.

According to 95% of survey respondents, journalistic education should remain a key priority for the organization. Additionally, respondents indicated they want to see the program provide education on a variety of topics, prioritizing development of modern journalism skills in programming. They want to see the program prioritize hands-on experiences and programming for high school and college students.

This project is still underway. Stay tuned for more announcements about it in early 2026.

Homecoming 2025

A DIVERSE CROWD of over 215 attendees raised over $90,000 during ThreeSixty's sold-out annual gathering and fundraiser at the **Minneapolis Club** on April 10. The program featured giants in local and national media and both ThreeSixty students and their work produced in the program. A surprise announcement from longtime ThreeSixty supporter **David Nimmer** laid the groundwork for a strong and sustainable future for the program—more to come on that soon!

Thank you again to our sponsors: Best Buy, McKnight Foundation, the *Minnesota Star Tribune*, *Pioneer Press*, *Minneapolis/Saint Paul Business Journal*, the Minneapolis Club, *MinnPost*, *Sahan Journal*, and the Racial Justice Initiative at the University of St. Thomas.

Current ThreeSixty students and program alumni attended Homecoming in record numbers.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

1. ThreeSixty leadership council member **Pauleen Le** (left) caught up with **Panhia Yang**, executive producer at FOX 9.

2. The Root Editor-in-Chief **Tatsha Robertson** received ThreeSixty's annual Opening Doors award. Based in New York City now, she worked at the *Minnesota Star Tribune* early in her career. *New York Times* Correspondent **Ernesto Londoño**, a current program volunteer who has helped integrate mindfulness into ThreeSixty curriculum, received the program's Widening the Circle award.

3. *Minnesota Public Radio* President **Duchesne Drew** and *Sahan Journal* founder Mukhtar Ibrahim were part of the night's sold-out crowd.

4. FOX 9 anchor **Chenue Her**, who grew up in East St. Paul, hosted the evening's program.

Photos by Brandon Woller, *St. Thomas*

PECHULANO NGWE ALI JOINS THREESIXTY AS LEADER OF PROGRAMMING

By Kenzie O'Keefe, *Staff*

PECHULANO NGWE ALI was named ThreeSixty's associate director of programs in June 2025.

He comes to the University of St. Thomas from the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire where he was an assistant professor of communication, journalism and digital storytelling as well as co-advisor of the student news outlet, *The Spector*.

He has a knack for engaging journalistic storytelling that centers people and communities. Previously, he taught college courses in data journalism, podcasting and narrative audio storytelling, long form multimedia journalism and international communication.

He is passionate about leveraging his skills in media production and curriculum design and implementation to train young people to find, develop and use their voices for civic engagement in their communities.

"My role is allowing me to blend my passion for teaching, community storytelling and youth mentorship into one cohesive mission; helping young people find their voices, and use journalism as tool for civic engagement and social change," he said.

After a summer on the job, he says ThreeSixty students "commitment and energy" stands out most.

"The collaboration and determination I have witnessed [this summer has] shown me that joining ThreeSixty wasn't just a career move but a continuation of my broader calling to empower the next generation storytellers," he said.

Born and raised in Cameroon, he has also worked in the humanitarian sector, including with UN Refugee Agency, where he helped communicate the needs and stories of displaced communities in the Republic of Congo.

When he's not guiding the next generation of storytellers, Ngwe Ali loves to read, cook, play tennis, and produce narrative audio stories of his own.

Ngwe Ali replaces longtime program leader Theresa Malloy Lemickson who transitioned out of ThreeSixty in February 2025.

Pechulano Ngwe Ali

IN MEMORIUM

Remembering **Nancy Cassutt Ison** and **Robert "Bob" Franklin**

Robert Brewer Franklin, longtime *Star Tribune* journalist, St. Thomas professor, and ThreeSixty classroom volunteer, died of Parkinson's Disease on January 31, 2025, according to his obituary. He was 87.

"Bob Frankling was a wonderful man and a true ThreeSixty Journalism champion. He was always the first to answer our calls for classroom volunteers," said former ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers who worked closely with Franklin.

An alumnus of the University of Minnesota's graduate journalism program, Franklin worked for local papers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the *Associated Press*, and eventually, the *Tribune* (eventually the *Star Tribune*) where he was hired in 1967.

Franklin's wife Norma Jean asked that memorials to her husband be made in the form of gifts to ThreeSixty. We are grateful.

Nancy Cassutt Ison, beloved Twin Cities news leader and tireless mentor to many ThreeSixty students, died June 19, 2025 of a glioblastoma brain tumor, according to her obituary. She was 64 years old.

Cassutt was a member of ThreeSixty's industry leadership council and helped launch the program's radio camp partnership with *MPR News* in memory of her colleague and fellow ThreeSixty champion Toni Randolph who died in 2016.

"Nancy always centered the experience of the young, diverse voices who participated in radio camp and ThreeSixty, and always with energy and a smile. She impacted so many and so much," said former ThreeSixty executive director Chad Caruthers who worked closely with her during her time on the program's leadership council.

Cassutt began her career as a reporter at WDIO-TV in Duluth. After working at several Midwest stations, Cassutt ultimately landed in news management, including leading the WCCO-TV news team. She joined *Minnesota Public Radio* in 2010 after a decade at Internet Broadcasting. In 2019 she became Managing Director of News at *MarketPlace*. She retired in 2022 but later joined a national marketing agency and oversaw sponsorship sales at *Twin Cities Public Television*. She was also an early supporter of *Sahan Journal*.

ADDICTION, RECOVERY FOCUS OF 2025 MULTIMEDIA STORYTELLING INSTITUTE

Over three weeks, 18 high school students learned about narrative justice and reported on health, supported by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

By Pechulano Ngwe Ali, *Staff*

THIS SUMMER, one of ThreeSixty Journalism's key programs was the Multimedia Storytelling Institute (MSI). Launched in July 2024 and currently in its second year, the three-week camp taught the technical, ethical and entrepreneurial basics of multimedia journalism inside the University of St. Thomas's STEAM building, the Schoenecker Center. It was sponsored by **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.**

Eighteen students from 12 different high schools reported on addiction and recovery during this year's MSI. In teams of three they produced written, video, and social media stories for professional publication. Stories included issues of how a Native-led approach is fueling successful recovery in South Minneapolis, how community is crucial to the recovery journey, youth substance use and treatment, recovery in rural Minnesota, and social media addiction.

Guest instructors included **Scott Winter**, journalism professor at the University of Minnesota's Hubbard School, **Hlee Lee**, CEO of the Other Media Group (OMG), 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 Minnesota *Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, MinnPost*, Padilla, WCCO TV, KARE 11, KSTP, FOX 9, the University of Minnesota Hubbard School, and Seavert Studios

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

Additional support for this workshop came from the Dow Jones News Fund.

Student journalist, Lakshmi Aishwarya Devulapalli (middle) interviews sources for story about substance use and recovery in rural Minnesota. The interview was shot by a volunteer professional videographer, Brian Wiedeke (first from right), and mentored by Symone Woolridge (second from right), both of FOX 9. **Photo by ThreeSixty Staff**

MAX FREEMAN
Rosemount High School

"After I got here on the first day, I could immediately tell that this was going to be a good way to spend three weeks. There was a vibe in the room that felt deeply inspired, like great things were bound to happen... the theme of this MSI Camp wasn't just addiction, it was addiction and recovery. Every story we tell should show the arduous journey someone had to go through, while also showing how they were able to better their lives after it."

NAOMI MILLER
Richfield High School

"Every morning, Monday to Thursday during the month of July, I would walk into the Schoenecker Center into a small glass classroom. It was inside this room that I became a journalist."

KING PRIMUS
Roseville High School

"It's okay to try new things and it's okay to be vulnerable. Sometimes it's good to come out of your shell and try new things and experiences. That's how I got here today. MSI taught me a lot about journalism and life skills."

AISHWARYA DEVULAPALLI
Wayzata High School

"After several days of carefully curating a balance of personal and logistical questions, along with many sessions led by media professionals, I no longer felt so daunted by the prospect of mindfully interviewing those who have had much heavier and complex lived experiences beyond my own."

DEALING HOPE IN SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS

MINNEAPOLIS ORGANIZATION TAKES A NATIVE-LED APPROACH TO ADDICTION RECOVERY

By Margarita Rosales Alarcón, *Venture Academy*
Additional reporting by **Maria Hernandez-Silva**, *Venture Academy* and **King Primus**, *Roseville High School*

"I'm a hope dealer, not a dope dealer." That is Nation Wright's motto today.

Growing up in the Minneapolis American Indian community, Wright saw first-hand how addiction affected his people. Now, as the chief operating officer for the American Indian Community Development Corporation (AICDC), Wright is concerned about the recent trends.

"Things have gotten dramatically worse," he said. "The average age of addiction is getting younger and younger. It's hard for me because that's, you know, these are babies, essentially, that are out here struggling."

Native Americans are disproportionately impacted by addiction. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, they are seven times more likely to overdose than white Minnesotans.

"They feel like they're stuck in this state of hopelessness," said Wright.

He says community outreach is one way to combat that hopelessness and get people the resources they need. The AICDC, a housing organization, attempts to reach community members experiencing active addiction.

"You keep showing up, you keep showing them that you care and what it does is it builds relationship[s]... it builds trust," he said.

Resistance is common, but that doesn't stop Wright and his team from continuing to reach out to people with help. "I might have had 100 contacts with you before you say yes, but that's the thing, though, it's consistency," he said.

The struggles in his community have to do with generational trauma.

Native Americans have been stripped from their culture, language, traditions. Their children were sent to boarding schools. They've suffered colonialism and colonization.

"That lasts and that's generational," said Wright.

Treating addiction in his community requires an understanding of what his people have been through.

"There is also a lot of judgment in this world and there's a lot of hate and a lot of not taking the time to understand and to listen and to be fully educated about a situation, people, and about a community," he said.

Wright said that many of the youth in the Little Earth East Phillips community in South Minneapolis have never been outside of that bubble.

"That's the only place they know. And if we start to see the world and what the world has to offer for us we can start to create some different pathways to success," he said.

Nation Wright. Photo by Yasmin Yassin

He aims to be a positive voice for his people, and to show love to those when needed. Most importantly, he seeks to hold his friends, brothers, sisters, and family accountable.

But with limited resources in Native American communities, change can feel far off.

> **"The average age of addiction is getting younger and younger. It's hard for me because that's, you know, these are babies, essentially, that are out here struggling."**
>
> Nation Wright

"How can we expect people to change?... There's been generation to generation of no change, no resources, no support within their immediate environments because everyone else is in the same struggle," Wright said.

Mental health also plays a part in addiction that co-occurs. There can be a lack of how to address struggles.

For his people to move forward, Wright says it's important to "raise the bar" and not to normalize addiction and struggle.

The AICDC helps individuals move forward with culturally grounded care that brings together traditional and western treatment support.

They have several buildings with different support functions. Their housing facilities are almost always at capacity.

At their homeless shelter, individuals are able to receive a warm meal and take a shower. Participants are also able to connect with counseling, therapy or any of the other services the AICDC has to offer. There is a wet house where participants are allowed to drink on site.

"It's a harm reduction model, they're limited to what they can bring in. It's a way to get people housed," Wright said.

Work is important to Wright but working in a high stress environment also takes a toll. He uses cultural practices like Native drumming as a way to cope and is working to prioritize his well-being so he can be more present for his two children and become a better person for his people.

"This is the community that I'm raising my kids in and the community I want to see thrive and really do better," he said.

This story was produced as part of ThreeSixty Journalism's Multimedia Storytelling Institute for high school students in partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, which financially sponsors the camp and supports story sourcing.

SEE MARIA & KING'S VIDEO STORY HERE:

ACCESS MAKES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADDICTION, RECOVERY

TWO MINNESOTA RECOVERY SPECIALISTS PURSUE FAIR AND EQUAL ACCESS TO ADDICTION CARE.

By Vivian Ogunro, *Breck School*
Additional reporting by **JJ Moore**, *Jefferson High School* and **Amelia Mani**, *DeLaSalle High School*

It wasn't until Heather Lococo's daughter was born with cocaine in her system that she knew she had to receive treatment. Losing her kids to foster care was the turning point for her. She started 29 days in a treatment center and then started going to recovery meetings and spending time with people that didn't use drugs or alcohol.

That was 2005.

"Everybody that knew me wanted me to get help," said Lococo. She has had two relapses since then but is currently 10 years sober. Now she has her temporary permit as an alcohol and drug counselor (ADC-T) and works as a program manager at Partners Behavioral Healthcare. She's also studying social work at Bemidji State University.

"I know the struggle. So I want to see people succeed in life," she said.

Lococo and Melissa Mikkonen, who is a Principle Program Manager of Medicaid health at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, share a commitment to equitable access in addiction recovery care.

Both say that many people working in the recovery community are in their own long-term recovery. "I think that that's really powerful when you can be professional and also share your recovery story... because then people who are on their journey can see, hey, that's attainable for me," said Mikkonen.

