

# MOSAIC

Magazine: Volume 13, 2016

My  
Life

community

creativity

advocacy

opportunity

equality

activism

expression

education

protection

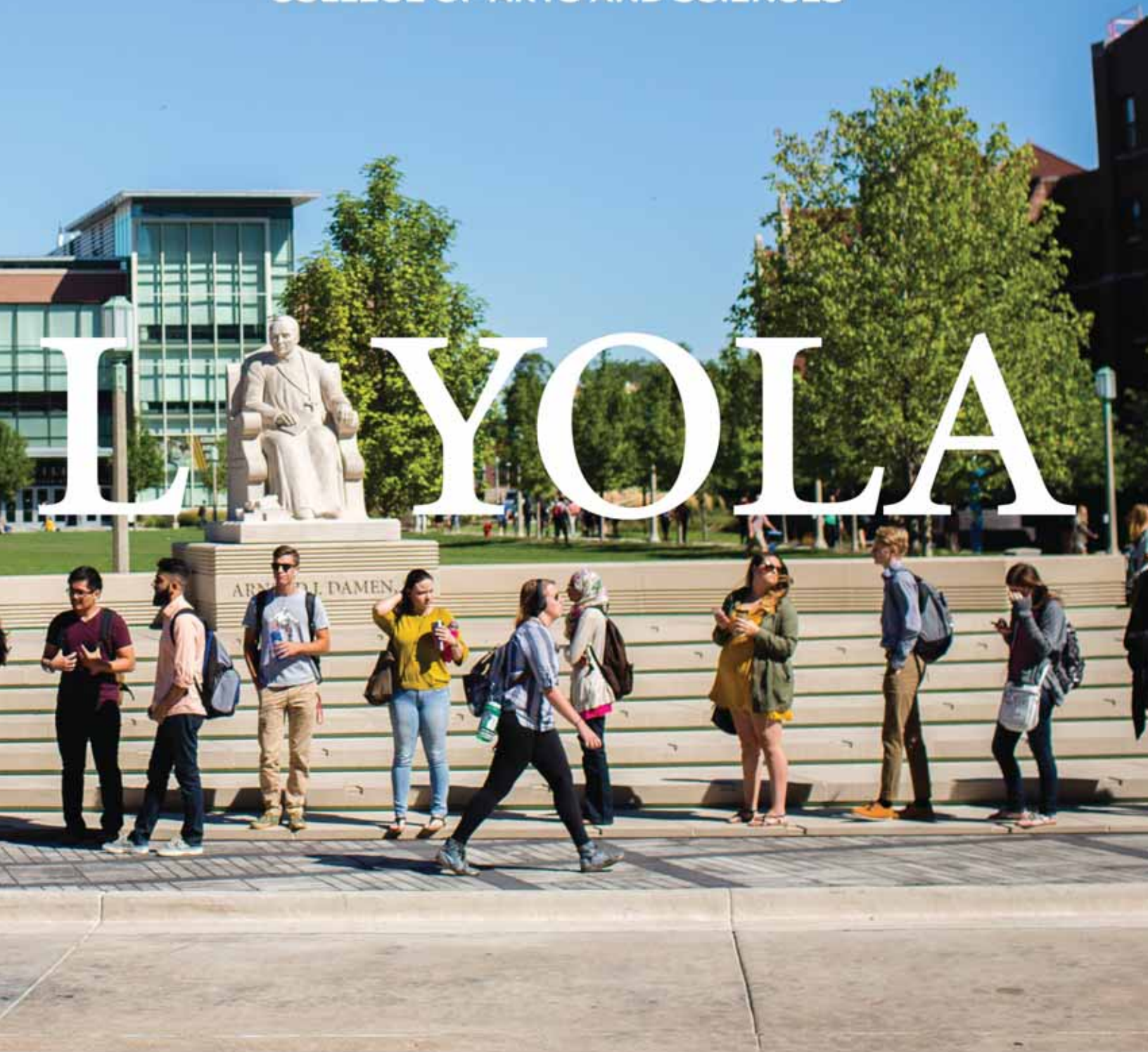
diversity

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race

A Loyola student social justice publication

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The Loyola Journalism Program wants to acknowledge the hard work of our journalism students, and commitment to knowledge, truth, and social justice represented in these pages. Our program exemplifies a distinctive practice, system, and philosophy of reporting with integrity coupled with using the latest technological advances to tell stories that people need to know about.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE MOSAIC STAFF!**

# MOSIAC

table of contents

## INSIDE

### PROFILES

- 10 Crime Watch
- 14 Mission Possible
- 16 Brave Work
- 18 INTERVIEW WITH  
WTTW correspondent
- 20 SPECIAL REPORT  
Black lives matter
- 32 Coming full circle
- 34 Exception to the rule
- 38 Mecca Man
- 44 Fighting Temptation
- 46 Save Haven
- 48 Poetry club speaks

### TRENDS

- 12 A culture of cycling
- 26 FEATURED STORY  
Trauma Deserts
- 40 Let's Get Technical
- 42 After School Matters

Slow Roll, a bicycle advocacy group, works to bring safe riding to all areas of Chicago

p.12



PHOTO BY  
HANZI DESCHERMEIER

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### ON THE BLOG

Read more about activism and race on the Web. We discuss more issues from diversity in cosmetics, to race-based medicine, to a by-the-numbers look at the importance of after-school programs.



### MULTIMEDIA

View the slideshow of more images from the #BlackLivesMatter demonstration at Loyola's Lake Shore campus. Also watch members of the staff and some Chicagoans talk about their experiences with race.



In this past year, Chicagoans took to the streets to protest police violence across the city. From the blocking of the Magnificent Mile on Black Friday to halting traffic on Lake Shore Drive, the people of Chicago have started to take notice of inequalities throughout our neighborhoods. Even on our own campus, the Black Lives Matter movement has taken hold with the students of our University.

Because of the wavering emotional terrain throughout our city, the *Mosaic* staff decided we couldn't ignore the issue any longer.

Our reporters dove deep into the city — beyond the boundaries of the Gold Coast and Rogers Park. They met real people dealing with an imbalance of justice and had to put their own privilege aside to understand individuals they would otherwise never encounter.

They rode the subways with The Guardian Angels, witnessed the performed poetry from a high school's spoken word club and got to know one of Chicago's most notorious reformed gang members. We learned that these issues are not just black and white.

This experience has been nothing short of transformative. We're thankful for the opportunity afforded to us to enter the lives of so many diverse Chicagoans.

We want to thank the hardworking team of reporters, photographers and designers who made this issue possible. We also want to extend gratitude toward our advisers, John Slania and Jessica Brown, for their continued encouragement and support.

Sincerely,

*Travis Cornejo & Kristen Torres*

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

# LOYOLA



## NEVER STOP LEARNING

Congratulations to our journalism students on the newest issue of Mosaic. Their commitment to lead, to serve, and to live extraordinary lives inspires us all.



*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*

Volunteer watch-dog group protects CTA train line riders against possible danger



The Guardian Angels patrol CTA train line platforms in some of the most crime ridden neighborhoods of the city. PHOTO BY HANZI DESCHERMEIER

# crime watch

BY HANZI DESCHERMEIER

**M**iguel “3rd Rail” Fuentes carried around his waist a camera, handcuffs and a phone holster strapped to a ballistic nylon belt.

His posture, upright and alert, distinguished him as unique from the other CTA passengers. As the National Director of the Guardian Angels, a criminal watchdog group, he is a little different.

“We’re a visual crime deterrent,” Fuentes, 43, said of the group. “We prefer to hand out fliers and safety pamphlets, but we’ll get involved [in apprehension] if we need to.”

Comprised of a small collection of Chicagoans, the Guardian Angels hope to ensure the safety of CTA passengers when they patrol public transit.

Founded in 1979 in New York City, the Guardian Angels have maintained a presence in Chicago since 1981. They wear almost-matching uniforms: white sweat-shirts with red angel wings, red berets and combat boots, all in various states of cleanliness. Their backgrounds are mostly working-class: electricians, security guards and factory workers.

However, their most characteristic trait of all is a deep, almost fanatical passion for protecting riders from theft and burglary on the train lines. They walk back and forth through moving cars, blatantly ignoring the “emergency exit only” signs on the doors.

Younger Angels like Shawn Mathews, 20, seem hopeful about their work. When he is not working for a shipping company, he spends his time patrolling.

“Instead of just saying someone needs to change the world, I want to do something about it,” he said. “I love it. It makes you want to come out here more to help. I’d say 80 percent of the time I’m helping people and 20 percent is dealing with crime.”

Almost as if on cue, Fuentes helped lift a stroller over the gap between the train car and the platform. Despite this and other acts

of goodwill, their tactics can come across as paramilitary to some people. Throughout their history, the Angels are often referred to as vigilantes.

Working in groups of two to 15, they primarily canvass ‘L’ trains, usually the Red Line along with the Green and Pink Lines. They work using a coded series of hand signals, standing in the doorway at each stop, visually checking-in with each other.

In the corner, a sleeping passenger sat near the door, her phone rested loosely in open fingers on her leg.

“Like her, see?” Fuentes said. “No clue. She’d be a target.”

That is what they are here to protect against.

Ken Dosier, 45, began working as an Angel almost 27 years ago. Originally from the South Side, Dosier moved to K-Town, an area of Chicago where nearly all of the street names begin with the letter ‘K,’ with his parents at age 10. He worked security for most of his life. At 5 feet 10 inches tall and with a muscular build, his stature belies a certain discernible, easygoing attitude. Yet the dangers can be real.

“Broken ribs, my arm, my nose, both ankles,” Dosier said, smiling as he listed his various injuries throughout the years. “It’s part of what we do. I don’t talk about this with my wife.”

Without supplied insurance or compensation, Angels put themselves at risk for very few immediate benefits, leading some to question their motives.

“Our primary goal is to be a visual crime deterrent and act as role models,” Fuentes said. “We want kids to look up to someone besides gang members selling drugs and beating up on people.”

Dosier, whose children grew up in a gang-heavy neighborhood on Chicago’s West Side, echoed those sentiments.

“I think the major obstacle we face in Chicago is the drugs and the gangs,” he said

before the train car lurched to one side.

A door connecting the train cars opened and Mathews stepped through. He stopped in front of Dosier and whispered something. Curious passengers flashed glances, staring from all directions before Dosier relayed the message.

“Apparently a man on a cell phone in the last car said ‘Don’t get on at Pulaski, the Guardian Angels are riding the train,’” Dosier said. “But I don’t know about that. I think he was probably just trying to get a rise out of us, trying to see what we would do.”

Their presence can be simultaneously confusing and intimidating, but for some, a welcome sight. An older man, who sat with a cane to one side, sincerely thanked Fuentes several times over “for what they do.”

With only 30 members for the Chicago area, some still think highly of their work. Nicki Yeldell, 36, grew up on the West Side and remembers their presence as a welcome sight after a series of rapes occurred in the Austin neighborhood in the ‘90s.

“I’d become immune to the violence by that time,” she said. “But I think what they were doing was definitely a good thing.”

Their reputation can be controversial, as Mayor Rahm Emanuel publicly vacillated on their value in the past several years, recently requesting that they would be more useful assisting Chicago’s Safe Passage program than patrolling the ‘L.’

The goals, membership and outreach methods have changed over the years. For example, security cameras have no doubt outmoded them in a large capacity. Yet one constant remains: the Angels don’t carry weapons.