Mikkonen says "an epidemic of loneliness" is contributing to addiction in society. "I think that we're all together all the time, but we're all still really feeling quite alone."

She sees building community as the key to recovery. Mikkonen goes out into community a lot, and she thinks it is very important to build programs that are reflective of the people she serves. She loves to travel to all the different parts of Minnesota and says that "different parts of the state have different needs."

Lococo elaborated that putting people of different backgrounds and cultures together with the expectation that they will all learn the same and understand the same is really difficult. Lococo says there need to be more culturally based treatments.

Treatment looks different for everyone. Mikkonen says Blue Cross offers programs both for people who need substance use disorder treatment "within four walls" and for those who don't need residential treatment but still need structure. They offer virtual IOP, intensive outpatient treatment, for substance use disorder. According to research on IOPs, 12% suffering from substance use disorder were being treated with IOPs. The demand for these programs is huge, and these programs wouldn't be possible without funding.

Mikkonen says the federal "Big, Beautiful Bill" threatens access to treatment. According to an article in *USA Today*, between 12 million and 20 million people are at risk of losing Medicaid coverage. "That's the thing that keeps me up at night," said Mikkonen.

For those who don't have insurance Mikkonen recommends Portico, which, according to their mission statement, helps uninsured individuals and families access affordable coverage and care. She said Blue Cross works with them a lot. She says counties can also be a resource.

Lococo said most people know someone with drug or alcohol problems. According to American Addiction Centers and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 50% of Americans know someone who struggles with substance use disorder. Addiction is widespread, but Lococo wants people to know that addiction recovery is possible. "It's hard, but it's doable," she said.

> **"Everything's changed. My relationships with people, my relationships with family and friends. The world is my oyster."**
>
> Heather Lococo, alcohol and drug counselor

The first time Mikkonen had an impact on someone in recovery sticks with her. She says that seeing someone be stable and successful felt so wonderful, because it was like being part of their family. She wants them to know that when they are ready, Blue Cross is there to help.

Lococo hopes those struggling with addiction don't ever give up hope: "I was the black sheep of my family, so it was, 'oh, don't let her over.' But now, because of what I've done with my life, I think it's really, actually opened up a lot of people's eyes."

Lococo's journey provides an example of what's possible through recovery. Once homeless, she's now about to close on a house of her own: "Everything's changed. My relationships with people, my relationships with family and friends. The world is my oyster," she said.

Melissa Mikkonen is a program manager at Blue Cross and Blue Shield. She aims to provide easy and accessible addiction recovery care. "It's on us to not only have good, solid programs, but to make that accessible information, so that they can find those programs easily." **Photo by Yasmin Yassin**

This story was produced as part of ThreeSixty Journalism's Multimedia Storytelling Institute for high school students in partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, which financially sponsors the camp and supports story sourcing.

SEE JJ & AMELIA'S VIDEO STORY HERE:

HEALING HAPPENS IN COMMUNITY

PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM ADDICTION NEED SUPPORT AS THEY WALK THEIR ROADS TO RECOVERY.

By Muhammad Memon, *Wayzata High School*
Additional reporting by **Smit Bhardwaj**, *Wayzata High School* and **Alaia Scroggins**, *Wayzata High School*

Darnell Cox started using marijuana and alcohol around the age of 12. By 20 he had been introduced to hard drugs. His uncle had been released from prison, and Cox started spending time with him and his friends. That's how he became addicted to methamphetamine.

Cox is one of many Americans whose entire family systems are affected by substance use disorder. One in four U.S. children lived with at least one parent or caretaker with substance use disorder in 2023, according to research from the National Institute of Health.

In 2020, Cox had found recovery, but it was fragile. He was two years sober, working for the first time in construction. He and his family had created distance from unhealthy people and behaviors.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. It was an isolating time for everyone, and substance use disorders surged. Cox started using again and quickly spiraled.

"I was living in my car, fully prepared to go back to prison when they caught me using meth again," he said "I couldn't stop until I was in jail. When I was in jail, I was away from it, I could come down. That's how jails and prisons almost became a reset for me."

When he was caught, the judge gave him another shot, and that's when he found Minnesota Recovery Connection. Now, he is the director of operations there.

The key to his recovery? "the difference between this time and the last is actually finding that connection and finding that place where I belong," he said.

Doing things differently got Cox out of the cycle. He learned new hobbies during his time in prison. He learned how to crochet so he could make things for his kids. He now regularly enjoys crocheting and even has a TikTok page at @yarnellcrochet showcasing his art. He also replaced his criminal habits with a health and fitness routine. He goes to the gym daily and plays basketball with a group weekly.

"I reset many times. The big part of it was I never realized, until the last time, that after I reset, I needed to do something different," he said.

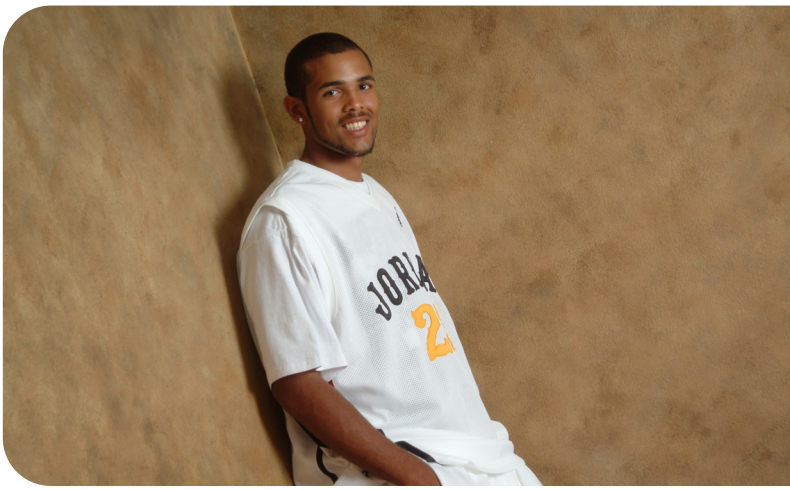
People recovering from addiction need support and community as they walk their roads to healing.

A student, M, who is given anonymity because of the stigma surrounding substance use disorder, struggled with addiction at his large suburban high school in Plymouth.

Vaping was his gateway to addiction. He was 13 years old and influenced by peers at his high school. It escalated from there. M struggled for years and was not able to find the support he needed within the school's community.

"There was no real safe space, because I felt whatever I told them they were gonna tell other people. It was hard to quit when all they would do is take you to the office and get you in trouble and make you do some program, but that's not really helping students," he said.

M eventually left his high school for a private Christian alternative. He originally had no intentions of turning his life around but, his new environment influenced him to stop using substances and engage in more productive behavior.



Darnell Cox, pictured here in high school, began using drugs at age 12. After struggling with addiction for years, he has found belonging and community to be key to his recovery. **Photo courtesy of Darnell Cox**

> **"I reset many times. The big part of it was I never realized, until the last time, that after I reset, I needed to do something different."**
> Darnell Cox

"Just the conversations and experiences I had in my private school really changed the way I was viewing the things I did. I felt I could have real talks with the teachers and not be judged, cause they weren't perfect people either, but they made me feel seen," he said.

Chemical health and recovery specialists are important leaders to have in schools today, says Cynthia Munguia, Executive Director for Minnesota Recovery Connection. Munguia and M agree: they positively affect the community to be a more safe and accepting place, so students can have someone that they can speak to without fear of getting in trouble.

"Absolutely develop support programs for students, collegiate programs for substance use disorders or recovery-oriented programs providing understanding and education," said Munguia.

"I think [schools] should lead with programs; you keep taking away a kid's vape then he's just gonna get a new one. Actually tackle the issue; they can actually give kids the help they need to quit," said M. He stressed the importance of focusing on why young people are using.

Cox, Munguia, and M agree that a strong, supportive community is absolutely essential to a successful recovery. It can affect whether an individual starts using substances or not and it can affect whether they are able to stop and sustain recovery or not.

Munguia wants struggling young people–like a younger M or Cox to know that help is available.

"I would really love our young generation to know that they're not alone," she said. "They're not the first ones or the last. It's wonderful to be able to reach out to someone, especially when you're feeling alone, that you know there's one person who can listen to your story and help you."

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SEE SMIT & ALAIA'S VIDEO STORY HERE:

A ROAD TO RECOVERY: HOW ONE WOMAN'S RESILIENCE HAS PAVED A WAY FORWARD FOR ALL

MINNESOTA NORTH COLLEGE'S LICENSED ALCOHOL AND DRUG COUNSELING (LADC) PROGRAM HAS BEEN RESHAPED AND BROADENED TO INCREASE ACCESS TO ADDICTION SUPPORT IN RURAL AREAS ACROSS THE STATE.

By Lakshmi Aishwarya Devulapalli, *Wayzata High School*
Additional reporting by **Legend Primus**, *Roseville High School* and **Amelia Mohamud**, *Delano High School*

Mary Kay Riendeau began to use marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes at only 12 years old after surviving several instances of sexual violence. Resources were not abundant in the 1970s, and Riendeau's trauma response dangerously spiraled into substance abuse that lasted 23 years.

Since she set out on the path to recovery in 1999, Riendeau has refused to let the pain of her past define her future. Today, as the department head of addiction studies at Minnesota North College-Mesabi Range, she is helping widen access to addiction counseling services in rural areas across the state.

"You know why people use?" said Riendeau. "The pain of life."

She says expanding access to addiction counseling will help people get the support they need.

According to a 2024 Minnesota Department of Health report, residents of rural areas seeking mental health and chemical dependency treatment typically travel over three times longer to access care compared to urban patients. The same report shows that of the 4,156 alcohol and drug counselors across the state, only 4% work in isolated rural areas. Only 6% work in small towns. Such disparities contribute to health inequity.

Faced with declining health and a looming prison sentence, Riendeau made the tough decision to stop using and turn her life around 26 years ago. She wanted to show up better as a mother, but also as the individual she knew she was under the shadow of her addiction. So, she enrolled in college.

"I'm 61 years old," she explained. "Am I going to let sexual violence ruin the rest of my life? There had to be a time in there where I made a decision."

Her college, Minnesota North College-Mesabi Range, is home to an expansive Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor program (LADC), which was established in the 1990s. The program aims to effectively train students to enter the addiction recovery field throughout the state by Zoom room and to remove the barriers that prevent many from completing their education. Rural areas such as the Mesabi Range have always faced great challenges with distance, affordability, and accessibility to addiction counseling.

Minnesota North College's program addresses the shortage of addiction counselors in the area by integrating a real-world problem-solving curriculum into the classroom. Riendeau was a 2001 graduate of the program and started teaching in the program in 2004. In 2007, her mentor retired, and she has been the Department Head since that time. There were only nine in the program that year. Even with the impacts that it was making, this shortage persisted in her community, so she sought out to expand existing initiatives.

Riendeau worked as a full time, in-person LADC instructor at her alma mater for three years until she began to broaden the program's efforts by using technology. In 2010 she launched free Zoom panels, accessible to people across the state. From Grand Portage to the Iron Range she says these "Zoom rooms" have allowed the program to reach thousands who have been touched by addiction.

This is "a way of putting people together in a community of recovery," she said. Healed communities "can excel and do things which expands the empowerment of people."

Riendeau has seen more and more students engage with the LADC program during her time as an instructor. The program's instructors currently oversee the education of over 85 students. Thousands more have been licensed and are now active in the field of addiction work since her early beginnings.
Graduate Angela Tomassoni, who has faced addiction in the past, "gets goosebumps," when reflecting on the program's impact. She said it has transformed and saved countless people, including her. She now serves as the program's Indigenous grant coordinator, and helps to oversee some of the millions of grant dollars that the program receives.

> **"As long as we're still there, there is still a voice fighting for addicts."**
> Mary Kay Riendeau

"These degrees and this experience was something that nobody could take away from me," Tomassoni said. "Giving back and staying busy is a huge thing."

Riendeau never anticipated her efforts reaching so far, but is grateful. After all, her main purpose in everything she has set out on has been to touch lives. Funding cuts threaten access to addiction services in rural communities, but Riendeau says her commitment is unwavering.

"We're at a different time politically. But does it affect us? I'm not going to let it," she said. "As long as we're still there, there is still a voice fighting for addicts."

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Angela Tomassoni (left), Indigenous Grant Assistant at Minnesota North College-Mesabi Range, and Mary Kay Riendeau (right), Department Head of Addiction Studies at Minnesota North College-Mesabi Range work to widen access to addiction counseling in rural Minnesota. **Photo by Brian Wiedeke**

SEE LEGEND & AMELIA'S VIDEO STORY HERE:

HIGH ON LIKES

EMERGING DATA SHOWS THAT ADDICTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEENS HAS MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES. YET, SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION HAS NOT BEEN RECOGNIZED AS A MEDICAL DISORDER.

By Lani Ngonethong, *Saint Paul Academy*
Additional reporting by **Maxwell Freeman**, *Rosemount High School* and **Wendy Xiong**, *Johnson High School*

Most teenagers have 24/7 access to a popular drug. They are high off it for hours a day and carry it in their pockets everywhere they go. The drug? Social media.

From calls to getting directions, technology has been ingrained into everyday life. According to a 2022 Pew Research study, 95% of U.S. teens have access to a smartphone and 97% say they use social media daily.

Linna Xiong, a high school senior who lives in St. Paul, says she spends three hours a day scrolling on social media.

"We're currently in summer right now, so I'm very bored and I have nothing to do," Xiong said. "I tend to be on social media a lot."

Ongoing research has linked heavy social media use with health issues. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General released a public advisory about social media's harms on youth mental health, noting that teens who use social media more than three hours a day are twice as likely to have poor mental health. U.S. teens spend, on average, 4.8 hours on social media a day. Fourty-one percent of the teens who spent the most time on social media rated their overall mental health as poor.

According to a 2025 study by researchers at Cornell University and Columbia University, 40% of children that they followed showed addictive use of social media that distracted from important responsibilities like school work or chores. Furthermore, addictive screen use was linked to worse mental health and suicidal behaviour.

Teens are susceptible to the addictive qualities of social media because their brains are not fully developed, according to Joel Frederickson, a psychology professor at Bethel University. Features of social media apps, such as follows, likes and comments keep users coming back for more. This reward system makes the bain release a lot of dopamine, similar to how substance addiction works.

"There's a reason why Wordle has streaks, it's to get you to go back to Wordle," said Frederickson. He is cautious of how developers make media addictive. "You're fighting against some of the best minds in the world, and you don't even realize it."

Though studies have shown the adverse effects of addictive use of social media, social media addiction is not recognized as a medical disorder.

"When you think of addiction, you think of something [like substance abuse]. But that's not how it works with phones or social media. These are a part of our lives," Clinical Director of Psychological Services at Children's Minnesota, Sarah Jerstad said. "So, how do we work with it?"

> **"I can't see [social media] disappearing. So, how do we work with it?"**
> Sarah Jerstad

Within homes, schools, and legislation there is a growing push for more regulations.

Frederickson believes schools are going to have the largest impact in consistently regulating social media usage because that is where students spend more than half of their day.

Xiong says parents have an important responsibility here. She has seen it already in her younger Gen Alpha cousins, how they stick to their tablets even at the dinner table. It irks her.

"Whenever I visit, I always see them on their iPads, and they never get off it. No matter how long I stay," Xiong said.

Jerstad encourages parents to have open conversations with their child about online boundaries instead of dictating barriers, highlighting how social media can have healthy impacts. As the name suggests, it is a place for teens to socialize, connect with others, find entertainment and express themselves.

However, often parents will blame social media and technology in response to their teens speaking out about their mental health and that shuts them down.

"There's the thought that adults never believe in us, by saying that we don't understand their struggles. But everyone goes through something differently," Xiong said.

In a 2025 national survey on the impact of social media on teen mental health, the Pew Research Center found that many parents believe social media is the primary detriment to teen mental health. Teens say the same, however are more equally divided on other factors such as bullying and pressures and expectations.

"Parents might be minimizing some of [the other experiences] and have a perspective that the world of a teen is their friends and their devices," Jerstad said.

Xiong believes teens have mental health needs that are often overlooked. "Teenagers should also have a platform to speak on their mental health, their beliefs and have a voice," she said.

As knowledge on social media addiction grows, states are taking action. The National Conference of State Legislatures reported in 2024 that at least 40 states and Puerto Rico have introduced legislation pertaining to online content and access. In Minnesota, bill SF 3567 passed in May 2024 requiring school districts and charter schools to develop a policy on cell phone usage.

Phones feel integral to our lives. Xiong remembers when they were not.

"When I didn't have a phone, I was always outside. Everything was colorful and bright," she said. "Nowadays, I don't see that anymore."

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The U.S. Surgeon General released a public advisory warning against social media addiction among teens in 2023 and ongoing research shows the detrimental effects of addictive social media use. **Photo by Lani Ngonethong**

SEE MAXELL & WENDY'S VIDEO STORY HERE:

ADDICTION ISN'T MEANT TO BE FOUGHT ALONE

INPATIENT FACILITIES LIKE HAZELDEN BETTY FORD FOUNDATION ARE CRITICAL RESOURCES FOR YOUTH IN RECOVERY.

By Janya Dieringer, *Johnson Senior High School*
Additional reporting by **Naomi Miller**, *Richfield High School*
and **Kamrin Scott**, *Two Rivers High School (Graduate)*

Lucy Getschow knew if she didn't get help soon, she would end up dead.

Drugs and alcohol had taken over her life. She had quit soccer. Stopped trying in school. She realized she was at her breaking point. Lucy felt terrified to vocalize her struggle, because there was no one there to push her forward. She had to face it all alone.

Lucy grew up in South Minneapolis. She started using marijuana at 11 years old and then moved on to alcohol and opiates, which quickly became an addiction. She felt isolated in her experiences. At the age of 16, she opened up to her sister about her struggles. Lucy was then enrolled into Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation's inpatient program. It wasn't until she met the other girls in the program that she found connection and community.

Many youth have experiences similar to Lucy.

Over 8% of Minnesota teens use drugs and 10.87% of them drink alcohol, according to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics (NCDAS).

Ken Winters, a researcher of adolescent health and cannabis use at the University of Minnesota, says there are two main reasons youth are so susceptible to addiction.

Drugs are popular in our culture. Youth follow the norms that they see in their culture and the behavior of the adults around them. Biology also plays a role in addiction. Young people are more vulnerable to the addictive effects of drugs than adults, and the way the brain is maturing and developing can contribute to it.

"Young people, even though it's illegal and [they] may not have a lot of money to buy drugs, it's easier to go down an addiction path than adults," he said.

The NCDAS reports that over 3% of all 12-17 year olds in Minnesota meet the criteria for illicit drug use disorder. Because of the amount of youth addiction, there is an overwhelming need for recovery facilities that offer treatment. Inpatient programs are an important part of recovery for many; they provide a place where those with a drug use disorder can stay and receive 24-hour treatment, often for a month.

"The inpatient or residential environment can really be quite important for a young person, because it helps structure the recovery process," said Winters.

Health professionals, like Winters, say that there is a need for more inpatient facilities available to youth.

"On average, they say only 10%, maybe 15% of young people that need treatment services for a substance use problem receive it," said Winters.

Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation helps fill that need in Minnesota. The organization works to supply more opportunities for recovery from substance use disorders and related mental health conditions. Their youth residential program serves people ages 12-25 at one location in Plymouth.

"Because there are national gaps, people fly their kids in from all over the country to receive treatment and access to health care." said Emily Piper, Chief Legal and Administrative Officer at Hazelden Betty Ford,

> **"I wasn't used to being held accountable and being told I was doing something wrong and that I needed to clean up my actions."**
> Lucy Getschow

Lucy was one of the young people who received treatment through this program, and she says it is one of the reasons she is alive today.

"I definitely appreciated the program, but I was really angry at first, and I didn't want to engage," said Lucy, "I wasn't used to being held accountable and being told I was doing something wrong and that I needed to clean up my actions."

There are many other things that contributed to Lucy's recovery, including the sober high school she attended and her sister's support. Today she is two and a half years sober.

Hazelden Betty Ford aims to become more accessible to those who cannot access treatment due to cost and coverage barriers through their advocacy work, says Piper. They also engage in education and prevention work in schools and communities in an effort to limit the number of youth who develop addiction.

Parents shape the attitudes and values of their children, says Winters. When parents and communities are educated on these topics they have the ability to support their youth when they are in need.

"[Parents and communities are] an important source of corralling… and bringing favor to pro healthy and drug free attitudes," said Winters.

Youth access to drugs can also be limited by laws and compliance checks, like ensuring drug stores are following drug age regulations, says Winter.

Lucy, now 19, has found a supportive community in her recovery. She is heading into her second year of college at St. Catherine University. She is studying to become a nurse, a profession she chose because of the experiences she has had throughout her recovery.

"I definitely have thought about [how] my life isn't linear and my recovery isn't linear, and that's OK that I'm not like everyone else," she said.

Lucy Getschow, now two and half years sober, feels passionate about sharing her story of addiction and recovery, "I didn't know anyone like me when I was going through it, and I think it would have meant so much to me to see it in someone else," she said. **Photo provided by Lucy Getschow**

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SEE NAOMI & KAMRIN'S VIDEO STORY HERE:

ON AIR WITH PODCAST CAMP

By Denise Huang, *Staff*

FOUR ADVANCED Threesixty students ushered in the first-ever Podcast Camp. Designed and led by **Aa Tiko' Rujux-Xicay**, educator and co-host of the podcast *Defining Diego*, the workshop explored the question of change: What moments have simultaneously altered your perspective and brought you closer together with others in your life?

In one week, students **Legend Primus**, **Ella Barbosa**, **Margarita Rosales Alarcón**, and **Anais Froberg-Martinez** studied the form of audio storytelling and explored their own selves. Already experienced with script writing and audio editing, the four had stories that touched on basketball, siblinghood, a trip to Florida, COVID-19, and bucking the pressure of labels.

The Podcast Camp was intimate, experimental, and a deep dive into a wildly popular mode of storytelling.

"If I had the chance, I'd do it again because I was given the opportunity to be independent." said Rosales Alarcón. "I was responsible for finding the background audio, noises, and creating a tone that matched my story."

As more Americans seek news, stories, and information from social media, ThreeSixty's youth storytellers need the technical and ethical training that can set them up for success. Not only did the cohort record and edit their stories on professional software like Adobe Audition, but they were also asked to understand their own communities, especially those that have been invisiblized.

Rujux-Xicay said workshops like these that focus on students' self-exploration and expression are a crucial part of training journalists.

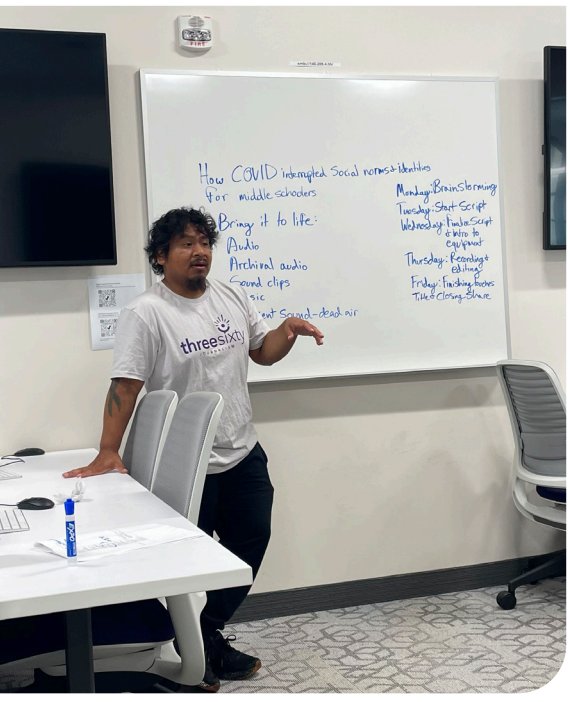
"It's important for young people to know themselves and find their voice. Through and through, it's a net good for them to think about their own story, as they also learn to tell those of others."

Two audio journalists, **Alberto Villafan** of *Sahan Journal* and **Bill Wareham**, retired from *MPR News*, also joined in on the action. Villafan and Wareham worked with two students each over two days from brainstorming to scripting.

The smaller workshop size meant one-on-one work time with Bill or Alberto was a highlight of Podcast Camp.

"Condensing my thoughts on growing up and belonging into one articulate seven-minute episode was a difficult task, but Alberto was patient in guiding me through it," shared Froberg-Martinez.

The episode produced from this workshop are published on ThreeSixty's podcast, *The Youth Pulse*. Helmed by Minnesota's youth journalists, the podcast believes that when young people are the center, storytelling can be a reparative force.



CHECK OUT THE THREESIXTY PODCAST HERE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

1. ThreeSixty student **Ella Barbosa** tries out the mic with her volunteer **Bill Wareham** in the St. Thomas podcast studio.

2. Students of the Podcast Camp worked closely with volunteers **Alberto Villafan** of *Sahan Journal* and Wareham, retired from *MPR News*. **Aa Tiko' Rujux-Xicay** led classroom and technical instruction.

3. Students receive line-by-line feedback on their podcast scripts. The small camp size meant volunteers could provide more guidance on storytelling for the ear.

4. Rujux-Xicay introduces podcasting on the first day of the workshop.

RADIO CAMPERS SPOTLIGHT STORYTELLERS AT THE LOFT LITERARY CENTER

EACH JUNE ThreeSixty and *Minnesota Public Radio 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. South Minneapolis-based KRSM Radio and MIGIZI also contribute to radio camp with student recruitment and camp support.

Camp size was increased by a third, to 17 students, this year in response to high demand. Each student produced a story from an interview conducted with someone connected to the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. Interviewees included local authors **David Mura**, **Carolyn Holbrook**, and **Art Coulson**.

After 23 years at MPR and four years as the newsroom leader of radio camp, **Nancy Lebens** is retiring. Evening editor **Lisa Ryan** will take over newsroom leadership in the year to come.