Two men riding the CTA chuckled when asked about the help that the Angels offer: “Guardian Angels,” one said, trailing off with a shrug. The other man nodded.

“Oh sure, they help people,” he said. “But they don’t got guns!” ■

# A culture of cycling

Bicycle advocacy works to bring safe riding to all areas of Chicago



Chicago residents gather in order to spread the culture of cycling to all parts of the city. PHOTOS BY HANZI DESCHERMEIER

BY HANZI DESCHERMEIER



**O**boi Reed wondered whether or not he'd be able to keep going when he arrived home from his commute.

Struggling with crippling depression, he felt isolated in both his career and social life, until the timely discovery of a decrepit bicycle changed his life.

Now, through bicycle advocacy, he's helping others do the same. "It was 10 years ago now, I was questioning the pain and whether or not [living] was worth it," Reed said, talking about the time his life came into focus.

"I remember there was this bicycle sitting in the storage area. It was all dusty, had two flat tires, rusted. And I thought, 'Well, you got to do something.' So I cleaned it up and rode it down to the shoreline. It was tremendous. I smiled at people, and they smiled back. It allowed me to reconnect, and in that moment, I became a cyclist."

Reed, who co-founded the Chicago chapter of Slow Roll, a bicycle advocacy group originating out of Detroit, didn't expect to eventually lead a movement addressing social and environmental change.

Chicago's South and West Sides, home to largely impoverished, minority residents, could use bicycle programs like Slow Roll to offer commuters accessible, low-cost transportation.

But these neighborhoods are home to few bicycle programs.

Consider Divvy, the city-sponsored bike rental program. More than 40 percent of low-income Chicagoans live in a neighborhood without a Divvy bike station, according to a study by the Chicago Reporter.

Specifically, more than half of Chicago's 77 neighborhoods don't have a Divvy station, according to the Chicago Reporter study. Those neighborhoods are mainly on the far South and Southwest Sides, according to the Chicago Reporter.

Slow Roll supports offering more bicycle options to residents of the South and West Sides.

"With bicycles, we'd like to see that community members are equitably served. We're working together to create a culture of cycling in our communities," Reed said. "When we talk about biking, we're talking about reducing violence, improving health and creating jobs."

And part of that message means community building to improve access to safe cycling conditions.

Chicago's North Side remains the densest area of equitable, public cycling access in the city, according to Chicago Department of Transportation data. In contrast, some feel as though the predominantly African-American neighborhoods on the South Side have been left behind.

"It's really important for black communities in the South Side to come together like this," said Alicia Henderson, standing with her grandson, Avani, 7, when asked why Slow Roll's work matters.

"Our communities don't have bike paths," echoed Susan Carlotta Ellis, another Slow Roll rider.

The lack of bike lanes is visible in South and West Side communities, a point highlighted by a recent case study, commissioned by the League of American Bicyclists.

Using CDOT, as well as 2013 census data, researchers were able to map inequity in bicycle transportation throughout Chicago.

Findings revealed that 57 percent of African-American/Latino/Hispanic neighborhoods in Chicago "lack adequate access" to cycling infrastructure, meaning bike lanes. The majority of these instances were found in far Southeast and Western neighborhoods.

However, rather than install more physical infrastructure, organizations like Slow Roll and West Town Bikes hope to change this,

instead, by promoting a "culture of cycling," which some neighborhoods have pushed against.

The staff at West Town Bikes, a nonprofit located in Humboldt Park, knows this all too well.

"Even today, bikes aren't so well received. [They] were seen as a tool for gentrification, they were seen as wealthy white people who had this expensive recreational activity," said Alex Wilson, executive director of the West Town Bikes discussing his experiences promoting community bicycle programs.

Founded in 2005 in an area known as Paseo Boricua to Puerto Rican locals, Wilson spoke passionately about the need to fit within a community and listen to local concerns. He also discussed the pushback associated with the installation of cycling infrastructure in the neighborhood several years ago.

"Things like bike facilities... would not happen because the local Puerto Rican constituency was so strong, they said 'no, we don't want those white lines of gentrification going down our street,'" he said, noting how West Town Bikes approached this from a different direction.

"We really want to reflect who we are, and who we serve, who our partners are and where we're at," Wilson said.

A recent planning document from the City of Chicago took this approach into account, and outlined a more focused method for 2016 planning: gathering community input from South and West Side neighborhood leaders, such as Slow Roll and West Town Bikes.

Divvy, Chicago's bike share program and a partner of Slow Roll, has expanded in several South and West Side locations, installing 176 stations between 2014 and 2015.

Coupled with the Divvy for Everyone program, which aims to overcome financial barriers to the bikes for low income Chicago residents, awareness of these issues appears to be improving.

Though according to Reed, "There are still large swaths [of Chicago] that have no access."

And unlike Divvy, Slow Roll and West Town Bikes work to focus on the human elements of transportation, rather than the mechanical.

West Town's comprehensive after school programming is the largest bicycle education program in the city. Participants often graduate to work for other bike shops, Divvy, and even CDOT.

This, Wilson explains, is the next generation of community advocates, and the generation that will close the gap for equitable access to cycling in Chicago.

"Not only is our mechanic staff made up of those who've gone through our programs, but now, our youth programs are being taught by those who've gone through our programs," Wilson said. "I've found that reinvesting into the young people that we serve, it becomes this great cycle." ■



# MISSION POSSIBLE

Local activists work to inspire and improve the Windy City

BY TAYLOR FRIEDLE

**O**n a small lot on Chicago's South Side, Kimberly McGraw stands covered from head to toe in dirt, bringing out her bright blue eyes and the long blonde hair she tucked back into a camouflage hat. She wears a beaming smile, a sure sign that today's mission is accomplished.

McGraw, 32, is a lead organizer of a non-profit organization called The Mission Continues, a group that turned a vacant lot in Woodlawn, a neighborhood in Chicago's South

Side, into an inspirational garden.

McGraw first got involved with The Mission Continues in graduate school at Lewis University, while working toward her master's degree in school counseling and guiding services. While taking an exam, a passerby with a Marine symbol on his bag grabbed her attention and eventually introduced her to the organization.

"I was hooked right away," McGraw said. "It was like an IV of motivation straight into me."

The Mission Continues

liberates veterans by giving them new ways to serve their country post-service. Veterans return to their local communities to continue helping through community service projects. The Mission Continues has service platoons all over the country including Missouri, California and Texas.

There are two platoons in Chicago. Chicago 1st Service Platoon has health and wellness as its main mission, and Chicago 2nd Service Platoon focuses on underprivileged youth and violence.

Both platoons do service



Homicide is the leading cause of death in Chicago for Black and Latino males between 15 and 24, according to The Mission Continues' website.



#### BY THE NUMBERS

# 28%

of households in the Woodlawn neighborhood are below the poverty line. This is a significant increase from Chicago as a whole, which has a total of 18.7 percent of households living below the poverty line.

The community garden is dedicated to the service of Woodlawn families who are suffering from domestic violence. PHOTOS BY TAYLOR FRIEDLE

projects in the West and South sides of the city and set out to build the community garden space.

The day was marked by rain, but there were no signs of the mission being slowed down. There were bags of mulch, stacks of wood and piles of woodchips spread throughout the lot, ready to be put to use.

A group of approximately 30, including veterans, volunteers and community organizers, happily worked to build a space that will bring opportunity to the Woodlawn community.

The location for the garden originally belonged to the City of Chicago, but 20th Ward Ald. Willie Cochran eventually granted ownership to the South Side Gospel Church, a church across the street from the site.

The Mission Continues approached South Side Gospel Church Pastor Monte Rollerson and proposed the idea of the garden. Rollerson was instantly on board.

Dressed in a poncho and a hardhat, Rollerson excitedly participated in the service project.

“People will come here to

grow healthy food and do some social engagement,” Rollerson said. “We’ll have a number of activities that will give people the opportunity to come out of their homes and enjoy each other in an outdoor venue.”

A garden already existed prior to The Mission Continues’ arrival, but the group proposed a major garden uplift that included the completion of a yoga platform, building new garden beds, assembling a storage shed and organizing an outside library, which are just some of the things on the agenda.

In a matter of 10 days, The Mission Continues was able to pull together the volunteers and resources in order to make it happen.

Chicago 2nd Service Platoon leader Robert Schuler was assigned garden duty for building day. Schuler, 31, is a veteran of the Marine Corps, serving from 2002 to 2006. Schuler became a part of the organization after learning of it from a classmate in graduate school.

“My process of figuring out my own purpose in life especially with my military experience has been a long journey,

and The Mission Continues is an organization that has lined up with my values,” Schuler said.

Born and raised in Chicago, with a background in social work, Schuler is well aware of the struggles faced by the city.

“I know that there are communities that have a lot of needs,” Schuler said. “So when you see certain areas of the city experience community violence, poverty, food disparities, it’s an indication that something is going on there and there’s a need.”

The Woodlawn neighborhood is no stranger to hardship. Crimes have continuously plagued the neighborhood. During the past year, there have been 613 thefts, 187 robberies and 480 counts of criminal damage, according to the Chicago Tribune.

McGraw said these factors are potential setbacks when planning service projects.

“We take the Englewood area and Woodlawn, so it is going to be the roughest and toughest areas that a lot of people won’t go to,” she said. “We do get a lot of issues when we do projects

because people don’t want to come here at all.”

To McGraw, this is a simple roadblock in her mission.

At the end of building day, McGraw reflects on the projects with which she has been involved, one of them being the process of assembling tomato cages in the garden that prevent rats from consuming the fruit.

McGraw’s friends and colleagues gave her the nickname “Kim Possible” and it’s no wonder why.

This past Thanksgiving, she organized an event that fed 850 veteran families, providing each with seven bags of groceries and an 18 pound turkey, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables.

Motivational speaking and grief counseling for children and families are ways in which McGraw continues to give back to the community.

“Anybody can make a difference,” McGraw said. “It’s so easy but sometimes you don’t know the pieces you need in order to make it happen and that’s what we do. We just try to come out and show people that with a little bit of teamwork, it can happen.” ■

## Community watchers guard Chicago streets for students

BY REBECCA BYRNE

It's a sunny morning, and the corner of West 48th Street and South Paulina Street on Chicago's West Side is filled with students waiting for the fluorescent green-vested "community watchers" to give them the all-clear signal to cross the street.

Three weeks into a new school year, students like Andy Macias, a seventh grade student at Cesar Chávez Multicultural Academic Center, are back into their daily routines. A major part of Macias' day includes walking through his neighborhood's new Safe Passage route to get to and from school.

The group of students' commute to school involves a journey through their Back of the Yards neighborhood, an industrial, working-class community that rests alongside the old Union Stock Yard and meatpacking plants from the late 19th century. At one point, smells of livestock and manure filled the air. Today, scents come from corner taqueria taco stands and other colorful, ethnic restaurants.

The abandoned buildings and empty lots that still permeate the area create spaces for gang activity and dangerous crimes, making it a threatening environment for students to venture through. But with the new Safe Passage community watchers guarding the streets, students are feeling a little more at ease.

"I really like the protection that our Safe Passage path gives us," said Macias, 12, as he waited for his friends at a nearby laundromat, so they could walk to school together. "Kids used to always get into fights on the way to school, but now there are crossers on every corner to make sure we're safe and staying out of trouble."