Lebens said radio campers have taught her "what resonates with the next generation of journalists" and said her favorite part of camp has been when students finish their first mixes and engage with the editing process.

Her advice for young people who want to have careers in radio journalism? Engage with audio reporting. "Find audio journalism programs in your community. Start an audio club. Learn how the technology works and strive to produce the best sound you can," she said.

LISTEN TO THEIR STORIES

King Primus focuses on his script after doing an interview at the Loft Literary Center with **Michelle Zamanian**.

TOP TO BOTTOM:

1: Eden Gillette-Kelley listens to her audio and writes her script after conducting an interview with **Wini Froelich** at the Loft Literary Center.

2: Radio campers listen to their interviews and write scripts supported by professional mentors.

3: Alex Simpson (left) and **Maryama Ahmed** review interview tape.

4: Damar Young records his narration in an *MPR News* studio.

Photos by Nikhil Kumaran, *MPR News*

CAPITOL REPORTING WORKSHOP ELEVATES STUDENT LEADERSHIP, TACKLES POLITICAL DRAMA

By Ayanna Melander, *Staff*

AGAINST A BACKDROP of political division and a snowstorm, 21 high school students from across the Twin Cities came together to cover news related to Minnesota's 2025 legislative session in February.

Together, they worked in teams of three to produce one story across three mediums: print, audio and vertical video for social media.

Student journalists did more than participate in the program's second annual Capitol Reporting Workshop—they helped lead it.

Six of the program's youth leadership board members along with **Angeline Patrick-Pacheco** of Johnson Senior High School began working in December to select reporting topics and learn about state business so they could effectively guide their teams through the reporting process. **Madison McVan** and **Michelle Griffith**, both experienced Capitol reporters from the *Minnesota Reformer,* mentored them.

Students selected a wide range of topics, including the political divide and the rocky beginning of the session, the future of Medicaid, and funding for transportation, special education, mental health, and rural eldercare.

The four-day workshop included a day at the Minnesota Capitol. Students had access to the *Pioneer Press* reporting corps office, interviewed sources, captured audio and video b-roll, took a tour, and engaged in conversation with veteran statehouse reporters, **Deena Winter** from the *Minnesota Star Tribune* and **J. Patrick Coolican** from the Minnesota Reformer.

The workshop was supported by Three Sixty staff and contract program manager, **Marianne Combs**, veteran radio reporter and award-winning youth mentor. Her support was essential to student success.

"Her coaching with the script reading was incredibly helpful. I've always struggled with annunciation, but I felt a lot better with how the audio went thanks to her," said **Aketzally Alvarado**, a Minneapolis FAIR High School senior and ThreeSixty youth board member.

Despite less-than-ideal—yet entirely realistic—political and weather conditions, students learned about the importance of journalism in democracy and had a valuable experience.

"Throughout the programs I've participated in with ThreeSixty, I've met a wide variety of people; some who I never thought I'd have the chance to meet, some that I've made lasting friendships with and even people who became mentors to me—all of which have helped me grow immensely as a person and continue to do so," said Alvarado.

Volunteer journalists from local newsrooms worked closely with students throughout the workshop. Thank you to **Anne Guttridge** of *MPR News*; **Madison McVan** of the *Minnesota Reformer*; **Sara Porter** and **Ashley Miller** of the *Minnesota Star Tribune*; **Katelyn Vue**, **Alfonzo Galvan**, **Samantha HoangLong**, and **Alberto Villafan** of *Sahan Journal*; and **Bill Wareham** for their support.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

1. ThreeSixty reporters **Margarita Rosales Alarcón** (right) and **Angeline Patrick Pacheco** interview Minneapolis Public Schools lobbyist **Josh Downham** for a story about the district's legislative priorities.

2. Student reporters tour the Minnesota Capitol.

3. Student reporters are coached by veteran radio reporter **Marianne Combs** during a snowy Saturday at the Minnesota Capitol.

Photos by David Pierini

Audio stories aired on KRSM and WFNU community radio. Listen to them on ThreeSixty's podcast, Youth Pulse:

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SAINT PAUL & MINNESOTA FOUNDATION

MEDICAID'S FUTURE: UNCERTAIN UNDER NEW ADMINISTRATION

By Juan Miguel Adams,
Saint Paul Academy

The future of Medicaid is in jeopardy under the Trump administration. Threatened cuts to Medicaid—one of the largest public health programs utilized by one in five Americans—could leave millions of people without healthcare.

Medicaid, a public health insurance program for low-income individuals, provides coverage for over 80 million Americans, ensuring vulnerable people have access to medical care.

It is jointly funded by federal and state governments, with the federal government typically contributing 70% of the costs; however, it is contingent on how much each state allocates or their resident's income levels. For states that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the federal contribution reaches as high as 90%.

Dr. Nathan Chomilo, Medical Director for the State of Minnesota's Medicaid and MinnesotaCare programs, says the program touches all Minnesotans: "There's someone in your life, whether it's a family member, a friend, a friend of a family member, … [who] has had Medicaid step in and help them," he said.

Medicaid is a lifeline for millions of Americans who can't afford the care they need, including physician services, labs, and X-rays. In addition, providing medical services such as immunizations and screenings helps prevent more serious, costly health issues. Health insurance through Medicaid works to ensure Americans stay healthy, go to work, care for their families, and pay their bills.

Susan Pleasants, Senior Vice President of Optimal Care for M Health Fairview and a practicing physician, believes Medicaid is crucial for ensuring vulnerable communities have access to insurance.

"The people who are most impacted are communities like the disabled who have nothing going for them as far as services or benefits, so Medicaid is really their access for almost everything that supports their daily life," Pleasants said.

Medicaid was relatively stable under both the Obama and Biden administrations. President Donald Trump's recent endorsement of a House budget that would cut Medicaid, despite previously stating the program 'isn't going to be touched,' has raised concerns about the future of the program. In his last term, his attempt to impose block grants or per capita caps alarmed advocates and users of the program. Now, many are watching as Trump's conflicting plans for the future leave Americans unsure if he will pursue actions similar to his last term, potentially impacting millions who depend on vital healthcare resources.

Sarah Rahmoune, a freshman at the University of Minnesota, says using Medicaid has made healthcare affordable for her. "We would probably struggle paying for healthcare if it wasn't for UCare or Medicaid. Just a doctor's visit itself is pretty expensive … because of Medicaid, we don't have to pay as much every time we get sick," Rahmoune said.

During Trump's previous term, his administration invited states to convert Medicaid into block grants, capping federal funding and limiting coverage and benefits in order to free up money for priorities like education and infrastructure. These waivers, however, would likely reduce access to care for the residents in these states. Additionally, efforts to lower the poverty line, which would limit Medicaid eligibility, were part of the many changes Trump's administration explored during his last term.

Adrian Uphoff, Health Policy Analyst at the Minnesota Medical Association, finds the Trump Administration oblivious to the impact of Medicaid. "The push for fiscal conservatism in health policy often overlooks the realities of how health care access and affordability are tied to basic human needs," Uphoff said.

Uphoff believes the Trump Administration will likely face backlash from its bipartisan supporters if major changes are made.

"I think the administration may come to find that Republicans in Congress are going to be upset when their constituents come knocking on their door saying, 'Why can't I get health care anymore?'" Uphoff said.

As voters in rural populations increasingly align with the Republican Party, cuts to Medicaid would disproportionately impact these regions, potentially leading to hospital closures and limiting access to healthcare for residents outside of the metropolitan areas, regardless of political affiliation.

Chomilo shares Uphoff's concern about the possible impacts of these shifts, "If things like work requirements and per capita caps are implemented, I think we can expect to see more challenges for individuals who rely on Medicaid, increasing the strain on both the state and on vulnerable communities," Chomilo said. "We've seen in other states like Arkansas and Georgia that work requirements didn't lead to greater employment but did lead to an increase in medical debt and a decrease in access to care."

The United States already has experience with cuts in Medicaid with the government contribution in some U.S. territories. In Puerto Rico, the statutory cap from the government was set for 50% of the program cost in 1983, like many other states, but by 2010, it covered 18% of Puerto Rico's Medicaid funding. Puerto Rico's per capita caps have strained its healthcare system. With tropical storms or hurricanes striking four times every year, disasters only worsen the crisis, leaving providers unable to provide care to patients affected by these natural disasters because the state has run out of money.

"Medicaid is really the backbone of so much of our healthcare system. So many children and families who have had some misfortune and might find themselves disabled at the moment are depending on Medicaid to be there for them to support them. I really do believe we all do better when we all do better, as late senator Wellstone once told," Chomilo said.

"Medicaid is really the backbone of so much of our healthcare system. So many children and families who have had some misfortune and might find themselves disabled at the moment are depending on Medicaid to be there for them,"

Dr. Nathan Chomilo

Trump's latest move to endorse Medicaid cuts has sparked fears about the program's future. While the White House has stated its intent to protect Medicaid from 'waste, fraud, and abuse,' the lack of clarity has left many wondering what this will mean for beneficiaries. However, it's important to note that states have the authority to accept or reject federal proposals such as block grants and the public's pushback can influence lawmakers' decisions. This means that while the administration may propose changes, the impact will depend heavily on local government choices and the actions of American citizens.

This story was published by Sahan Journal on Feb. 26, 2025.

MINNESOTA'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS MADE WORSE BY INACCESSIBLE CARE

By Madeline Batalden,
Central High School

Minnesota is experiencing mental health challenges that are exacerbated by the fact that care is frequently inaccessible. For youth, the issue has become a crisis.

Three primary causes of inaccessibility are high costs, a workforce shortage, and a lack of diversity in staffing, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness Minnesota (NAMI MN).

About a third of adults struggling with mental health issues didn't get help because of financial barriers, according to NAMI MN. And how can parents get care for their children if they can't get it for themselves?

Lauren Daniels, the clinical director for Emma Norton Services, an organization that houses and supports formerly homeless people dealing with mental illness, chemical dependency, and chronic health conditions, said even with insurance, mental health services and substance use programs are expensive.

"It's ridiculous. I had a family member last year who went to an intensive outpatient substance use program they billed him $48,000 for a six-week program that meets nine hours a week," Daniels said. Ultimately her family member paid $6,000—his yearly deductible.

Senator Heather Gustafson and Senator Tou Xiong have proposed a bill to help address the problem: funding for a Ramsey County youth mental health urgent care room that is free for its 13- to 18-year-old patients. It was introduced and first read on Feb. 13, although no further action has been taken by the senate.

The "urgency room" is an existing, recently-started program specifically for teenagers experiencing mental health crises. It's an alternative to the emergency room, and it is completely free even if insurance does not cover the cost. The urgency room offers services such as 24/7 crisis phone support, crisis stabilization services, and comprehensive mental health assessments, according to its website.

Gustafson and Xiong's bill states that the money is to be "for the ongoing operation of the youth mental health urgency room."

The financial burden that comes with mental health care isn't the only barrier, according to at least one state senator. "We need more capacity," said Sen. Rich Draheim.

Draheim says there also aren't enough practitioners and facilities open to receiving more patients. Even if someone can afford to get the care, it isn't guaranteed that there will be someone there to provide that care. There are overflowing state funded facilities that don't have any more room.

Sue Abderholden, the Executive Director for NAMI MN, agrees that more care is needed. She added: "When I say workforce shortages, it's not just the number of mental health professionals, but also the diversity of them."

According to an article from Ambitions ABA Therapy the vast majority of therapists are middle-aged white women, leaving many people struggling to find therapists who share their identities and experiences.

Carolina Gentry, a public school therapist at Johnson High School in St. Paul, is the only therapist for 1,200 students. She said, "It's never going to be enough therapists, the need is so high right now. Yeah, we wish that we had more people."

According to Abderholden, because 50% of mental illnesses emerge by 14 years old, high school is a time when it is crucial to have support provided. She says if students don't have enough support in their formative years, often it can lead to more severe issues later in life.

Looking at the state budget for this biennium, Minnesota legislators are going to be forced to underfund many essential programs. As a result, the near future of the mental health system is not likely to improve.

REPORTER REFLECTION

STUDENT JOURNALIST REFLECTS ON REPORTING AT THE MINNESOTA CAPITOL

By Lauren Scott,
DeLaSalle High School

ThreeSixty's Capitol Reporting Workshop significantly enhanced my personal storytelling skills, refined my communication abilities, and strengthened my confidence in engaging with new people. This immersive program pushed me beyond my comfort zone, allowing me to build connections and report on complex topics with greater depth and clarity.

Prior to ThreeSixty, I had never had the opportunity to be in a real-world scenario of journalistic reporting. Through my research and reporting on the political divide, in the medium of a vertical video, I broadened my understanding of what journalism can look like.

Journalistic storytelling about government plays a crucial role in fostering civic engagement, deepening public understanding of local governance, and shedding light on the pressing issues that impact every Minnesotan. By exploring these topics, I gained a greater appreciation for the power of journalism in bridging divides and informing communities. I myself was not entirely familiar with how the Minnesota House functions. The whole process was quite interesting, as I learned about the unprecedented tensions within the house. It was a fascinating time to be learning and reporting at the Capitol.

Throughout the process, I not only discovered more about my strengths, such as my ability to synthesize new information and think in new ways, but also confronted areas where I could improve. The unwavering support of the workshop staff and my peers made this journey even more meaningful. I was grateful to have the guidance of the workshop leaders, and experts within the field of journalism. Working with my team, which focused on the political divide, was an especially rewarding experience. We collaborated closely, sharing interviews, insights, and sources that enriched our reporting and helped us craft well-rounded, impactful stories. Being surrounded by creative and hard-working young individuals was inspiring to work with. I loved meeting new people, students, and mentors.

This experience has reinforced my passion for storytelling and my commitment to using journalism as a tool for meaningful discourse and positive change. I look forward to carrying what I learned through this experience into my school's journalism publications, as well as carrying the skills with me throughout my future.

FIRST-EVER CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS SUMMIT HELPS STUDENTS LEVERAGE THEIR STORYTELLING SKILLS BEYOND JOURNALISM

By Kenzie O'Keefe, *Staff*

THREESIXTY'S full slate of summer programming kicked off with a successful pilot of a brand-new program.

Corporate Communications Summit brought **21 students** ages 15–22 to Thrivent's downtown Minneapolis headquarters to learn how to translate their journalism and other storytelling skills into corporate communications contexts.

Industry professionals from some of Minnesota's top companies helped students understand and explore public relations, executive communications, internal communications, social media, multimedia, and business reporting. Thank you to **Naamua Sullivan**, **Liz Erickson**, **Linda Pham**, **Kyle Tekautz**, **Nick Abdo**, **Jenna Reck**, **Keith Schubert**, and **J.D. Duggan** for bringing your insight to the experience.

The program is the brainchild of ThreeSixty leadership council members **Shane Kitzman** of Thrivent, **Miles Trump** of Best Buy, and **Chris Havens** of Target. All three transitioned to corporate careers after early career work in journalism.

Kitzman planned and led the day. Trump had the original idea and co-moderated a panel of industry experts with ThreeSixty alum **Faaya Adem**. Havens dreamed up an interactive scenario activity that allowed students to put their learning into practice.

"There is a whole world of opportunity ahead for the talented students of ThreeSixty, and it was a joy to provide them a meaningful glimpse into what could be possible within communications and marketing at Fortune 500 companies. Hopefully we opened some eyes to future careers that are rewarding and fulfilling," said Kitzman.

Clockwise from top:

1. ThreeSixty students present their work at the end of the day's scenario exercise that asked them to put their learning into action.

2. The summit brought both high school and college students together with industry professionals to explore careers in corporate communications.

3. Naamua Sullivan of Amrize spoke to students about her journey from journalism to corporate leadership.

4. Kyle Tekautz of Ecolab speaks to students about his job as part of a panel discussion with industry professioanls moderated by ThreeSixty Leadership Council member **Miles Trump** and program alum **Faaya Adem** (second from left).

5. The summit involved both lecture-style learning and hands on experiential practice.

Photos by Marquan Harper

STUDENTS TACKLE TIMELY ISSUES IN 2024 OPINION WRITING WORKSHOP

By Kenzie O'Keefe, *Staff*

AS THE 2024 national election approached, eighteen students from ThreeSixty Journalism gathered for the program's **October Opinion-Editorial workshop**, ready to weigh in on some of the most pressing issues of our time.

Students brought a wide range of perspectives and experiences to the experience. From mental health stigma in the Somali community to gender roles in Hmong households, from changes at the Minnehaha Dog Park to the challenges of being multiracial in America—the range of topics spanned local quirks to national debates. Other op-eds addressed arts funding in public schools, public transportation, and abortion access.

This was also a year of transition. The 2024 workshop marked the first without longtime, beloved instructor **Rubén Rosario**, a former *Pioneer Press* columnist who died in July. Stepping in to guide students were Dr. April Eichmeier, a University of St. Thomas emerging media professor; **Trisha Collopy**, an editor at *Sahan Journal*; and **Phillip Morris**, opinion editor at the Minnesota *Star Tribune*. Together, they helped students shape sharp, informed opinions and understand the editorial process.

A dedicated team of volunteer editors and journalists also supported the students, helping them polish their drafts and prepare them for publication. These included: **Katie Moritz** (Minnesota *Star Tribune*), **Alfonzo Galvan**, **Hannah Ihekoronye**, **Katelyn Vue** and **Samantha HoangLong** (*Sahan Journal*), **Marianne Combs**, **Tala Kim**, **Terry Wolkerstorfer**, **Madison McVan** (*Minnesota Reformer*), **Jackie Renzetti** (*Minneapolis Documenters*), **DA Bullock**, **T McKinley**, **Kendall Shostack**, **Zekriah Chaudhry**, and **Ayanna Melander**.

Students, staff, and volunteer coaches for the workshop. **Photo by Sai Kallur**

In the end, six powerful pieces made it into local media: three published by *MinnPost* and three by *Sahan Journal*. All are available on our website.

Art should be funded as necessity–not luxury–in Saint Paul Public Schools

By Angeline Patrick Pacheco, *Johnson Senior High School*

This story was published by MinnPost on Dec. 4, 2024.

Arts education isn't prioritized in public schools. This isn't breaking news. Despite the fact that 88% of Americans agree that art is necessary for a well-rounded education, arts classes are typically the first to be cut in order to balance a district's budget.

An analysis put out by the Minneapolis Schools Voices in 2023 showed that the St. Paul Public School district is one of the least adequately funded districts in Minnesota. Funding is particularly tight since access to pandemic funds ended on Sept. 30, 2024. According to recent KARE 11 reporting, the end of pandemic funding means there is $207 million less for the overall 2024-2025 budget. Once again, arts programs will likely be cut, and students like myself will suffer as a result.

I've experienced the benefits of arts programming firsthand. As someone who has had a hard time in school due to mental health struggles and, as a result, feeling deeply out of place, art has kept me afloat. It has been a source of solace and a creative outlet for self-expression when I felt stifled. If I didn't have that space to be myself in school, I don't think I could have made it to my senior year.

My experience with arts education is far from unique. I surveyed other students via social media in October. Here are just a few of their responses:

"When they almost quit the orchestra and band program because they didn't have a teacher, it would've devastated me. If I didn't have a proper art program growing up, I wouldn't be who I am today," said Marin Reyenga, 17.

"Being in art classes gave me something to look forward to in school. I actually started paying more attention to my schoolwork because I wasn't allowed to be in band activities if my grades weren't good. I would've done significantly worse in school had I not been in an art program," said Bennett Nguyen-Prowell, 18.

"Choir gave me an outlet for creativity, a welcoming community, and a sense of motivation in moments where I would've otherwise given up," said Sara Tellez, 17.

Overwhelmingly, students said that they would be miserable without having arts as a refuge in school.

So what is being funded instead? The FY25 SPPS Budget Report states that physical education specialists are prioritized over art and music because PE builds motor skills, enhances cognitive function, fosters social skills, and reduces stress and anxiety.

But, guess what? So does art!

Involving and embedding art in education benefits student's social and emotional learning. A study conducted in Houston Public Schools found that students in art programs improved their writing, had fewer disciplinary infractions, were more engaged in their education, and even showed greater interest in attending college.

"I have witnessed in my students a stronger sense of teamwork and collaboration as well as a greater work ethic," St. Paul Johnson High School music teacher Melanie Lunda told me. "I also believe it gives students an opportunity to participate in something they enjoy during the school day which provides daily mental health space and balance."

Cadex Herrera, a visual arts teacher at Creative Arts Secondary School in St. Paul and teacher for more than 20 years, said he's seen firsthand how arts education fosters critical thinking, self-expression, problem solving and collaboration. "It can be particularly transformative for students who may not feel as successful in traditional academic subjects. Art is more than just a subject. It's a tool for connection, expression, and resilience. It deserves a central place in education because it shapes not only students' creative abilities but also their emotional and cognitive growth." said Herrera.

Funding for education is complex and challenging, but the arts are essential. With the state of the world and recent global pandemic, students need more mental and emotional support than ever. Art is that comfort for many, and to deny students that part of their learning is to deny them a proper education. I wouldn't be myself or have made it to where I am without the support that art has given me throughout my school years.

The arts should be a key part of education and prioritized when it comes to funding in St. Paul Public Schools. It is absolutely necessary for the well-being and mental development of students. Be vocal in your support and speak up for the arts!

Minneapolis Park Board is mishandling major changes at Minnehaha Dog Park

By Keira McNiff,
Great River Montessori

This story was published by MinnPost on Dec. 9, 2024

A beloved Twin Cities dog park is about to fundamentally change.

After decades of not enforcing park boundaries, creating a uniquely free and beautiful experience for dogs and dog owners, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) has announced that it will be erecting fences and reducing access to parts of the Minnehaha Off-Leash Dog Park.

The park has been used by the community for the past 30 years. The area is lush, with streams and woods, bordering on the Mississippi. For many residents of the city, this is the only place where pets can run free in nature.

In October, MPRB passed a resolution to begin enforcing the dog park boundaries with fencing. Notably, they explicitly stated that they were going to do it without a public hearing.

The resolution formalizes the park's boundaries with fencing, closing off a majority of the access to the Mississippi beach. The new fencing cements the park's boundaries with nearby landowners, the Minnesota Historical Society and the National Park Service. It's also creating only one access point with double gates.

This decision caused immediate community outcry. The areas that are being fenced off are parts of the park that visitors have frequented for decades. Most had no idea that there even was a property boundary.

I have been going to this dog park since I was 9-years-old. I grew up running through the woods with my dogs. I know the trails well. I would play in the exposed tree roots on the beach, pretending it was my house, or play fetch in the creek with my dog Bruno. I loved walking along the bluffs, and climbing the frozen waterfall to catch a glimpse of the water running under a foot of ice. The space was magical for me.

When I first heard about the changes, I, like many others, was upset. The boundaries and standards that are now being enforced are ones I had no idea existed. I also did not understand what the changes were and why they were happening.

Over the years, MPRB has posted signage and sent emails to redirect dog owners from leaving the official boundaries. But the signs faded into the background of the woods, and the emails seem to have gone to only a small percentage of park visitors. Overall, the communication was limited, and did not reach most park users.

Many people feel like the park is being taken away from them. A petition to "save" the dog park emerged and gathered thousands of signatures. The public feels left out of this decision, and the result is a general misunderstanding, confusion, and anger.

MPRB's official decision to "inform" instead of dialogue with constituents is a bad one. The Minnehaha Dog Park is a cherished community space, and these changes should have been handled with more care. MPRB should have known that this would be a jarring change; they could have avoided the crisis of misunderstanding with more conversation.

MPRB's "inform" engagement model requires the board to provide information in a clear and timely manner so that everyone can understand what's happening. This has not happened.

It isn't too late to include the public. MPRB should take responsibility, and facilitate public meetings, informing the community that is being impacted by these changes and including them and the neighboring property owners in coming up with solutions.

By inviting dialogue and holding space for this change the park board can take steps towards a right course of action that balances all needs.

With or without a Harris presidency, multiracial people are here to stay

By Sonia Kharbanda,
Saint Paul Academy

This story was published by Sahan Journal on Nov. 4, 2024.

Former president Donald Trump made headlines this July when he accused Vice President Kamala Harris of becoming Black for political benefit. "Is she Indian or is she Black?" he wondered publicly, questioning the presidential candidate's biracial identity.

Trump's words reflect our nation's uncomfortable fascination with people like myself who transcend a single identity.

I can't remember the first time someone commented on my race, but the feeling is unmistakable. The most common questions – "Where are you from?" and "What are you really?" – don't bother me anymore. But when someone calls my skin "exotic," or questions if I'm really both Indian and white since I don't "look like it," I start to feel like a zoo animal on display. My personal favorite was when a family friend said I was the only person he knew who was "both oppressed and a colonizer."

While these incidents are uniquely my own, being questioned, misunderstood, and stereotyped is a common experience for multiracial people. Trump's challenges and doubts about Harris' identity simply put this experience on a national stage.

In order to understand the present experience of multiracial people, it is important to know our past. A 1662 statute in Virginia proclaimed that a child's freedom is dependent on the condition of the mother, which made it profitable for slaveholders to impregnate enslaved women and "own" their children. In 1691, Virginia's colonial government declared interracial marriage illegal.

These laws established the idea that it was acceptable to have children with an enslaved person for purposes of labor or property but not to have a relationship or marry them. Then, the one-drop rule became policy in many states in the 1800s, asserting that even one Black ancestor was enough to classify someone as "colored." It wasn't until 1967 that the Supreme Court case Loving v. Virginia declared state laws prohibiting interracial marriage in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. However, efforts to prevent racial mixing have persisted; Alabama's ban on interracial marriage remained in its state laws until 2000. Even then, 40% of voters supported keeping the law.

Despite our nation's pervasive cultural discomfort, its multiracial population is on the rise.