Cesar Chávez, one of Chicago's 660 public schools, is one of the 136 schools where there are Safe Passage routes in place to escort children across dangerous neighborhoods where gang activity is high.

In 2013, the Board of Education for Chicago Public Schools decided to close 49 elementary schools, ultimately affecting thousands of children who would have to transfer to different schools in other communities. This forced them to not only cross busy streets, but also the boundaries of warring street gangs.

The Safe Passage program was created in 2009. After the shutdown of schools just a few years ago, city officials increased the number of Safe Passage routes in 2013 to help students who were forced into new schools make a sound transition while crossing gang lines.

Macias' school was just added to Brighton Park Neighborhood Council's Safe Passage Program at the beginning of the school year.

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council Safe Passage Coordinator Berenice Flores said she understands attendance is an issue for some districts because children do not feel safe getting to and from school. This is one of the many reasons why she feels these safe routes are necessary.

"Some kids are scared to go to school because it is dangerous," Flores said. "Unfortunately, we do see bad things."

Crime and gangs have been prevalent in the Back of the Yards community for many decades, but the statistics and number of daily incidents are growing. In the first few weeks CPS was back in session, the Chicago Tribune reported there were 51 reports of violent crimes, 118 reports of property crimes and 104 reports of quality-of-life crimes just within the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

These numbers explain why the Safe Passage route is an essential to have within this community.

"It feels great to know that our community watchers help make the children feel safe enough to come out, and it is so rewarding when we help prevent something from happening because of our watchers out there," Flores said.

The brave work of the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council watchers is not going unnoticed. Students like Macias see the difference they are making every day.

"Before, these streets used to be silent when there weren't fights because no one would want to talk," he said as he joined his classmates in line outside of school. "Ev-

eryone would be too scared. But now with all the Safe Passage workers, we actually feel like we can talk to other kids and still feel safe."

The community watchers, made up of parent volunteers as well as those employed by CPS, also realize the necessity of this program.

"I've been stationed in 'hot' areas where there's lots of gang activity, vandalism and looting," said community watcher Belda Meraz. "Our job is to make sure these kids, especially those whose parents can't be there walking with them, have an environment where they feel protected, even when they're crossing through dangerous places."

Meraz said having community watchers here in the Back of the Yards neighborhood is creating a better environment for everyone, not just the school kids.

"Community members are more alert now, and they feel a lot more willing to report things," she said. "If they see something suspicious, they'll come up to us and let us know so we can call it in."

Flores said she also agrees that the whole community is benefitting from this program.

"From our weekly meetings where we check in with the community watchers to find out what's going on out there, we've learned that the crime rates and gang activity have gone down," she said.

Although there are still many problems occurring in the communities, the Safe Passages continue to impact the Chicago neighborhoods and the minds of the children who received some comfort from these routes.

As Macias began to walk into the school building to start his day, he wanted to offer one last thought for anyone who may have to use these pathways in the future.

"It's sad that schools keep closing, but kids don't have to worry when that happens," he said. "With the Safe Passage routes, they should know that they'll feel better and safer now." ■



Kids used to always get into fights on the way to school, but now there are crossers on every corner to make sure we're safe and staying out of trouble."

— Andy Macias, student

CPS Safe Passage worker helps children get safely to school in the Back of the Yards neighborhood.  
PHOTO BY CESAIRE SOUISSA



# Brave Work



WTTW correspondent Brandis Friedman says Chicago has many unique issues when it comes to education. PHOTO BY JANE BODMER

# Interview with ‘Chicago Tonight’s **BRANDIS FRIEDMAN**

WTTW11 correspondent speaks with Mosaic


BY TRAVIS CORNEJO

**B**randis Friedman, a correspondent for “Chicago Tonight” on WTTW11, covers some of the city’s toughest neighborhoods and toughest issues as the program’s education reporter.

When Chicago Public Schools educators claimed custodians were leaving schools “filthy,” Friedman, 37, walked the hallways. And when former CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett pled guilty to corruption charges, Friedman was in the courtroom.

Friedman, who was raised in Mississippi, also takes opportunities to cover issues important to her as a Black, Southern woman. In 2015, for “Chicago Tonight,” she interviewed the remaining members of the Little Rock Nine, who integrated a previously all-white high school in 1957. The meeting was nearly 10 years after Friedman left her job with Little Rock, Arkansas’ NBC affiliate.

She spoke with *Mosaic* on a variety of topics, ranging from education reporting to how race has affected her career.



sue related, as opposed to incident related. That's very appealing. That's what brought me here.

**Q: What made you want to focus your reporting on education?**

A: I never covered education as a beat in any of my other markets. I never really saw myself covering education. There were other issues and other beats that I was much more interested in.

But since I am covering this one, I've had to learn a lot about covering education and what the issues are, and what's important. I still have so much to learn about how it works.

I didn't cover education when I was in D.C. or in Little Rock, but I see a lot of the same issues. There are families who feel trapped in weak, poor or troubled schools. They feel like they're not being heard.

And I remember, in Little Rock, segregation and desegregation were still a subject of discussion. And when I look around at Chicago schools, these schools are absolutely segregated. Certainly not intentionally, but effectively.

**Q: How is Chicago different from other cities when it comes to your reporting?**

A: I will say that since I've been in Chicago, there's also been the difference that a lot of the administration in D.C. is from Chicago. There's the president, obviously. But Secretary of Education [Arne Duncan] is a former CEO of Chicago Public Schools. So sometimes what happens in Chicago has a national ear.

And there are a ton of education-related resources in this market that I haven't seen in any other market. Everyone is trying to work on the issues. It surprises me that kids are failing when there are so many different people working on helping them succeed.

**Q: How were you able to incorporate covering race along with covering your education beat?**

A: When you cover education in Chicago, race is absolutely an issue. You can't ignore it. If you've ignored it, you've failed at your job. And so there are times when I try and incorporate that factor.

When you hear from community organizers and activists from the South and West Sides, they believe race is absolutely a factor in how they're treated and the condition of their schools.

A few weeks ago, when the Dyett hunger strike was happening, I saw someone

tweet something like, "Remember the time families on the North Side went on a hunger strike so they could get a better school? Of course you don't remember, because it never happened." The point was, the people who were striking for Dyett felt like they'd been sabotaged because of their color or because people think they're not important.

**Q: What diversity have you noticed in the newsroom?**

A: I think race has played a factor in all of our careers, whether or not we're white or black or Latino or Asian. I think that it's because when you're on television, I think the news directors should feel some responsibility. Sometimes they don't, but they have a responsibility to maintain diversity or to maintain a presence that is reflective of the community they cover.

So if you have a large Asian community, that should be reflected in the people you hire. At the same time, depending on where you are, you can't have a mostly black staff, or a mostly white staff. The news director has to be sure they've got a diverse crop.

**Q: How has it affected you?**

A: I think it's affected all of us. And the truth is, there may have been times when being a black woman has worked in my favor, because a news director thinks "we don't have an African American face, and we need one."

I think it has been a factor, but I'm lucky that I don't feel like it's ever worked against me, even when I was in D.C., and I kept trying to get on-air reporting jobs. When my boss wouldn't hire me to be an on-air reporter, I couldn't argue that it was because I was black, because he hired two other black women.

But diversity is not only important because the faces in the newsroom should reflect the audience. It's also because of the need for diversity in backgrounds, which can affect how you approach a story.

**Q: What's your favorite story you've covered?**

A: One of mine was covering the Little Rock Nine. They were in town, and we were asked if we were interested in interviewing them, and I absolutely jumped on it. The members of the Little Rock Nine almost never get together. They only get together about every 10 years. ■

*Interview has been edited and condensed.*

**Q: What sets Chicago apart from other newscasting programs?**

A: What I like about this show and the job is the stories are more thoughtful. They're longer-form stories, which I've always wanted to do. It's not reactionary news.

You'll find on the commercial stations, there is a lot of day-of news—more news that responds to something that's happened, like a shooting or a fire. There's a lot of that. That news, it lasts for that day, and then it's not important anymore.

I just appreciate the fact the stories we do at "Chicago Tonight" are much more is-

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PHOTOS BY DANTE VIOLETTE: STORY BY HALI GILSTRAP

O

n Nov. 13, 2015, Loyola University students gathered to attend the Black Lives Matter demonstration on the Lake Shore campus to stand in solidarity with students of the University of Missouri. Using social media and #Luc2Mizzou, students were able to spread the word and show support.



Julian Marshall, co-founder of The Black Tribune, feels that Mizzou students are not alone when it comes to racial injustices. "In joining in solidarity with marginalized students here or elsewhere helps to bring an end to this injustice," Marshall said.



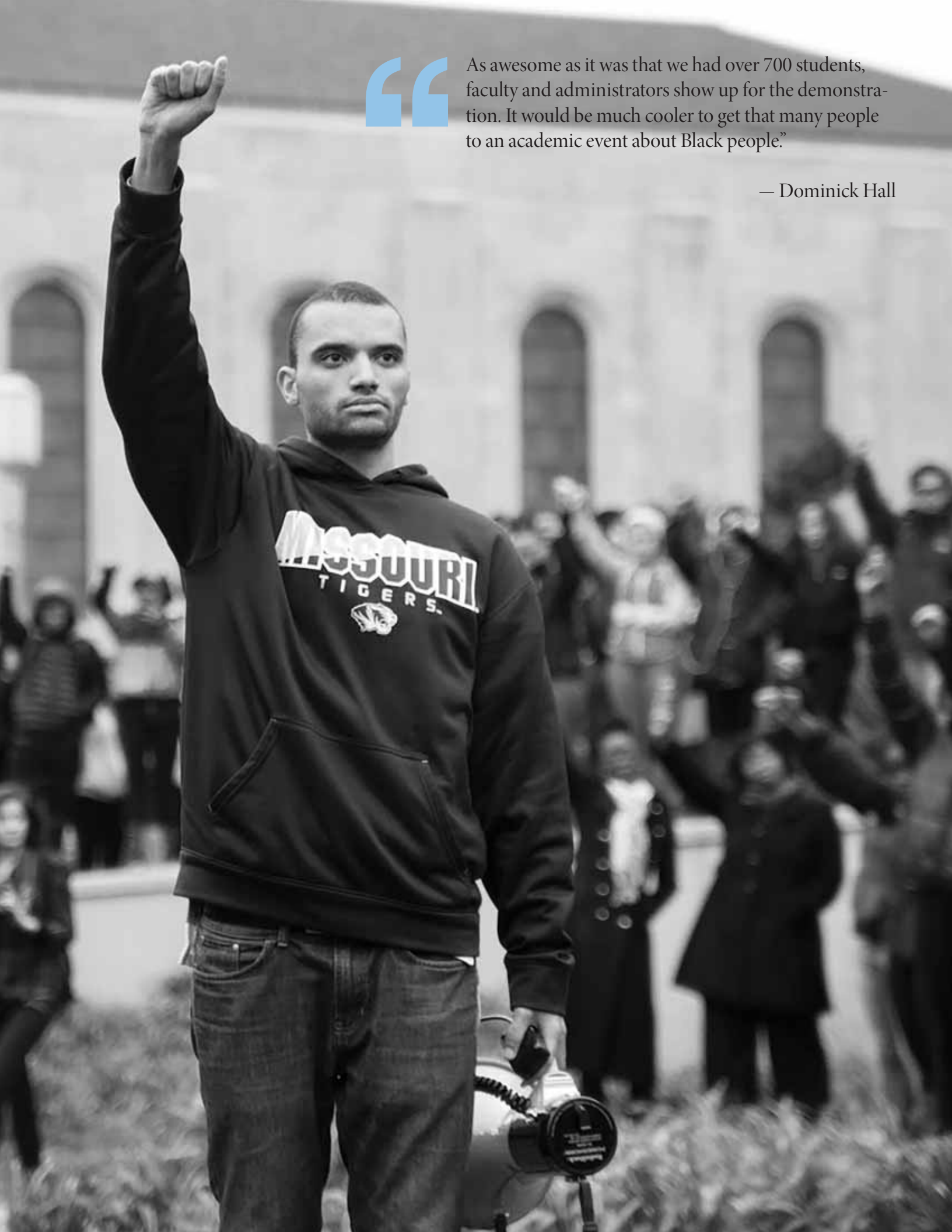
Loyola's 2011-2012 Demographic report states there were only 382 Black undergraduates, including both degree-seeking and non-degree seeking students.