According to the 2020 census, multiracial people now account for 10.2% of the population, a 276% increase from 2010. This shift represents the largest change compared to all other racial groups; it could be attributed to an increase in immigration and clarified options on the census for self-describing one's race.

In addition to an increase in the multiracial population, the Pew Research Center reported in 2021 that the percentage of interracial marriages in the U.S. is increasing, too. In 2019, 19% of newlyweds and 11% of all married people were in interracial marriages. The data is clear: we are inevitably becoming a multiracial society. Harris' ascension to vice president and potentially the nation's highest office reflects this country's diverse and multicultural future.

The backlash to Trump's comments has focused on explaining that Harris has, in fact, always been Black. News organizations scrambled to prove her Black credentials: she attended Howard University, a historically Black university, where she joined a Black

Continued on page 30

Voices unheard: A call to change the perception of mental health and disabilities in the Somali community

By Suado Omar,
Central High School

It was the peak of my puberty; I was experiencing uncomfortable changes. My anxiety presented itself in an unexpected way. The first thing I do is confide in my safe place: my mom. I talked to her about my anxiety; however, she didn't understand. She had a confused, angry look on her face as if she was offended.

She had a similar reaction to finding out about my brother's autism. He was diagnosed around kindergarten. She asked me not to tell anyone, including my siblings, as if having autism is a shameful thing.

I'm a senior at Central High School now. I've since learned I'm not the only one in my family who struggles with mental health. My sister, who I confide in, struggles with extreme anxiety as well. I'm sad about it, but simultaneously thankful to have someone older I can talk and relate to. Yet this made me wonder, how many other young Somalis are missing out on the help they need?

Eighty to 90 percent of Somalis in Somalia with mental health issues don't have good affordable options to mental health resources, according to a qualitative study published by Tropical Medicine and Health Journal.

Many of our Somali parents were affected by the 1990 civil war. The aftermath has not been easier either; for decades, Somalia has faced economic and political turmoil. Trauma from multiple wars and humanitarian crises increase the risk of mental health issues.

Hearing what my parents and many other parents went through, I can understand their reaction. I don't carry animosity towards them for not being open about our issues. Instead, it created the opportunity for me to educate them and speak out about such topics.

Many Somali parents are unaware of mental issues, such as autism. In a recent National Library of Medicine study, researchers exploring the knowledge of autism among Somali immigrants and non-immigrants found that Somali doctors don't have enough competence in diagnosing autism. They also found that parents in Somalia had never heard the term "autism."

Many of our Somali parents and elders never had resources for autism nor mental health issues. They are unaware of these concepts and of where to get help. They are unintentionally neglecting and misinforming their youth.

My peers at Central High School know firsthand what it's like to have parents who don't understand mental health. Amran Yarrow, a Somali American senior said, "I struggled with telling my parents my problems because they never had been in my situation, and they don't understand the concept."

Somali elders also have a stigma against those with autism. "They think it's a joke and not important, and are often seen as someone acting up," said Makdis Aidid, a Central High senior.

Misconceptions about autism can be detrimental to the overall health of our community. Rumors spread easily in the diaspora, particularly around the measles vaccine's link to autism. Measles cases are reported year-round in Somalia where it is endemic. In 2022, the World Health Organization conducted an epidemiological study on measles outbreaks. In just nine weeks, there were approximately 3509 cases across 18 regions. Not only does this rumor spread misinformation to our relatives back home, but it also causes panic, and fear of necessary medicine.

> "Autism is not a bad thing. It makes him unapologetically him and I wouldn't want that to change."

Many Somali parents use the Quran for spiritual treatment of autism. The NLM study reported a majority of the 22 parents surveyed sought faith-based treatment. As most Somalis are Muslim, we strongly believe the Quran can help with anything including Quran saar. In Somali, meaning "putting Quran on someone," usually for Islamic exorcism.

"Since being in a religious environment, I have come across many kids with disabilities," Abdullahi Abdullahi said. Abdullahi is a Central High School senior who works at a religious institute. He understands that the help they deserve is beyond religious treatment.

"We try to make the environment as friendly as possible, and we try our best to help them understand the religion." he said. "If not, then we take care of them and give them the special needs they deserve."

It's refreshing to see youth with modern perspectives on mental health and disabilities working in religious institutions. However, as a Muslim, I believe religious leaders should redirect parents to mental health and disability resources.

Healing spiritually is extremely important, but this is not a spiritual issue. Just using faith-based treatments isn't addressing the full-depth of the problem. Youth aren't getting the full extent of help they deserve. And religious leaders should take accountability for that gap.

The *Sahan Journal* recently covered the inaugural Maangaar summit in Bloomington, an event organized by Somali parents, professionals, and service providers to address the challenges faced by Somali families with children of autism. As an older sister to a little brother with autism, I related to a common struggle many shared: the pressure of being instructed to not tell anyone about your sibling's autism. But I also felt inspired that fellow Somalis were trying to accomplish the same goal of spreading awareness for change.

My little brother may have been struggling in his education due to his disability, but it helped him tap into his creative side. He loves to draw both on paper and digitally. Autism is not a bad thing. It makes him unapologetically him and I wouldn't want that to change.

I'm grateful that the barriers of unawareness and stigma have been shattered in my own household. But I wish for it to be shattered for others as well, those in the Somali community and far beyond.

Many Somali students at Central High School are in support of my cause and wish to share their voice. Najimo Ahmed Bare, a senior at Central, has had challenges with her mental health and supports those struggling with mental health and disabilities.

"Organizations [should] gather people with the same mental health issues and disabilities, so no one feels left out," Bare said.

Youth should continue to use their voice for good. I work for an organization called Helping Hand Care as a personal care assistant and work with children who have autism. It would be amazing if we could have more of these organizations like Najma hopes for.

But overall, the most need is for the elders of the Somali community to be aware and more involved. This would alleviate my biggest fear: generational stigma.

It's been a while since my brother was first diagnosed with autism. He's in third grade now and soon to be 9 years old. He has become a genius in art, even learning how to animate on his own and starting his own YouTube channel reaching over 100 subscribers. His autism may be his "disability," but I consider it his gift.

Rather than 'stealing' jobs, immigrants take on the work Americans don't want to do

By Margarita Rosales Alarcón,
Venture Academy

This story was published by Sahan Journal on Nov. 4. 2024

It's election season, and some U.S. citizens are fixated on jobs being "taken" from them; the reality is that immigrants often do the jobs citizens don't want.

Undocumented immigrants are a benefit to our communities and economy.

I have the privilege of being a U.S. citizen and a daughter of immigrants. I can see both sides of the issue in my community and outside of it. My father is Mexican. He works in roofing for up to 15 hours, seven days a week, sometimes skipping his meals to get his work done.

Immigrant workers are the only ones willing to endure the heat while carrying many shingles throughout the day. From my father's view, the pay for roofing can be good but because the work is physically demanding, there is a worker shortage.

My father works long hours outside in the heat with the sun on his back. He faces racism and microaggressions all to put food on our table. He could benefit from more workers and so could the rest of the state.

Minnesota is going through a labor shortage. More immigrants in Minnesota could help address this "tight labor market" over the next decade, says the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

Some of these workers are already here. Almost every day there's a gathering of day laborers on Lake Street waiting for any job offer coming their way. They could help ease agriculture and food processing job shortages if we make it easier for them to get those jobs.

Minnesota has already taken a step forward by allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain their drivers' licenses. My relatives benefited from this and had another weight taken off their shoulders. Now they're not breaking the law by simply driving to work. This goes to prove that the people former President Donald Trump called "criminals" want to follow the law but often cannot due to eligibility or other challenges that leave them out.

The fight is ongoing. Recently in Minneapolis, asylum seekers from Ecuador have tried to make a living by selling food on the streets. Yet many have been fined by Minneapolis Police Department and city staff. Food vendors fear going out to sell and being treated as criminals when they've vocalized the current license requirements do not fit the various vendors' needs. Minneapolis City Council Member Jason Chavez put it best, "It's not wrong to be able to try to make a living,"

Undocumented immigrants are often misrepresented by media, but the reality is that most immigrants work hard for their families and communities. My neighbors and I are always there for each other when one of us is going through a tough time. Even if we are not family, we treat each other as if we were. Everyone comes together to raise money for family members in need, such as when someone passes or requires medical treatment back in Mexico. My downstairs neighbors are always looking out for me and occasionally bring my family food and fruits. What's so good about this? For me, it is important to have people around you to lean on and trust in a community. We are all equal after all.

Why have we normalized such xenophobic comments when it comes to undocumented immigrants? Citizens might not think these comments cause harm but in fact, they do. The comments cause racism and discrimination to happen even when going about in our daily lives.

How can we combat xenophobia? You can start by supporting your immigrant neighbors and connecting with organizations. Anyone can reach out to an organization like Centro De Trabajadores Unidos En La Lucha (CTUL) to volunteer or donate. They are a worker-led organization in Minneapolis where workers fight for each other's voice in their workplaces and communities.

Minnesotans must learn that being Muslim doesn't always mean Somali

By Muniratu Shaibu,
South High School

As a resident of Minnesota, I grew up surrounded by Somali culture. A community with great presence and as of 2021, making up around 86,000 of Minnesota's residents, continuing to be the main contributor to the high Muslim population. Yet I'd often faced questions about my identity and my "Muslimness."

It's known that Minnesota is home to a high immigrant population, many of whom came from Africa. As of 2024, there is still little data about the African immigrant population. Worse, when the identities of Muslim and West African or Black intersect, data from even within the past four years is scarce. As of 2022, Minnesota consisted of 146,532 African immigrants, being of various cultures. Liberia and Nigeria are top of the list as of West Africa.

My mother instilled culture and faith into me and I've never questioned my identity. I'm a Togolese Muslim girl. A hijabi, from West Africa, and have never hesitated to share any part of this with people. Amongst gratitude, I realize it's a privilege to know my mother tongue and have access to our clothing and food that I share proudly.

However, the moment the words, "I'm not Somali," leave my mouth, I morph into a walking contradiction. I'd receive questions like "Are you actually Muslim?" and "Do you pray five times a day?"

Of course I'd receive questions from non-Muslims, relaying the experiences of every Muslim they met, being Somali. I figured early on, people must've assumed these two identities were synonymous. However, most of these questions came from fellow Muslims, usually Somali, and it stung even more.

One thing must be clear, Somali doesn't mean Muslim. These two identities just intersect often. Over 95% of the Somali population, no matter the region, are also Muslim.

As a Togolese, it stings when people haven't heard of my country and go on to dismiss my Islam as if Muslims from my side of the continent don't exist. Black Muslims as a group have always been present in the United States due to the brutal slave trade over 400 years ago. Though stripped of their culture, faith remained intact. Whether their ancestors were enslaved or they're children of immigrants like me, Black Muslims come from various countries including Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and more.

Melanated skin and a hijab didn't mean Somali. They don't mean I called my mom 'hooyo', wear diraacs and clap along habos at the buraanbuur circle. How would I explain, Somali and Muslim, could be separated from one another? I was a walking contradiction to both Black Americans and Somali Americans, belonging with neither group.

Why was I constantly questioned by those with the same hijab on their head, quizzing me on our religion?

Somali Americans were the only sense of Muslim community I saw, yet felt so out of touch from. This is a universal experience for most, if not all West African Muslims. It shouldn't be the case though; Muslims don't share one image. We are diverse.

I noticed a shift during freshman year of high school when I met an Indonesian Muslim, Farisa Wafiqa, who became a dear friend. I spoke with her about the experience of being the "outlier" in Muslim spaces.

People would often be confused by Farisa's identity as a child, possibly because she wasn't always a hijabi. Questions like "Are you Somali?" were met with an immediate "Wait,

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LOCAL LITERARY STAR LEADS ANNUAL COLLEGE ESSAY WORKSHOP FOR 23 STUDENTS

By Pechulano Ngwe Ali, *Staff*

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM capped summer 2025 programming with our annual College Essay Workshop.

Led by **Sun Yung Shin**, award winning poet, author, and McKnight Foundation Fellow in Creative Nonfiction, this workshop served 23 students from 13 high schools in the Twin Cities metro area.

As part of the intensive four-day workshop, students heard from, and interacted with **Tyger Callahan**, an admissions counselor at the University of St. Thomas, who provide insights into what admissions counselors often look for in college essays.

Using prompts from the CommonApp college application system, and techniques of creative, reflective, and persuasive storytelling, the 23 students completed 500–600-word essays that can be used in their college applications.

Additionally, the workshop's curriculum empowered students to navigate discussions of trauma, a subject that students often feel pressured to surface in their college essays. Particularly, through the help of writing and editing coaches, students examined such feelings of expectation to surface trauma and chose essay topics that allowed them to present themselves authentically and intentionally.

A total of 17 volunteers, including two ThreeSixty alums, **Safiya Mohamed** and **Stacy Dahl**, helped mentor and coach students to produce strong and polished essays.

The workshop culminated in a showcase where eight students read their essays out loud to an audience of their peers, family members and community members.