Shaniqua Mitchell (second from left), Black Cultural Center executive board member, addresses the lack of diversity at Loyola. “I shouldn’t have to fight for equal education at an institution that promotes diversity,” she said.



Ryan Sorrell is co-founder of The Black Tribune. “I don’t know what the future of Loyola holds but I know we have to be building it,” he said.



“

As awesome as it was that we had over 700 students, faculty and administrators show up for the demonstration. It would be much cooler to get that many people to an academic event about Black people.”

— Dominick Hall

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# TRAUMA DESERTS

## Local groups work to imp

BY TRAVIS CORNEJO

**W**hen Damian Turner, 18, was shot at the corner of 61st Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, he was just two blocks from the University of Chicago Medical Center.

But his injuries were so severe, he required treatment in a hospital trauma center, which was 10 miles away at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Six years after the shooting, Turner's family believes he would be alive today if the University of Chicago Medical Center was equipped with a trauma center.

"It's unfair for this community not to have a trauma center, for all the incidents going on. It's heartless," his mother Shelia Rush



Damien Turner  
PHOTO FROM  
NEWS TIPS

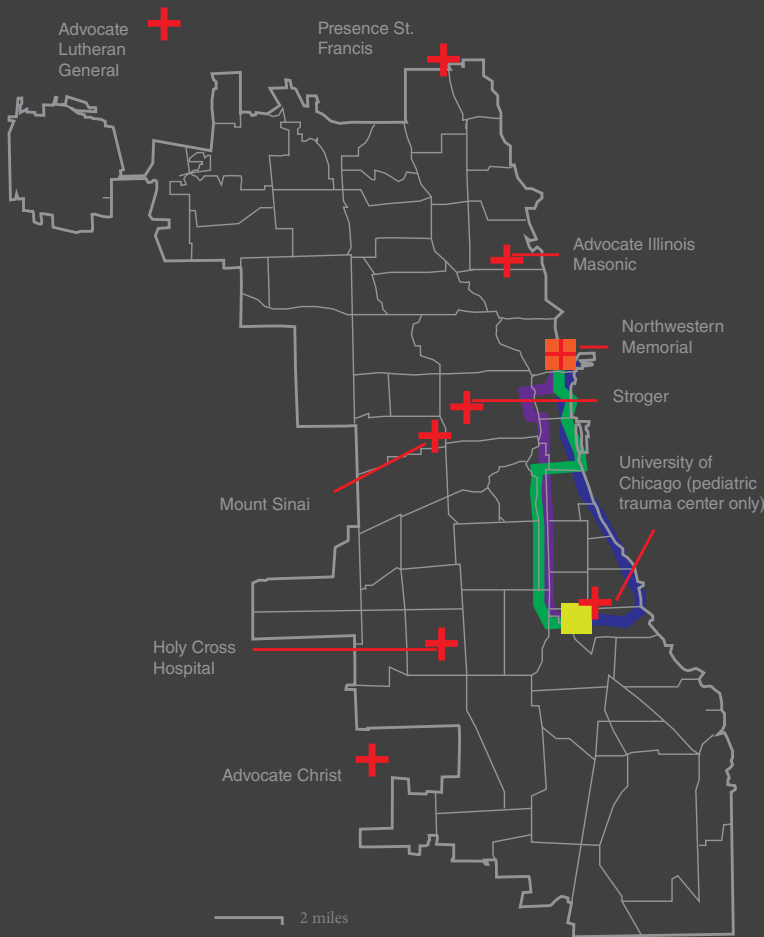
said to a crowd during a South Side rally seeking more trauma centers.

With Chicago experiencing one of its most violent periods, the trauma center issue is at the forefront. Most of the shootings take place on the South and West Sides, which are home to large African-American and Latino populations.

There are only a handful of Level 1 trauma centers in Chicago. These centers are hospital facilities that treat emergencies and also have access to medical specialists and surgeons to treat the most serious injuries from shootings, fires and car accidents.

Many of these incidents happen on the city's South and West Sides, but there are few trauma centers in those neighborhoods. Most of Chicago's trauma centers are located on the affluent, mostly white North Side.

# Trauma Centers in Chicago



## Map Legend

- Level 1 Trauma Centers in Chicago, IL
- Damien's location when shot (61st St. and Cottage Grove Ave.)
- Trauma Center Damien was taken to (251 East Huron St.)
- Route option 1 for Damien - 10.2 miles away/21 minutes without traffic
- Route option 2 for Damien - 10.6 miles away/22 minutes without traffic
- Route option 3 for Damien - 10.6 miles away/25 minutes without traffic

This is a map of Level 1 trauma centers in the city based on data from the Chicago Tribune. ILLUSTRATION BY MARIAH ARCHIE

# Improve Chicago health care

Thus, the South and West Sides are considered “trauma deserts.”

Although South and West Side residents have access to local health care options, none meet the services equal to a Level 1 adult trauma center.

There may be encouraging news as The University of Chicago Medicine announced in December 2015 that it would build a Level 1 trauma center in Hyde Park, which is targeted to open in 2018.

However, in February 2016, it was announced that the university is trying to get state approval to expand its medical center, which would include a 30 percent increase in hospital beds, according to the Chicago Tribune. The article said that according to the center, the costs for its plans of adding a trauma center, an enlarged ER and additional beds is expected to amount to \$269 million.

“A trauma center on the South Side will help to increase access

to emergency and trauma care for the neighboring communities,” said University of Chicago spokeswoman Lorna Wong. “The University of Chicago Medicine has grown tremendously and is often full, and the South Side is a big part of the growth. In fact, adult ER visits have increased annually by an average 5.3 percent the past few years and will continue to grow.”

The initial announcement was seen as a victory for many, not just for the underserved residents of Chicago’s southern most neighborhoods, but for the activists who worked for years for the cause. Among them was the Trauma Care Coalition, made up of Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP), Fearless Leading by the Youth (FLY) and Students for Health Equity (SHE).

These groups argued that residents of Back of the Yards, West

Story continues on next page



It's unfair for this community not to have a trauma center, for all the incidents going on... It's heartless."

— Sheila Rush



Lawn, Englewood and other South Side neighborhoods needed closer options than John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County or Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn.

Dr. Marie Crandall, who has researched Chicago's "trauma deserts," said careful planning and forethought should help avoid future scarcity of health care resources.

"Now, obviously there can't be a trauma center on every corner, because you need a critical volume of patients to be able to do your job well," she said. "So [multiple trauma centers] might not be practical for all places, but Chicago supported six or seven trauma centers for many years."

Dr. Richard Gonzales, Loyola University Chicago's trauma division director, said Chicago's health care options can often suffer due to political issues. Earlier in the year, he floated the idea of

Loyola servicing more Chicago trauma patients.

"I think it's still a little bit up in the air," he said. "Obviously our hospital isn't in the city proper, but we're still a closer trauma center to much of Chicago than other trauma centers that are within the city limits. So our goal is to have optimal care of trauma patients within Chicago and elsewhere."

And that same day, one West Side resident wasn't able to join in on the celebration. According to city data, Wilfred Santiago, 21, was shot on the 1600 block of North Francisco Avenue in Humboldt Park. He was transported roughly three miles to the nearby Mount Sinai Hospital, where he was pronounced dead an hour later.

It was that sort of loss that Dr. Crandall was accustomed to seeing. As a faculty member at Northwestern Memorial Hospital,



BY THE NUMBERS

5

A gunshot wound more than 5 miles away from a trauma center increases the risk of death.

10

Number of miles from Damien's original location when shot, to the closest Trauma Center to which he could be transported.

50

Percent of Chicago trauma patients that originate on the South Side.

188

Number of patient beds that will be added in the expansion of the University of Chicago Hospital.

PHOTO BY J. BROWN

Crandall noticed a disturbing trend: When treating victims of gun violence, the likelihood of saving the patient was lower

Years earlier, when she was a surgical resident at Rush University Medical Center on the Near West Side, they pulled off some “pretty spectacular” saves on the victims of gun violence. What made the difference between her earlier experience at Rush and her current experience at Northwestern?

She wondered if the roughly four miles that separates the two hospitals could make that much difference and if pre-hospital transport times were to blame.

To answer her question, she prepared a study using 11 years of data from the Illinois State Trauma Registry. In the end, she found suffering a gunshot wound more than five miles away from a trauma center increased the risk of death. Further, the study showed

that same scenario was likely to happen on Chicago's South and Southeast sides, due to the city's “trauma deserts” or rather, lack of Level 1 adult trauma centers in the area.

“I can't really say I was surprised,” Crandall said about the results. “Our data supported what I was seeing clinically and what activists were noticing from the streets. I was, however, very gratified to see it sparked a really crucial look at our trauma centers in Chicago and identified potential solutions.”

While her research was widely cited in local media, she doesn't credit it alone for the forthcoming trauma center.

“I think that there were probably many people in the legislature in Illinois, and in local politics, who recognized there were hospitals closing despite the amount of gun violence and homicides in Chicago,” she said. ■

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Former Pontiac Correctional Facility inmate  
creates support circle for past offenders

**B**enneth Lee is not a threatening looking man. Dressed in a blue linen walking suit and matching dress shoes, Lee will greet visitors with a warm smile and rather than a handshake, he will embrace them with open arms.

No one could guess Lee, 60, was once a leader of Chicago's second largest and oldest street gang, the Conservative Vice Lords. But Lee was sent to jail many times. His experience as a chief Vice Lord landed him in prison once for unlawful possession of a weapon and three more times for armed robbery. Partially because of bad luck, bad timing and his criminal background, Lee was moved to Pontiac Correctional Center right before the 1978 riot that killed three officers.

After being wrongfully associated with the riot as a gang leader, Lee was moved to death row for 15 counts of murder he didn't commit with 16 other gang leaders. The riot was the result of overcrowding in a facility holding 1,000 inmates when its maximum was 600. Lee and the others were eventually acquitted.

At the Bobby E. Wright Medical Center in West Garfield Park, Lee didn't want to talk about his violent past. Instead, he wanted to discuss the people who have come to him for help.

"Many of the people here are mentally challenged," he said. "Every Monday, we hold the re-entry circles for them and anyone else."

The re-entry circles are part of a program in which those who were incarcerated meet to discuss the issues they are facing by being back in society. The circles provide support for ex-convicts through empowerment and shared experience.

Lee founded the National Alliance for the Empowerment of the Formerly Incarcerated in 2009. This organization focuses on empowering those who were in prison and helps them build their confidence to re-enter society. It also provides resources to its participants to help them expunge their records and connect them with jobs and methods of supporting themselves and their families.

Five days a week, Lee's organization provides these re-entry circles for those who were discharged from prison. The re-entry circle includes 20 chairs arranged in a large circle, facing inwards, within the old, brown and black painted room of the mental health center. On one side, large black pillars hold African symbols. The other side has small windows to look out onto the lively street outside. In the circle, he passed out six blue pieces of paper and each was read aloud by a participant.



We do our best to rebuild that self-esteem and empower folks...the past is just that, the past.

— The Rev. Walter Amir Jones

"The Seven Principles," one college-aged girl, Rosalie, read aloud. Due to the sensitive nature of the conversations held in the circles, participants can only be referred to by first name. As a new participant in the circle, she rolled through the list with some caution. Each principle is titled in Swahili first and followed with its English translation and explanation.

The Seven Principles the circles recite, in English, are unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

"We predominantly work with African-Americans," Lee said about the use of Swahili and the Seven Principles. "Most African-Americans have culture shame, a lack of identity. We use those to reconnect them back, to give them a sense of pride."

The Seven Principles originated with Kwanzaa, a holiday intent on uniting the black people of the world. Its intentions became clear as Rosalie rattled off each principle, which stand for family, community and race.

"Most of the crimes [committed by Black people] are on each other, most of the violence is on each other," Lee said.

The goal of the re-entry circles is about much more than simply providing services to those who have been incarcerated. They are about empowering people.

This becomes even clearer as the Power of Self Talk is read aloud in a series of statements aimed at encouraging positive inner-dialogue.

"Your words, your dreams and your thoughts have power to create conditions in your life," the script said. "What you speak about you can bring about."

This idea of self-empowerment is becoming rampant through the program and throughout the West Side community. The Rev. Walter Amir Jones, a close friend of Lee's and the organizer of the West Garfield Park Community Stakeholders and the Father's Who Care organization, dove into the issue with full gusto and enthusiasm.

"Most people who go are goin' through some stuff [and] have lost their self-esteem," he said. "We do our best to rebuild that self-esteem and empower folks. The past is just that, the past."

At the National Alliance for the Empowerment of the Formerly Incarcerated and the re-entry circles, Lee makes it clear that change and healing are the most important.

Dorian, 45, a newcomer to the circle, seeks this change and healing to help him make the most out of his new life. He was released in late May from Joliet Correctional Center after being incarcerated for armed robbery and continues to make some strides in his new life. He has a girlfriend who emotionally supports him, a new job and the desire to continuously do better.

"I'm stickin' to commitments like this," he said of coming to the circle despite the hardships he has endured.

Faced with child support bills, Dorian is uncertain how to navigate the constant change in his life while dealing with the discrimination that comes with being an ex-convict. So, like many others like him, he reached out to Lee for help.

"When you plant a seed in non-nurturing soil, it dies," Lee said to Dorian. "You don't need brothers who ain't been through what you're going through. You need brothers who have been through what you're going through."

That is the whole idea behind this organization and these circles. Lee, who went through the prison system many times, was being reached out to by so many like him. He knew, with his new degree from Northeastern Illinois University in substance abuse counseling, that he could help them. The circles proved successful through the stories of men like Dorian. Many of the men and women who continue to make the commitment like Dorian go on to have successful jobs and normal lives.

Earnest, a past participator in the circles, came to the National Alliance for the Formerly Incarcerated without the ability to read.

"He could barely sign his name," Lee said. But Earnest is successful now. After acquiring a small business loan for ex-cons with the help of the re-entry circles, he was able to start his own landscaping business and is now in charge of a fleet of landscapers he hires.

"He is one of our success stories," Lee said.

Many of those like Earnest come to Lee and the National Alliance for the Empowerment of the Former Incarcerated and many leave just as successful. Like the symbol of the organization, the fern, these people have gone through hardship and lived in difficult conditions.

"And yet," Lee said, "we have survived all we have been through." ■

# An Exception to the Rule

Former gang member helps prevent at-risk youth from following in his footsteps

BY BETH NEWHART

**B**y day, Eddie Bocanegra mentors the high-risk youth of Chicago in some of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods. He reaches out to kids who often have nowhere else to turn in the hope of getting them off the gun-ridden streets and away from gangs.

But by night he's still a caring father and loving husband, putting his two young daughters to sleep after coming home from work at the YMCA Metro Chicago.

It's a far cry from where he was 21 years ago: shooting dead a rival gang member in Little Village, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood on the Southwest Side of Chicago.

By age 14, Bocanegra was involved in gangs on the block. He said the divisive area he lived in forced him to fall into a gang like so many other youths do. It often comes down to a matter of survival and protection.

But by 1994, Bocanegra was 18 years old and sitting in jail facing a first-degree murder charge. After serving half of his 29-year sentence, he was released. And at age 32, he found himself at a crossroads.

"Every person has to make some critical decisions in their lives," Bocanegra said. "And for me, those decisions didn't happen upon my release. They actually happened years prior to that."

Many ex-cons tend to fall back into the streets and get caught up in gang life again after surviving prison. But instead, Bocanegra actively chose to turn his life around.

He did a lot of thinking while being locked up, and asked himself a few important questions.

"Are you going to come out as a better person, or are you going to come out as a much worse person than when you came in? That was the beginning of my transition," Bocanegra said.

He took advantage of whatever academic resources he could get while in prison, such as the high school level classes offered by the Chicago Board of Education. He also enrolled in community college courses after his release.

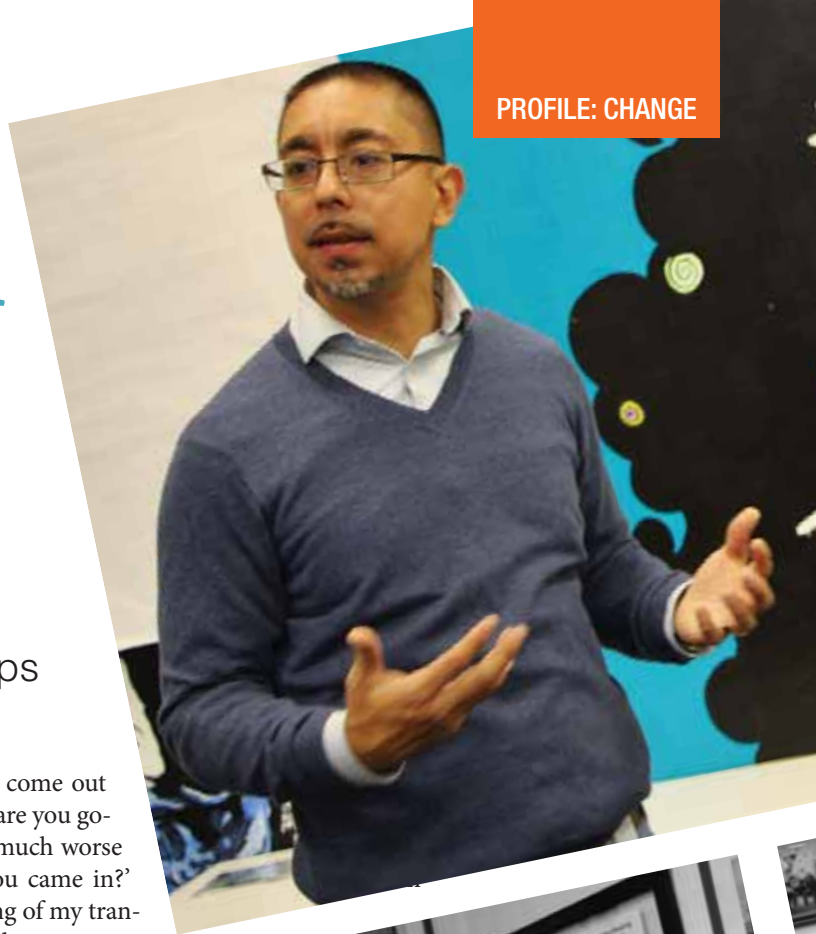
Bocanegra began volunteering with a community program called Urban Life Skills, and he eventually worked his way up to his current position: executive director of the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Program at the YMCA. He even took social work courses as a graduate student at the University of Chicago.

The passion he holds for his work is clear; he comes alive when he talks about Story Squad, a program at the Y which teaches kids how to write, audio record and edit any story they want to tell. It provides them with vital skills that they may not get at school.

"When these kids get the opportunities to share their stories, you're empowering them," Bocanegra said. "You're giving them a voice because often they're silenced. Sometimes they get overlooked by adults."

Bocanegra's own story is quite unique given his past, and he recognizes that. He's so often questioned about his situation. How did he manage to make it through prison and succeed in life after it?

"I am not the norm—I am the exception," Bocanegra said. "And by that I mean that not every person that comes home from



the support system that I actually received. And on top of that, not every person in prison really has the same level of hope that I had. Or even the same level of resiliency that I did."

A life like Bocanegra's easily captures the attention of an audience. It is exactly the type of triumphant human interest story that people like to hear, and the city of Chicago has taken notice.

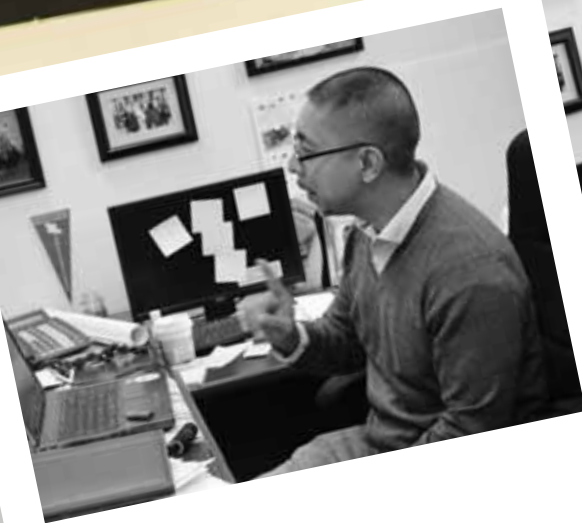
Bocanegra has been interviewed by many different organizations over the years including WBEZ 91.5 FM Chicago, the University of Chicago and the Chicago Reporter.

He was most notably profiled in Steve James' and Alex Kotlowitz's 2011 documentary "The Interrupters." The film followed Bocanegra along with two other "violence



“I don’t see my job as a job. I see this as a calling and as a form of redemption and simply giving back.”  
— Eddie Bocanegra

Eddie’s passion for his work shines through when he runs Story Squad at the YMCA. PHOTOS BY BETH NEWHART



interrupters” over the course of one year.

All three subjects were involved in some type of violence in Chicago’s streets as teens, and they all currently work with CeaseFire to end that violence.

“His Urban Warriors program is one of the most innovative and impactful programs out there,” Kotlowitz said. “It was genius on Eddie’s part to pair war veterans with gang members in an effort to push these kids to be more self-aware, to be more conscious about what they’re feeling and what they’re experiencing.”

Through this work and recognition, Bocanegra has dedicated the rest of his life to making amends for his crime by helping at-risk youths just like him avoid the mistakes he couldn’t.

“The reason why I do what I do now is atonement,” Bocanegra said. “I don’t see my job as a job. I see this as a calling and I see this as a form of redemption and a form of simply giving back.”