Top: Volunteer, Anne Ajaluwa (right), works with CEW student, Justin Cajamarca of Columbia Heights High School on his college essay.
Bottom: Volunteer Terry Wolkerstorker (middle) reviews and provides feedback to students. **Photos by Marquan Harper**

Anais Froberg-Martinez

Perpich Arts High School

Salted almonds and an ice-cold glass of Coca-Cola. This was the breakfast that Joan Didion ate everyday, and the one I was determined to eat too, in hopes of becoming a better writer. By eighth grade, I had become obsessed with writers' daily routines, even making a presentation about the sleep schedules of famous writers.

This project grew out of insecurity about my own identity. Even as a child, I created a new personality each week at summer camp. By middle school, I found it hard to connect with my peers, preferring to be an observer, but I came to idolize famous writers through the safe distance of a book. They represented something I was not. I thought: they must have had a special quality that allowed them to express the truths of life into words on a page.

Entering high school, I remained an insecure observer with a year of biographies piled onto my internet archive account. I spent so much time emotionally invested in the lives of others that I only put the minimum effort into school and life itself, stopping at subpar grades and neglecting to try any hobbies.

Parental pressure pushed me to make a completely impulsive decision: to apply as an editor of my school's newspaper with no prior experience. For once, I felt like my eyes were taken off the margins of someone else's biography and into my own life, and I was elated. By sending my application in, I had finally chosen to become someone. But the vision of a journalist I'd hastily constructed that night became a performance that I needed to pull it off perfectly.

> "I had failed to realize that the 'extraordinary' quality in writers was observation itself."

As I wrote article after article, I treated each piece as a test to see if I'd be mythologized as a great writer too. I focused most on the qualities that each well-received article made me feel: smart, educated, and like "journalist" was a title fit for me. I defined myself by my success, but my self worth became conditional. It would only take one failure for my ego to gradually unravel.

The catalyst for my ego ended up being an article that had slipped away from publication. After 30 hours of work, 21 pages of research, and dozens of annotated research papers, I had toppled back to square one. Every sentence of the rejection email ate at a part of my self-worth, and by the last line, I felt like nothing again. Only one of us had gotten published, I heard from a classmate. One of us, and that one wasn't me. I knew that my four-page opinion editorial had a longer list of citations than main points, yet I writhed in jealousy. I threw myself even harder into my next few articles, and my pain disguised itself as anger at the outlets that had rejected me.

On the first day of summer vacation, I lay exhausted on my wooden floors as I absentmindedly flipped open the *New York Times*. The first page I saw began with a quote by an op-ed columnist, Nicholas Kristof, reporting from the Chad-Sudan border. It immediately grabbed my attention: "Side by side with the worst of humanity, you regularly encounter the best." It sent me on a thought spiral: I had failed to realize that the "extraordinary" quality in writers was observation itself. I found a striking beauty in Kristof's article: his own reflections in the face of conflict became a lens for the world to evolve alongside him. On that achingly hot day, I made a revelation that the process of journalism – each article, observation, carefully assembled detail into something greater – helped me create my identity every day. Rather than resolve it, I decided to accept my identity crisis, and let its uncertainty guide me through my journey in academia, through newsrooms, through borders, and into a life of my own.

Daphne Kleinschmit

Columbia Heights High School

Throughout my teenage years, I've been told that I have a "big mouth." This label used to damage my self-esteem, but now I see it as my biggest strength: my natural storytelling abilities.

At my school, I've developed connections with a diverse group of people, creating a multitude of sources. I ache to share the latest updates and gossip. Nothing compares to the moment my friends lean in as I speak, eager for the next part of my story. I'm enthusiastic with my words, loudly expressing emotion through body language and over the top reactions.

I felt that same spark when I discovered journalism. When I'm writing, the words flow onto the page giving life to the story.

However, I've always considered myself private when it came to my own story. When talking about myself, I become closed off and selective with my words. This takes me back to elementary school, where I barely spoke and felt like an outsider among my peers.

I didn't emerge from my shell till eighth grade. I saw it as the result of my eating disorder. To me, my thinness is what made me finally belong. As I became more extroverted and social I fell deeper into my disorder. Though I became someone I aspired to be, by holding onto my illness so tightly I was dulling my own story. My world narrowed, and so did my capacity to capture it.

By junior year I had nurtured my love for journalism, landing multiple internships and becoming the most social and extroverted I'd ever been. Despite my success, the secrecy of my anorexia made me feel like no one knew the real me.

> "I realized I was doing what I loved most; telling a story that matters – my own story. It was then that I saw that all stories are worth telling fully."

One afternoon, I came home to find my divorced parents sitting in the living room together. Their voices were low as they told me I was being admitted to intensive residential treatment. I ran out of the house unable to accept what was ahead of me, roaming the streets trying to soothe my racing mind. My sobs echoed through my house that night as I packed my bags, grieving the life I knew.

I spent long days and even longer nights in treatment, losing myself – and even worse, my voice – in the process. My desire to share and speak was gone. I was isolated for hours, and reverted back to my elementary self: quiet, shy, and alone.

Even after being discharged my voice was gone. I pushed everyone away, the fear of treatment holding me back. I stopped expressing myself and my emotions, becoming a background character in my own life.

Weeks after being discharged, I sat on my best friend's bed in the dead of night. The glow of her lamp illuminated the room, when, in the depths of silence I opened my "big mouth." I told her everything, and as the words escaped, a cascade of tears followed. She quietly leaned in, eager to hear more. And as I spoke enthusiastically using body language to express myself, my voice carried something new. I realized I was doing what I loved most; telling a story that matters; my own story. It was then that I saw that all stories are worth telling fully.

I spent the next week at a journalism workshop at *MPR News*, and was surrounded by inspiration. It was then that I remembered my love for journalism. I was me again.

I realized that life is chaotic – it's loud sometimes, quiet others, and unexpected. But every day I now choose not to let my disorder cut my story short. My "big mouth" isn't something to hide, it's an outlet of connection, and a way to make meaning of the world. But now it's also a reminder of my resilience and appreciation for every story, including my own. And my story, like journalism, is only at its opening scene.

Jessica Eumaña Barban

Cristo Rey Jesuit High school

I lost a letter and found my voice.

I never believed a tiny letter could carry so much significance until my coworker at my internship asked me, "Do you happen to know how to type the letter 'ñ?". Motionless, I began pressing random keys, which led her to open another tab. As I stood beside her desk, I nervously suggested she look for a shortcut on Google or copy and paste the letter.

Of the 26 letters in the English alphabet, none of them contains the letter "ñ". "Ñ" was lost in translation between English and Spanish. Yet to me, it means everything: my identity, my family's culture, and the part of me that demands to be recognized. My last name, Eumaña, had lost its curl somewhere between immigration borders and school forms, and for years, I had been typing, writing, and speaking of it incorrectly without thinking. Every document, passport, and identification was always missing the letter "ñ."

At graduations, some of the proudest moments of my life, I was often called to the stage, but it wasn't me who was called. It was someone else, "Jessica Eumana to the stage". I often asked my cousin why we go by "Eumana" now instead of "Eumaña." She would say, "the letter ñ doesn't exist here, so we conform to this last name."

As Hispanics and Latinos, we are often encouraged to take pride in our culture and identity, yet the moment someone struggles to pronounce our name, we adapt to their needs instead of honoring our own.

> "That tiny curl may be absent from the paperwork, but I carry it with orgullo (pride) and a promise: to be a voice for those whose voices are too often overlooked."

In trying to make it easier for others to say my name, I had erased a part of myself in the process. Watching my family grow accustomed to using a name that wasn't even ours pushed me to reclaim my voice. This missing letter became more than just a letter. It became a symbol of recognition, respect, and the power of being seen. I carried this mentality into my work as an election ambassador and judge for the city of Minneapolis. Guiding people through ballots and ensuring that every vote counted, no matter how small it seemed. Through this opportunity, I have seen how policies affect real lives, and impact real people, and how laws only work when the people impacted by them are heard and seen.

Just as a name can be altered with a single mark, entire experiences can be erased if no one stands up for them. I feel a great sense of responsibility to speak up, to correct, and to restore what once was lost. That responsibility has shaped who I am, pushing me to engage in leadership roles, advocacy, and service. It has taught me that identity is not just what you carry in your heart; it is what you insist the world sees. Typing the ñ correctly may seem insignificant to someone else, but to me, it is an act of recognition, of honor, and resistance. It is a reminder that the smallest mark can carry the weight of generations, and that restoring it takes attention, courage, and persistence. Studying political science is my next stepping stone towards becoming a bridge between both worlds, a translator for not just two languages, but of needs, hopes, and rights.

Like the ñ in my name, I want to restore what's missing, to lift up the silenced and make sure their stories and rights are never lost in translation. That tiny curl may be absent from the paperwork, but I carry it with orgullo (pride) and a promise: to be a voice for those whose voices are too often overlooked.

Lani Ngonethong

St. Paul Academy

Champalani Mainguen Ngonethong. Translated from Lao, Hawaiian, and Hmong, it means the heavenly plumeria money lady.

My name is a blend of both my parents' backgrounds. My mother is Hmong, and my father is Laotian, but grew up in Oahu. To my friends and extended family, I am Lani, the Hawaiian sky, but I tell my elders a different name: "Khanoi." Khanoi means "I" in Lao. It is a name to call yourself when speaking with an older person as a sign of respect. However, Khanoi means more than a simple pronoun; it was a bridge to my community. That bridge matters because after over a decade in the U.S., I no longer speak Lao fluently, but I strive to make up for it by becoming a scholar of my community and culture.

Calling myself Khanoi was my way of stepping back into the community. When I call myself Khanoi, aunts and uncles smile knowingly, as if they could relax. My paternal grandmother beams and hugs me a little tighter, thankful that I still remember how to speak enough Lao to converse with her. It was my way of saying to my elders, "I want to learn."

So, I spent my junior year writing a 25-page comparative history research paper on the Lao and Hmong refugee diaspora in four countries during the 1975 Southeast Asian exodus. My grandparents, granduncles, and aunts became my primary sources, calling in from France to Australia. At first, they spoke broken English as a courtesy of me, delivering brief answers. It wasn't until I told them in Lao, "I can understand you, so speak freely," that they switched languages. Their short answers became long tales filled with emotion, their answers more poetic. My maternal grandmother's borderline bride-napping, their harrowing escape from the Secret War in Laos, their childhood, their faith, their tears and joys; I know them all thanks to one word.

The same storytelling instinct drew me to journalism. My hunger to learn evolved into a desire to tell these stories. I continued to be a lonely, but loud, voice within my school. This past year was the 50th anniversary of Southeast Asian refugees' resettlement in the U.S. It was my time to shine. I took the opportunity to lead a small team of my school newspaper's staff to create a story package about the anniversary. I took to my school's library and curated a display of books by Southeast Asian authors and displayed my history research project.

"It wasn't until I told them in Lao, 'I can understand you, so speak freely,' that that they switched languages. Their short answers became long tales filled with emotion... their faith, their tears and joys; I know them all thanks to one word."

It wasn't until I heard that people were interacting and resonating with my efforts that I understood the importance of representation. When I walked by my research display, a Vietnamese classmate and I laughed while analyzing an old photo of my grandpa in front of an old townhouse in the 70s I had used. We joked about how our families were probably neighbors because they settled in the same housing project pictured. Most memorably, my French granduncle, who rarely had the chance to share his story, said to me at the end of our interview, "I never talked about this out loud. You keep doing this." To that, I answer, "I will."

As I achieve higher education, I will carry what my community organizer mother has taught me through all of my efforts to raise up my community. "Who going to show up if you don't even show up for yourself?" I will continue to be the loudest voice for my community through pursuing journalism.

Kaia Bodden

Central High School

Awkwardly squatting over an aged hunk of plastic in the middle of the woods with three measly squares of toilet paper in hand, I released both that day's water intake and my unrealized expectation of comfort. The path that led me there was of my own making, and though I knew difficulty was to be expected, the insatiable mosquitoes, inescapable dutch oven that is a tent, and oppressive weight of a canoe carried across torn and sodden terrain permanently redefined my understanding of necessity and my worldly position.

For an expense only so large that I sank back with apprehension at the request of it, I explored Minnesota's vast Boundary Waters with Camp Menogyn the summer before my junior year. My long, curly hair was put into dozens of braids, and I willfully prepared to be one of the only people of color in an environment dominated by paler skin, and a culture different from my own. Still eager to experience pristine nature and comforted by the presence of the one other person of color among my seven fellow campers and counselors, I set off onto the trail.

Having never camped before, I was oblivious to what I would face. My feet knew not a second of dryness, my face and body blistered with mosquito bites, my arms ached from portaging through thick woods, and my words stumbled in unfamiliar company. Though uncomfortable, I found these were things I could tolerate and overcome. Recognizing my peers were enduring identical circumstances eased my mind further, as though we were presented and perceived differently in the outside world, here we were one and the same.

"I realized my rights were not stripped of me, rather, my privileges were."