The main focus of his day-to-day work is helping kids stay off the streets and end gang violence. But he also has a few specific interests within that goal.

“What I like to focus my attention on is challenging the narrative of our kids and challenging the narrative of people with records. And doing that through addressing trauma that I’ve faced or seen in other individuals,” Bocanegra said.

He wants to smash misconceptions in Chicago that every murder is gang-related, or that every gang in the city is solely centered on violence.

His other concern deals with improving life and opportunities for those with records. Too often does the city give up on gang members when they are carted off to prison, he said.

They end up with little to no resources for building a better future upon release, and Bocanegra wants to change that.

Kotlowitz had the opportunity to shadow and work with Bocanegra for several months, and he saw something in him that he knew others needed to hear about.

“Eddie’s on to something, and for those in the field of violence prevention, it’s essential and pioneering work,” he said.

One of the most common questions Bocanegra is asked remains: how would he reduce mass incarcerations and violence in the city?

But the answer is not that simple.

“To me the bigger question is how do you change systems? How do you create a systemic change?” Bocanegra asked.

Mass incarcerations stemming from violence are mostly born out of Chicago’s roughest and poorest neighborhoods, which also happen to be communities of color. And Bocanegra urges people to see that it’s not a coincidence.

“That is a product or byproduct of racism, classism or simply just poverty,” he said.

No matter what the challenge, Bocanegra is ready to face it. His hard work and dedication to fixing the gang-ridden streets of Chicago is not a want for him, but a need.

“No matter how many times I tell people that I am sorry for the mistakes that I have made in my life, words can only take you so far,” he said. “So I’d rather show my sorrow and ask forgiveness and show my remorse by my actions.” ■



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OF THIS IS  
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OF WISDOM.

— *Dr. Theodore Isaac Rubin*

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**QUINLAN**  
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## Fabian Elliott helps Chicago's Black tech community grow

BY JANE BUDNYK

**W**illiam Owens, 43, grew up in the Chatham neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. His memories of technology as a youth consist of the big, boxy Commodore 64 computer, but only as a "novelty," he said.

Owens never actually worked much on computers as a young adult.

"As a young man, I thought my future would consist of me only working for someone else," Owens said.

Despite Owens' lack of exposure to technology, he became a successful businessman in tech who works to bring his knowledge to the South Side of Chicago, where cellular service and Wi-Fi are still spotty.

"You can't use a laptop, you can't use a phone, if you don't have Internet access," he said. "We are trying to give people the foundation."

Owens is just one of the many examples of African-Americans within Chicago's tech community trying to erase stereotypes and inspire young people to consider high-tech careers.

Fabian Elliott, 25, took this issue into his own hands during his college years and even more so in his professional career today.

While getting his marketing degree at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Elliott formed a student organization called The United Black Professionals. The group served as a trial run for his new and blossoming business, Black Tech Mecca.

The lack of Black people in tech became even more apparent when Elliott started working as a young African-American at Google in Chicago. Elliott said he took a look around his tech-filled world and realized that there wasn't much of a black presence.

This realization ignited his interest in the topic, leading to a six-month research and development binge that began in August 2014 and led to the launch of Black Tech Mecca in June 2015.

Elliott soon became the founder and CEO of Black Tech Mecca, a community exclusively for the black community to thrive



within the tech world.

"Looking back, we weren't ready for it," Elliott said. "But, we are happy we jumped in head first."

The passion that Elliott has for technology is something that many other members of the black community also possess.

Owens, who currently resides in the Beverly neighborhood, works as the co-founder and chief development officer at Krimson Technology Group, located at 9946 S. Halsted St. in the Fernwood neighborhood.

"Greater Englewood CDC, together with Krimson, they're addressing those needs just like Black Tech Mecca to try and fill that gap that exists out there and to try to rejuvenate the South Side specifically," Owens said.

KTG Group provides a wide range of technological services and it partnered with Greater Englewood CDC to bring Wi-Fi to the South Side of Chicago.

By partnering with other community organizations and companies like KTG Group, Black Tech Mecca strives to organize the chaos to give the Chicago black tech community the specific technological resources they need to succeed.

Elliott is the mastermind behind the enterprise. He hails from a small farm town in Fayetteville, North Carolina and moved to the big city of Chicago upon his offer to work at the Google office as a full-time advertising technology consultant.

Elliott dedicates his weeknights and weekends to Black Tech Mecca. He said he was a bit nervous coming to Chicago, having spent much of his life in the South.

"It was a curveball but I feel like everything works out as it needs to," Elliott said.

The young businessman said he found his calling here in Chicago and created a team

of black tech professionals working to build their community.

The team is made up of people with whom Elliott saw great potential. He did not work extensively with any of the members prior to Black Tech Mecca and none of them knew each other well. These factors made for a great culture within the start of the Black tech community.

For instance, Dineo Seakamela, 23, a youth coordinator for Chicago Ideas Week, works as co-leader of a group of marketing and communications volunteers for Black Tech Mecca.

Elliott is "very curious, a lethal go-getter, highly ambitious, organized, determined and focused," according to Seakamela, who is one of Elliott's old friends from his days in Charlotte.

Another Black Tech Mecca team member, Nehemiah Bishop is a fellow university student at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"I first met Fabian when I was participating in a program at college and he was volunteering on behalf of the 100 Black Men [of Chicago]," Bishop, 23, said. "The very first impression I noticed was how happy and upbeat he was."

Elliott was a mentor for Bishop from the start.

"He began to tell me about a vision that he had for blacks in tech around the world," Bishop said. "It was ambitious, compelling and inspiring all at the same time. Ever since that day, I have been 100 percent committed to Black Tech Mecca."

The company recently paired up with Blue 1647 Tech Innovation Center, an entrepreneurship and technology center located in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. The busi-

# MECCA MAN

“What space do you occupy in the tech ecosystem, what are you looking to accomplish, and how can we help you do that?”

— Fabian Elliott

ness helps people develop their technological skills through classes, workshops and technology events. Through this program, current and aspiring entrepreneurs within the black tech community can attend classes and utilize these resources.

Elliott said he is inspired by the organizations that Black Tech Mecca paired up with thus far and knows that it is a constantly evolving project. In order to confirm that their framework is working, the team is always making sure that they are attracting the right people.

Black Tech Mecca currently targets “three big buckets,” according to Elliott. The company target students K-12, working professionals and entrepreneurs.

“What space do you occupy in the tech ecosystem, what are you looking to accomplish and how can we help you do that?” Elliott said.

Black Tech Mecca does not offer its own services. Its goal is to connect with companies and communities offering resources that will benefit the black tech community.

Elliott’s long-term goal with Black Tech Mecca is that once it’s created this community and made the city a better place, it will have a blueprint that other cities will be able to use in order to build their own conditions.

Elliott addressed the elephant in the room when he asked the question: “What if we are not black? How does that work?”

“Our focus is undoubtedly, unapologetically, on the black tech community,” he said, responding to his own question. ■



Weekly Black Tech Mecca meetings are run by Fabian Elliott and his team (top left) of professionals. PHOTOS BY INDIA MCMILLER



## Chicago public schools struggle to provide up to date resources

BY JANE BUDNYK

**N**icholas Senn High School is a highly-regarded International Baccalaureate school that attracts some of the finest students the Chicago Public School system. It offers cutting-edge coursework in journalism and fine arts, and has a waiting list of students seeking to enroll.

Despite its rising reputation, when it comes to student technology, Senn is behind the times.

Students have three options when it comes to using computers in schools: a musty computer lab filled with aging desktops, laptops or Google Chromebooks, which they can use on a limited basis.

“I do not like CPS standard computers, but they get the job done,” said 15-year-old student Sana Leebe.

What’s happening at Senn is similar to the state of technology in many CPS schools. Because of limited funds, CPS students don’t have access to the same technology as their suburban peers.

Studies show that students with minimal technology access in their schools and no computer at home wind up doing less computer-related work, resulting in a lack of knowledge necessary for them to grow with the ever changing tech-world.

Michael Cullinane, 38, the lead journalism teacher at Senn, said the school is “a little bit behind the times” when it comes to technology.

Many suburban high schools hand students their own laptops or iPads on the first day of school.

For example, Evanston Township High School gives each student a Google Chromebook.

David Chan, 38, Director of Instructional Technology at Evanston Township High School, commends the one-to-one system and explains how lucky the school is to have been able to test out devices like Chromebooks and iPads before implementing the system.

“We weren’t always sure whether our students had access to a computer at home so with the one-to-one program we kind of eliminate that question,” he said.

John Genell, 67, has been a technology teacher for 15 years at Morgan Park High School on Chicago’s South Side in the Morgan Park neighborhood.

At Morgan Park, a school with a few computer labs, Genell has grown along with the rapid pace of technology.

Teaching in a lab with desktop computers is an improvement for Genell, who used to teach at Reavis High School in suburban Burbank. His days at Reavis were spent teaching on punch card equipment until the school got its first stand up computer.

This is especially impressive for Genell since the computer teacher position is a hard one to obtain at Morgan Park,

“I do not like CPS standard computers, but they get the job done.”

— Sana Leebe, student

requiring the instructor to have logged 5,000 hours of contact in the technology field.

The students may not have top-notch technology access, but Genell enjoys the “Ah-ha moments,” he said.

“I had a kid come back to me at the end of the summer that said, ‘Mr. Genell, because of you, I earned \$500 a week this summer. I knew Excel, so they hired me and they paid extra,’” he said.

Genell isn’t the only person making a difference in the lives of high school students through technology.

Donald York, head of the University of Chicago’s CPS University Internet Project (CUIP) agrees, “Things have changed too fast,” he said.

York, along with a staff of around four people, started a group called CUIP in 1996 in order to help Chicago Public Schools with their technology resources.

CUIP currently works for the principals of about eight Chicago schools. These principals direct CUIP to teachers within their school who need help with a technology issue and they help that teacher.

“We make sure teachers have what they want, make sure the computers are working and try to train teachers to use the software that they want to use,” York said.

In Chicago, it seems that more schools than not are well equipped with technology resources.

But in the schools that are not, what they need are teachers who understand computing or computer science in order to teach it.

Chicago is “one of three metropolitan areas that have made a commitment to doing large scale partners with the exploring computer science programs and one of the earliest partners with Code.org,” said Diana Franklin.

Franklin is the Senior Research Associate and Lecturer at The University of Chicago and Director of Computer Science Education Research for the Center for Elementary Mathematics and Science Education.

Franklin is currently working on a research project that monitors how 4th graders learn computing concepts.

“I have a curriculum and I have a system,” Franklin said. “I go into schools and we have the students do the curriculum and we watch them very closely. I’m trying to bring the computing concepts that we are used to teaching in high school and college levels.” ■



Nicholas Senn High School  
students work in their computer  
lab on PC desktop computers.  
PHOTO BY JANE BUDNYK



**LET'S GET  
TECHNICAL**



# After School Matters

Cocurricular activities provide opportunities to learn, create and grow

BY REBECCA BYRNE

**K**nowing that she is one of the lucky 20,000 students involved in the program, walking through the green doors of the building and putting the white double-breasted jacket, apron and chef's toque on every day after school brings great pride to Taylor Davis, 17, of Chicago's Gage Park neighborhood.

Davis, a senior at Alcott College Prep, a high school on Chicago's Northwest Side, is a student who participates in one of the various culinary classes at After School Matters.

"My neighborhood is one of the areas in the city where you do see crimes and other bad things happen, but being involved in my cooking class keeps me away from all that stuff. It's awesome that I get to come here and learn more about something that I've always enjoyed," Davis said.

After-school-programs, such as After School Matters, play a critical role in the lives of students living in Chicago. According to Chicago After 3 p.m., a research study conducted by Afterschool Alliance, Chicago has one of the highest percentages in the nation of students involved in after school and summer programs, with 27 percent of students involved in Chicago compared to the 15 percent national average. This study also found that 93 percent of parents in Chicago support these groups for students because they agree that children need a safe and enriching environment to go after school to learn. With more than 122,000 kids in Chicago enrolled in after school classes and 163,000 involved

in summer learning clubs, it is important for the city to ensure that these opportunities stay in place.

Avery Williams, a 16-year-old student at Walter Payton College Prep, is grateful to be participating and learning in an After School Matters program.

"I've been able to explore so much more in my mixed media arts class than I ever would have in just school alone," Williams said. "Even though I'm not sure if this is something that I want to do for the rest of my life, it's still cool to be a part of something that a lot of people in the city respect."

After School Matters is the largest provider of after school and summer programs to teenagers in the nation. However, there are hundreds of other similar organizations throughout the Chicago area that have the same mission of providing the close to 400,000 total CPS students with safe and meaningful opportunities that benefit them in a myriad of ways. Whether the results be an improvement in school attendance, higher graduation rates, more teens acquiring new skills, or youth feeling prepared and motivated toward their futures, what many of these establishments can all agree on is that these safe after school opportunities are essential for the city and the state government must support these services.

"These programs are absolutely necessary. Thankfully, we have a city that agrees with us that these programs are vital for a variety of reasons," said Michael Crowley, director of communications for After School



Students are able to explore many co-curricular activities such as cooking, visual art and dance through After School Matters.

PHOTOS BY REBECCA BYRNE

Matters. “They help teens graduate on time, they help them feel like they’re prepared to take the next steps toward college or career, and it gives them something safe and productive to do during times that they would otherwise be most likely to find trouble.”

One of the reasons after school programs are so important is because teens need places to go during after school hours when classes are not in session because that is when they are most vulnerable.

“A survey of police departments around the state, some years ago, found that juvenile crime increases an average of 2 ½ times between 3-6 p.m. That’s why we want to see at-risk Illinois youth in quality after school programs, rather than on the streets,” said Michael Nerheim, Lake County State’s Attorney and Co-Chair of the Executive Committee of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois, in an email statement.

Last year, After School Matters served 15,000 individual teens through 22,000 opportunities within 63 out of the total 77 Chicago neighborhoods, with a majority of programming on the South and West Sides of the city, according to Crowley. Ninety-three percent of the seniors in the program graduated from high school last year.

“We have the scale and the model that works, but the way we’re really able to see so much success is through these partnerships of like-minded organizations and individuals who want to provide these life-changing experiences for teenagers,” Crowley said.

BUILD Chicago is another organization

that helps students establish paths that lead to positive futures.

“We help over 3,000 youth a year and within each year, we have a tracking system where we perform assessments, one at the beginning and one at the end of the school year, to see the progress we’ve made. We see great results in terms of increasing school attendance and promoting better behavior. We also see higher grades and better track records in terms of keeping kids out of trouble,” said Angella Roberts-Smith, manager of prevention services at BUILD.

Another association that helps students in Chicago succeed is Family Focus.

“We are able to support more than 1,800 children and youth at 21 school sites through enhanced educational opportunities programs to explore science, technology, engineering, and math. Fifty-two percent of Family Focus students showed significant grade increases in reading and 48 percent increases in math last year,” said Stephen Majsak, senior vice president of external relations at Family Focus in an email statement.

Ultimately, the positive results and benefits are there, but the same can’t always be said when it comes to the money.

“We’re always working to raise the funds necessary. Because almost 40,000 teens applied last year and we simply didn’t have the capacity to fit everyone, raising money is something that’s always on our minds. Increased funding is what’s going to get us there,” Crowley said.

In early April of 2015, Gov. Bruce Rauner

cut \$26 million from social services grants in the Illinois state budget, a change that affects after school programs like Teen REACH. Due to a lack of funds, some of the Teen REACH locations in Chicago have had to shut down, with a possible elimination of the program all together in the 2016 fiscal year.

“Our state’s social service and non-profit infrastructure has been rocked at its very foundation by lack of adequate funding and by changes in program rules that were intended to save money in the short term but threaten much greater long-term costs to our state,” said Thomas Weitzel, Chief of the Riverside Police Department and member of the Executive Committee of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois, in an email statement.

“Far too many after school programs, child care centers, and ‘parent-coaching’ initiatives for new, at-risk parents have been forced to close their doors, lay-off staff, and cease services for our state’s most vulnerable children,” he said.

Students and program directors agree these programs are a necessity for the youth and the community.

Taylor Davis, a culinary student at After School Matters, wants more students to participate in the activities.

“I wish that even more kids could be a part of some of these programs because we all love coming here, and they’re a lot of fun,” Davis said. “They’re giving us a different option when it comes to doing things after school. Showing us that we don’t have to be a part of the street life is an amazing thing.” ■

Chavez in the forefront of resisting gangs in Back of the Yards

# FIGHTING TEMPTATION

BY EDUARDO MACIAS

Students enter the Chavez Chicago Public School, who's mission is steering children away from violence and toward education and excellence in class as well as after school. PHOTO BY EDUARDO MACIAS

**W**alking down Ashland Avenue, pedestrians see the many small businesses that could clearly use a face lift. From dealing with heckling shop owners encouraging you to come in and get “fresh,” to street vendors selling clothes, bootleg CDs and movies, pedestrians do not go unnoticed on these streets. One cannot forget about the local “eloteros” selling corn-in-a-cup, chicharones, raspados and other Mexican delicacies.

For most pedestrians, getting convinced to buy things is the least of their concerns. Ashland Avenue also marks the biggest

dividing line among the gangs in Back of the Yards. During the summer, gang activity usually rises, and that is shown as gang-bangers can be seen throwing gang signs and yelling obscenities at each other.

But among it all, there sits a bright red brick building trying to change how people see Chicago's Back of the Yards.

Cesar E. Chavez is a Chicago Public School that is trying to steer students away from violence by teaching them the value of an education. The school gets its name from the civil rights activist Cesar E. Chavez who fought for rights for migrant workers in California. Similar to the man, the school is also helping



out the Latino community.

Dinorah Lozano, Chavez's assistant principal, has been working at the school for almost two decades and believes that the reason why students have been able to achieve so much, despite obstacles, is through the support of their teachers. Chavez teaches kids from pre-kindergarten to 8th grade with the majority of the students being Latino.

"If you come out on any given day for dismissal you'll see Chavez staff outside," Lozano, 42, said. "We're technically off the clock when students are off also, if you go around other schools you may not necessarily have that patrol on the street."

The staff volunteers after hours to help kids feel safe walking home after school.

Five years ago, Chavez was chosen to be part of a new CPS program called Additional Learning Opportunities, which was an added one-on-one tutoring program. When the program started, the tutors were from the YMCA.

Eventually, teachers from Chavez decided to remain on their own and help tutor their classes as well. Teachers started to work for the YMCA in order to make one extra hour of pay.

After the third year, the school included that one extra hour into its budget so that teachers would not have to worry about being employed by CPS and the YMCA. This additional hour adds up to 25 additional school days. These additional days help make Chavez the best among the 35 different schools in the area, according to last year's CPS progress reports.

One of the reasons why the school is able to succeed is because of the Additional Learning Opportunities program. Students have more technology at their disposal, like tablets, laptops and smartboards.

Despite Lozano attributing success at Chavez to the program, some students have been succeeding because of their teacher's influence.

Ricardo Alvarado, 26, is a Back of the Yards native who, because of his teachers' support, has been able to graduate from the University of Illinois Chicago with a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology.

Alvarado graduated from Chavez in 2004 and says that the reason why he made his education a priority is because of the motivation his teachers gave him.

"The most important influence I received at Chavez was seeing not only young college educated teachers, but also Hispanic college graduates, it left an imprint on me, that I too could do it," Alvarado said.

Although Chavez is doing all these programs to help the students, it does not mean that gang violence in the neighborhood has drastically decreased.

In 2013, there was a mass shooting at Cornell Square Park where 13 people were shot, including a 3-year-old boy that was shot in the face. This same park is only a few blocks away and sometimes students are taken there during their Activity Fridays.

Activity Fridays is just one of the incentives that Chavez offers to help prevent gang activity in the school. Students who have behaved and done their work are allowed to go out to the park and play a variety of games.

A couple of incentives that Chavez offers its students are Caught Being Good Tickets and Bulldog Bucks that can be redeemed for different prizes like extra recess or pizza parties.

In Back of the Yards, kids are recruited by gangs as young as 10 years old. Some of these kids are practically born into gangs

because their family members have generationally been gang members.

"Those [prizes] are all easily manageable by anybody whether they are gang members or not," Lozano said. "Even kids that are in gangs want the incentives, they want the extra recess, they want the ice cream parties."

Juan Solis, 11, is a sixth grade student attending Chavez. He was born in the Back of the Yards neighborhood and has gone to Chavez his whole life. Solis says that his favorite part of going to Chavez is that his teachers are always willing to help.

"Every single time that I get a problem wrong she actually gives me a chance," Solis said.

Solis has yet to begin thinking about his education after elementary school but he is aware that continuing his education is important.

Solis' older brother, Salvador Solis, 20, is the first in his family to go to college and Solis said that he looks up to his brother. Instead of being a gang member, his brother is at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois getting a proper education to succeed in life.

"I feel proud of myself that I actually go to a school that actually gives me a good education for my future," Solis said.

Although Chavez didn't always have these incentives, it had different ways of keeping kids out of gangs when Alvarado was in school.

"The temptation of the gangs was always there because if you were not involved with one, you heard about everyone who was, and you felt the pressure of becoming involved," Alvarado said. "Despite that being the case, I chose to participate in the basketball program there and pursued my then hobby of art. Staying busy with basketball and art didn't allow me to idle in gang activities."

Alvarado isn't the only graduate of Chavez to put his education first instead of being involved with gangs.

Last year, for the first time, Chavez had three students get accepted into Walter Payton College Prep, which is the top-performing school in the state and is No. 10 in the nation.

Seven years ago, Chavez had its first student apply to a selective enrollment high school. In 2014, 26 students were accepted and currently attend selective enrollment schools.

Although more students now share the same mentality that Alvarado has, it is still plagued by gangs and violence.

"I wish that the Back of the Yards can be associated more with the good that the community council does, they extend their hands to the youth with various after school programs, from dance to neighborhood events every year," Alvarado said. "Chavez has continued to do its job in educating the youth of the Back of the Yards, but gaining an education is only half the battle." ■

#### BY THE NUMBERS

# 10

Age at which children in the Back of the Yards neighborhood could begin to be recruited by gang members.

# 5

The number of gangs operating within the Back of the Yards community, according to the Chicago Tribune. The territory includes 43rd to 51st streets, between Racine and Western Avenues.