What I found more difficult to reason with was the absence of running water and immovable shelter. Bathrooms on the trail were no more than glorified holes in the ground, drinking water was tinged with iodine, and the tent was cramped with other bodies and harrowing smells as it bore the force of wind and rain. I was stripped of a comfort I had thought to be a right, my access to stable resources and facilities. I cringed at each sip of water, used the "bathroom" sparingly, and cursed mobs of mosquitoes as they attacked my unshowered body without remorse.

In tandem with the slow progression of trail time, my perspective shifted. Alongside these discomforts, I observed loons quietly cutting through water in the wake of my canoe, the sun bursting through billowing clouds, dancing leaves of trees housing chattering birds, and bright smiles on the faces of my companions throughout it all; I was living amongst incomparable beauty and paying copious amounts of money to live with discomfort others would pay to leave behind. I realized my rights were not stripped of me, rather, my privileges were. Soon, I would return home to running water and a warm bed, things I had taken for granted. With this thought, I began to accept my circumstances on the trail.

When I returned home, I moved through life with greater appreciation of my privileges. I savored the comfort of sitting on a ceramic seat, let each drop of water from the faucet fall upon my gratitude, found the roof over my head stood taller, and received and reciprocated the love surrounding me more intensely. My standing as the only person of color on my block–one of few in the entire neighborhood–and my feeling of isolation in predominantly white classes, athletics, and communities began to weigh less on my shoulders. Much like the initial trials on trail, these were things I could tolerate and overcome. In their stead, the comforts of my privilege, including access to education and stable finances, gleamed brighter.

Unlike running water, comfortable bathrooms, and, apparently, bug spray, furthering my education is a privilege I cannot live without. To further it allows me to aid those forcibly living with the discomfort I paid to experience.

Justin Cajamarca

Columbia Heights High School

At 11 years old, my teammate's mom came up to me and said I'm going to play professional soccer because of my talent. I was able to flip the momentum of the game with just a single pass, zoom past defenders, even defend counterattacks. I was unstoppable. When my teammates' mom complimented me, I wasn't uplifted. I felt pressure. After getting stripped of the comfortable consistency that soccer was to me, my view of the world changed.

I have been playing soccer since I was 4. At 9, I started playing competitive soccer and my performances were taken more seriously. My parents were strict, and I wasn't allowed to hang out with my friends because of practice. I was isolated and tried to find my sense of belonging with everyone. To hide this feeling of regret and fear, I was loud and unintentionally put other people down for being different from me. I wanted to regain the control I lost around soccer.

Every year before tryouts, I wanted to stop playing and quit the sport I committed myself to. Not because I didn't like playing, but because I was forced to. I was registered for tryouts with no input. This continued for six years.

In my junior year of high school, it was the section game. I went all in on a loose ball, committed to scoring. I took my next step and without warning I felt the entire body weight of the goalie pierce through my leg. It was so sudden, and painful, that I collapsed onto the field. I was rushed to the hospital, experiencing the most excruciating pain, when the doctor told me that I tore my PCL and meniscus in my right knee and had to get surgery. The doctor said it would take six to nine months for me to recover. It hit me. I would not be able to play soccer for at least six months. I was shocked. Who am I without the thing everyone knows me for?

"Being stripped away from my consistency was the scariest but most important moment in my life. It created a greater understanding and new perspectives, people and opportunities."

The recovery process took ages but allowed me to participate in school activities that I previously couldn't because of soccer. I decided to attend a Speech meeting but was hesitant of what people might think because of a reputation I wanted to maintain. The meeting was filled with people I had labeled as outcasts, and now I was the one who didn't belong. This activity that I once made fun of, I would now be a part of and surprisingly, I was actually enjoying it. The world isn't what I thought it was.

When the time came for me to start playing again, I avoided any sort of talk with my parents about playing club soccer the following year. One early morning, I woke up to a knock on my door from my dad. He told me that there was a tryout that he wanted me to attend. I didn't know how to respond. I went to the living room to discuss it where I stalled making a decision for almost an hour. I took a deep breath, stiffened my body, and opened my mouth, "I don't want to play club soccer anymore." The most surprising thing to me wasn't that this basically meant the end of playing soccer for me, but rather the fact my parents accepted my decision. I no longer had to put up a performance to be someone I'm not. I regained my control.

Being stripped away from my consistency was the scariest but most important moment in my life. It created a greater understanding and new perspectives, people and opportunities. I grew away from being loud and arrogant to being more understanding and mature by learning from my mistakes and not limiting myself to expectations. I am in control of who I am regardless of what other people want from me.

Kevin Qiu

Wayzata High School

Cold. Hard. Red. Red? My first time ice-skating had me flat on my face, sprawled out on center ice as blood gushed out of my nose, a crimson stream over clear white ice. My dad rushed over and gently carried my small, 3-year-old body, Batman helmet and all, to the bathroom to clean up. Leaving with a rolled-up tissue in my nose, I tearfully promised myself that I would never go skating again. But, in fact, this would be my first meeting with the greatest teacher in my life: ice hockey.

My hockey journey was not smooth, but perhaps that was its virtue. Things in school came easily; I had no problem with reading, writing, or math material that was years above my grade. In hockey, on the other hand, I faced a much greater struggle. Though I was never the worst player on the team, I never shined like I did academically. I was overshadowed by stronger, faster, and more skilled kids. During tryouts in fourth grade, I was defending against a player on the other team. He wound up to shoot, and I froze in fear. If I approach him, will I get shot by the puck? Taking the opening from my hesitation, he released his shot, a hard, fast puck that struck me directly on the side of my hand, leaving a nasty mark.

Years later, my coach put us through a drill in which we had to charge into shots head-on—to my surprise, they didn't hurt at all. I began to question my stalwart hesitancy to avoid everything I feared. Instead of ducking out of the way of larger opponents, I faced them, stopping threatening rushes before they even had a chance to shoot. Little by little, I began to fight back against all the fears and doubts that had controlled me for years.

"While hockey did not teach me fearlessness, it gave me things far greater: the ability to hold out through fear, frustration, and disappointment, and the willpower to see things through to the end."

This willingness to leave my comfort zone materialized in all parts of my life. I began to take steps, though hesitant at first, into other things I'd never tried before. Despite my dizzying fear of heights, I pushed myself to go on roller coasters I'd never dared to go near and climb ropes courses that I used to shudder at the thought of. In academic competitions such as Science Bowl and Quiz Bowl, I pushed through my fear of giving a wrong answer, buzzing with confidence and contributing to the team.

Inevitably, I would stumble and fall many times throughout my endeavors, but hockey's guidance was there for me every step of the way. Years of crushing losses and disappointing tryout results instilled in me a resilience that kept me persevering through math competitions where I came up just short of an award. Last winter, when a few errors cost me entry to the next level of the Physics Olympiad, I knew better than to sit around and mope. Instead, I poured my time and effort into conducting research and studying for the Chemistry Olympiad, where I earned the score I was aiming for.

Now, entering the next chapter of my life, I know there will be many challenges and hardships to face on every path I take. I know there will be rough classes, strict professors, and workloads that drain my will to go on.

To say I am unfazed would be a lie; I am apprehensive about the road ahead. While hockey did not teach me fearlessness, it gave me things far greater: the ability to hold out through fear, frustration, and disappointment, and the willpower to see things through to the end. No matter how many times life leaves me face down in the middle of a busy ice rink, I will always get up and skate on.

Frank Bygness

Central High School

"So then how do you apply secondary dominants in a practical context?" I ask. It's 10th grade. We're halfway through the first semester, and my inquisitiveness knows no bounds. This is my eighth question of the hour, and 35th of the week. Every emerging query proved to be a device of comfort. I had found solace in sound. I look at my teacher, Mr. Knox, with a glimmer of unapologetic anticipation, awaiting his answer.

Prior to meeting Mr. Knox, my experiences with a consistent environment were particularly nuanced. I had recently parted ways with my mother, and my father was, unknowingly to me, an unstable influence. The actions of my parents forced me into a vulnerable position of anxiety and instability. There was a spirit of sorrow that I was unable to recognize. My curiosity of music led me to a place of reflection and emotional exploration.

"There's a number of ways, one of which is to use it as a bridge between one chord and the next." Knox said. He walks to the piano. "If we're in F, and we want to get from F to D minor, all we have to do is play the dominant cadence of D, and with that we can trick our ears into hearing resolution." He demonstrates. In these particular circumstances, the secondary dominant would be A7, the five chord of D. I look down at his hands as he illustrates the idea, but more importantly, I listen. Soon, my questions became more complex. "Does modal interchange apply to every mode of the major scale?", "How do diminished 7 chords resolve?" and "How are sus chords used effectively?"

> "I sought consistency and found it within the cavities of sound."

We spent hours going through every imaginable stipulation that could be applied to a single notion. Every observation led to a different path of variability and wonder. These lessons became sermons to me, and with them, my fidelity grew. Research became a habit. A growing sense of fixation lingered inside of me. I depended on the fastidious analysis of Stevie Wonder songs to console my mind. Eventually, Mr. Knox's teachings began embracing practicality. Every theoretical abstraction was manifested into physical projects and experiments. He taught me how to solder broken wires and how to equalize and compress audio to alter its raw properties.

I became incessant, obsessive, and curious. His lessons resonated with me so thoroughly that I couldn't help but explore them outside of school. I devoted myself to the intellectual probe of music and sound. I found some equipment. I bought software. I studied. I failed. I listened. Examining the musical "sonicity" served as a blanket of familiarity. These exchanges provided something that I was previously unfamiliar with, reliability. Through every trial and error came a growing sense of confidence. Noise became a companion that I could seek assurance in. I leaned on its solid qualities and stable dimensions. It became a cloud of comfort that I could search endlessly.

I valued every conversation we had as though it was my last. He had fostered a tree of musical insight, and I spent every day scaling it until my hands bled. These interactions became a constant in my life, a source of stability. They were something that I came to rely on, not only as inquiry, but as security. I find that when we are missing something integral to our well-being, we seek it somewhere else. I sought consistency and found it within the cavities of sound. These experiences have led me to a tenacious desire to continue learning in any way I can. Inspiration seethes through my skin and ambition swells in my lungs. This journey has allowed me to embrace the beauty of sound and recognize the importance of relentless aspiration.

Multiracial
Continued from page 23

sorority. But the point isn't that she is Black or that she has never hidden her identity. It is that she is and has always been both Black and Indian.

Trump's false claims about her identity are an example of the bigotry that multiracial people face and show that electing Barack Obama, the first multiracial president, did not change the discomfort many Americans feel toward those who exist outside of rigid binaries.

You have a role to play in moving our country forward–regardless of who wins the presidential race–for the multiracial people in your life. Educate yourself on what it means to be of mixed race. Understand that within the broad category of multiracial identities, each person may label themselves differently or embrace one part of their background more strongly. Advocate for representation of multiracial identities in all demographic forms and surveys. Identify and work against your own biases and tendencies to classify others as one thing or another.

When I think of the future of this country, I see my own face and the varied faces of multiracial people. We reflect both a rich diversity of experiences and this country's paradoxical relationship to race. The United States aspires to welcome all and embraces a "melting pot" ideology, but at the same time has implemented policies and practices to keep people apart and prevent racial mixing. It is worth celebrating that in spite of bans on interracial marriages and discrimination against mixed-race children, the multiracial population is now growing and thriving.

Just as Obama's presidency was not the cure for racism, Harris' candidacy simultaneously reflects how far we have come and how far we still have to go in understanding what it means to be multiracial.

Minnesota Muslims
Continued from page 25

didn't you just say you're Muslim?" Farisa would clarify she was Indonesian, yet many didn't know of Indonesia, consisting of the nation's highest Muslim population. Meeting a fellow Muslim, hesitant to join religious spaces, such as the school Muslim Student Association, made me feel seen. We related upon the fact that there wasn't an identity-based space geared towards us.

Together, we connected with Somali Muslim students who also saw their identity through a lens of intersectionality, shifting our reality.

My friend Amal Abdi shared how the increasing presence of her Somali community in the Twin Cities impacted her. As a child, she "felt more alone and felt like no one could relate to me." Though Amal and I share the same overarching identity of Black and Muslim, it doesn't mean we share the same blackness. What Amal highlighted was the power of being seen. To know you're not alienated for your differences builds stronger Black and Muslim communities.

To be surrounded by people who share your religion as well as culture and race is sacred, something many Muslims don't have access to, in Minnesota.

Some argue that it doesn't matter to distinguish our ethnic culture from one another because we're simply one ummah.

Simultaneously though, we're encouraged to seek community in one another and celebrate our uniqueness as long as they follow the sunnah. Allah created us with variety, so we appreciate one another.

I, alongside many others, need people to leave space for my cultural background, instead of assuming right away.

Questions that invite education on my intersectionality, actively make space for my whole identity. I appreciate it when people ask where I'm from or what language I spoke on the phone with my mother. There will still be the bamboozled faces when I clarify I'm not Somali. Confusion will creep on my face when people switch to full Somali. But surrounding myself with (Black) Muslims who understand intersectionality means I'm seen.

To understand intersectionality is understanding oneself and those in your neighboring communities. How can we refuse what will only benefit us?

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