Sky Art brings art and culture to the South Side of Chicago. It is in a new public area where children won't cross into gang territory. PHOTO BY SOFIE WOLTERS



# SOUTH CHICAGO'S SAFE HAVEN

Sky Art program reaches out to Chicago children

BY SOFIE WOLTERS

**A** little boy knocks on the locked glass door of Sky Art's immense new studio space in Chicago's South Chicago neighborhood.

Sky Art Founder and Program Director Sarah Ward opens the door. The little boy asks, "You gonna have art classes here? Can you teach me to draw here? My brother knows how to draw real good."

Ward replies, "Sure, baby."

She hands him a slip to fill out and gives him an extra copy for his older brother.

Sky Art, formerly known as South Chicago Art, brings art and culture to the South Side. It recently moved just three blocks east of its original 800-square-foot location, located in the South Chicago neighborhood on the 3200 block of East 91st Street.

The neighborhood is mostly residential. Many areas often look deserted and vacant lots are abundant. In the last year, there were

20 reported homicides, 126 reported assaults, 183 reported batteries and 179 reported robberies in South Chicago, according to the Chicago Tribune. The neighborhood is lined by East 79th Street on the north, South Chicago Avenue on the southwest and some of East 95th Street on the south.

"The neighborhood suffers from high rates of unemployment, poverty, crime and gang activity," Ward said.

With more than 6,000-square-feet, Sky



Art's tall ceilings, spacious white rooms and large glass windows will be able to provide students with more space and inspiration. The large space, allows the program to reach out to more children.

Sky Art Development Manager Billy McGuinness said it is important to have a safe space for the children of South Chicago.

"The space will cause people to think differently about their neighborhood, because their neighborhood is different now," McGuinness said. "What I really hope will happen, is that the people of South Chicago feel a sense of ownership of this space. It is a resource for them and a source of inspiration for their kids."

Ward said the art center's new location will be more accessible to children in the South Chicago neighborhood. The art center's old location was in a residential area, restricted by gang lines. Gangs are organized block by block and are made up of children on that block, according to Ward.

"There might be 12 active gangs in a 10-by-10 area," she said.

“ I learned how to not call people boy or girl anymore and that I shouldn't tell people to shut up. Sky Art taught me to be respectful if I want to be respected”

— Taytay Robinson

Today, gangs on different blocks may share the same name, but they are not necessarily part of the same gang.

"Our old art center is three blocks west of this, but nobody belongs over there if you don't live over there," Ward said.

She said the new location is not in a residential area.

"Here we're across from the Library, the YMCA, the Block of Commerce and everybody can come to here," Ward said.

Sky Art is supported by the City of Chicago. This summer at Wrigley Field, band Pearl Jam consulted Mayor Rahm Emanuel for a Chicago charity to donate to through the band's Vitality Foundation. After shows, the band regularly donates part of its proceeds to local charities. The mayor suggested they should donate to Sky Art.

Chicago Cubs President Theo Epstein donated an additional \$25,000 and personally presented the \$65,000 along with Emanuel. The donations went into Sky Art's programs.

Sky Art provides free classes at local schools as well as after school classes and college programs at their own facility.

Chicago Public School's curriculum mainly consists of left-brain activity exercising logic, mathematics, language and computation. Many children have a hard time learning these subjects but have no outlet to explore right-brain activity like their creativity and imagination.

"Giving children a curriculum based on an area they can't be successful in, creates an environment where kids can't communicate through their curriculum," Ward said.

Sky Art gives children an outlet for communication through the visual arts. Ward said that when implementing in-school classes, many of the CPS teachers are awed by their students speaking up and getting excited about their art.

"Art is a safety, it makes you able to process things in a different frequency," Ward said.

For teens, Sky Art provides college programs and summer internship opportunities, helping students build art portfolios and explore scholarship possibilities. The organization's Young Adult Art Advocate group is made up of teens that believe in the power of art and strive to share it with others.

High school student Taytay Robinson, 15,

joined Sky Art's Young Adult Art Advocate group after she said she attended classes at Sky Art and fell in love with the program.

"I learned how to not call people boy or girl anymore and that I shouldn't tell people to shut up," Robinson said. "Sky Art taught me to be respectful if I want to be respected."

Student Ruby Luna, 16, also said the art center was beneficial.

"The program helps me get bad things off my mind, Sky Art is like family to me," Luna said.

Sky Art's internship program gives teens a chance to inspire and interact with other children over the summers. Teens can be teachers and counselors for Sky Art's summer programs. It helps teens build up their resumes and enhances their chance of finding future jobs.

Student British Rohne, 17, said she feels honored and privileged to be working with the kids over the summer.

"It gives kids something to do," Rohne said. "It brings them here to get stuff off their chest, it helps them express themselves, explore things they're not used to, it gives them hope and helps them grow as a person because they can do whatever they want on a piece of paper."

Back in 2001, 12-year-old Anthony Steele attended Ward's second class at Sky Art. Now at 24, Steele works part time at the arts center as a teacher and he inspires others with his work ethic and dedication.

"I recently helped a young lady with her portfolio and she now has a full scholarship to Columbia," Steele said.

Although the program is in the midst of a huge move and classes are temporarily closed, McGuinness said that no matter what, the art center is still a safe haven for children in the neighborhood.

"One night, I was at the old space and one of our students walked in who knew we were closed, he came because he was hungry and he knew he could get food at the arts center," McGuinness said.

McGuinness said that his place of work doesn't confine its work to its stated mission, but Sky Art deeply cares about the people it serves.

"The need is there," he said, "As long as there is a need there will be a place like Sky Art." ■

High school poetry club

# SP HEA KS

Oak Park and River Forest High School  
students find outlet in Spoken Word Club

BY KARA VENSEL



I'm the only brown kid in the sea of white skin studying Hester Prynne and her red skin."

— Hevannli Harris, student

The 350-seat auditorium was filled with only standing room remaining. Five students took their places on the stage for the last performance of the night. In synch they marched in place and chanted "U-N-I-T-Y" before the group's leader, senior Hevannli Harris started, "I'm the only brown kid in the sea of white skin studying Hester Prynne and her red sin."

This showcase was titled Protest and was the first of three showcases Oak Park and River Forest High School Spoken Word Club will host this school year. The students performed their poems, most of which told stories about injustices they experienced in the past.

Harris said issues of racism and oppression are constantly on her mind whether she is writing or not.

She moved from Blue Island on the South Side to River Forest after finishing middle school in order to attend Oak Park and River Forest High School. She struggled to fit in while she was in her old neighborhood, but adjusted well to River Forest. She joined Spoken Word Club and Hip-Hop Wing her freshman year and is now in leadership positions in both clubs.

Harris said relating to white students can still be a challenge at times. She described herself, much like the line in her poem, as often being the only "brown" kid in her honors classes. She said she became aware of misconceptions that some students have about people of color.

"Sometimes I feel like I have to go out of my way to appear innocent even though I'm never doing anything," Harris said.

Junior classmate, Taylor Varnado, 17, shared Harris's frustrations about outside judgments. Varnado prepared a piece for the showcase about her own personal experiences with racism.

"I'm writing about how people consider black features beautiful except on black people," Varnado said as she recalled the many times she was told she is "okay for a black girl".

Students use Spoken Word Club as a platform to express and speak out against the things they live through and see. The program for the showcase said it perfectly, taking a quote from poet and writer Jeanette Winterson.

"A tough life needs a tough language—and that is what poetry is," Winterson said. "That is what literature offers—a language powerful enough to say how it is."

Twice a week, these students gather after school for Spoken Word Club, run by Peter Kahn, Adam Levin and Jay Lind. Poetry is at the forefront of everything this club does, but what it provides for the students goes way beyond this.

Sophomore, Kara Jackson, 16, said the club is more like a family. "You're surrounded by so many people who support you and people who want you to succeed," Jackson said.

Levin, 26, who graduated from Oak Park and River Forest High School, was a member of Spoken Word Club as a student. He recalled the structure that being a part of the club gave his life and credited hip-hop for saving his and many of his friends' lives.

"As a person I was very insecure, I was very self-conscious," he

said. "I felt like I didn't have a lot to offer the world and once I saw people respond positively to my art it made it a whole lot easier to be a person."

Jamael Clark, a 2009 graduate of Oak Park and River Forest High School, alum of Spoken Word Club and current student at University of Illinois at Chicago, comes back often to help with club workshops. He said when he first heard about the club he wanted nothing to do with it.

Clark said his hesitation came from self-advocacy issues. He believes building confidence in students is key to getting them involved. Once he joined the club he also noticed positive changes in other aspects of his life.

"I became this all around better person, not just through creativity, but even in the classroom," Clark said. "My grades got better and I was more engaged in the classroom as well."

Sophomore Levi Miller, 15, is also noticing these positive changes in his life.

"It's helped me so much overcome my anxiety and my self doubt," Miller said. "I can speak freely in front of people now, I feel like I have an open mindset to things."

Students in Spoken Word Club also have the opportunity to perform their poetry at the citywide competition, Louder Than A Bomb. This competition started almost 16 years ago and continues to grow immensely.

The first year, 60 students participated from four different schools. In 2015, the competition included more than 1,300 students from 140 Chicagoland area schools.

Louder Than A Bomb starts in February and lasts six weeks, narrowing down the competition until the finals in March. Last year was the first year the event was held at the Arie Crown Theatre in McCormick Place. With more than 4,000 seats, this was the biggest venue for LTAB yet.

The competition is hosted by the organization Young Chicago Authors. Kevin Coval started Young Chicago Authors in 2001 to give youth in Chicago a medium to share their stories. Coval and other teaching artists such as Levin lead writing, rapping and poetry workshops that are open to the public.

Levin also runs a similar after school program at Oak Park and River Forest called Hip-Hop Wing. As an extension of the Spoken Word Club, this program is for students who would like to put their poetry to music.

One recent workshop Levin taught in Hip-Hop Wing was about diss raps. He prompted the students to write about someone or something that they felt oppressed them. This group of teens is made up of mainly students of color and Levin said the majority of them chose to write about the oppression they feel from the police.

In these situations, Levin said he tries to listen to the student and their feelings. His role extends from an educator to a mentor in all aspects of their life.

"I want you to be a great writer," Levin said to his students. "I also want you to be a great human and I want you to be great toward other humans as well." ■

# MOSIAC

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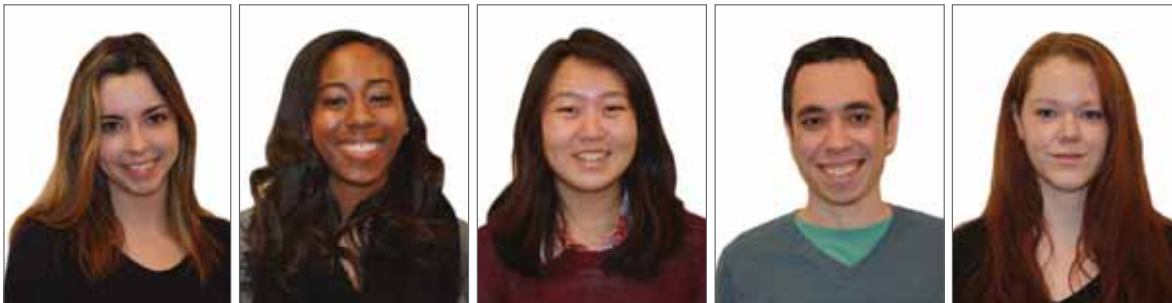
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