

Crossroads GPS

guidance, preparation & success

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WAYPOINTS Looking Back on the Common Thread

Esther Mellinger Stief, Executive Director

Normally my column, captioned The Road Ahead from the Directors Desk, covers new initiatives or current events at Crossroads, but for this issue I am having a conversation with **Sister Sandy Kiefer**, the common thread that connects all those who have been part of the Crossroads family. Since 1989, through periods of growth and seasons of challenge, Sr. Sandy has steadfastly supported young people on their journey through high school into college.

Q: When you reflect on the hundreds of young people you have worked with through Crossroads, can you identify some of the traits that scholars hold in common?

A: Our scholars are motivated and resilient. They are focused on using education as a way to improve their circumstances. They are inspiring to me because of their dedication and ability to persevere in the face of some major challenges. Plus, they are willing to push themselves outside of their comfort zones in order to learn and achieve.

Q: What are some of the most rewarding experiences you've had in your 32 years at Crossroads?

A: Every year, I love celebrating the accomplishments of our scholars at our achievement awards and being part of the senior graduation dinner. Hearing from alumni is really rewarding—finding out how they are doing now brings back memories of their time at Crossroads. So many of them have really “given back” to their communities and spent their lives making a difference in other people’s lives. I am so happy that there are now two members of our Board of Directors who are Crossroads alums and our Office Administrator is also an alum. It really brings things full circle.

Q: Anytime I talk with alumni, I hear Sr. Sandy stories—tales about how you sat students down when their grades were bad or when you felt like they weren’t working to potential and got them back on track. What’s your secret weapon?

A: Tough love. Building a relationship with the scholars is so important because they then will trust me and listen—they’ll hear me when I need to refocus them because they know I genuinely care about them. And I don’t give up—to me there is no such thing as giving up on a person.

Q: When you think back to your first years working with scholars and then think about the organization today, what are some of the ways Crossroads has changed most? At the same time, are there things that have not changed?

A: A hallmark of Crossroads has always been responding to scholars’ needs as they arise. And as we’ve increased the number of scholars we serve, there have been increased needs and we’ve responded with additional programs. As the staff grew, there were so many more voices, so many more ideas of how to meet the needs of the scholars, that Crossroads has continued to creatively and directly address emerging issues.



Sister Sandy Kiefer and Esther Mellinger Stief

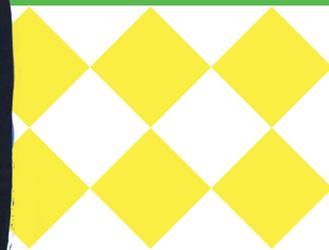
ALUMNI BY THE NUMBERS

620
ALUMNI

72%
HAVE EARNED OR ARE
COMPLETING THEIR
DEGREE

10 ARE
COLLEGE
COACHES &
MENTORS

A majority
of our alumni
are still
local!



It is fun to talk with graduates from 20 years ago who are astounded by all the opportunities today's scholars have. Lastly, the development of the board has been so important in Crossroads overall growth. I especially think about the ways Susie Gillespie and Dean Calland have invested so much of their leadership and resources into making Crossroads what it is today.

Q: Before Crossroads, you were a teacher and principal. Why do you love the field of education? What makes the education our scholars receive through our partner high schools so valuable and unique?

A: So, I originally didn't want to be an educator, I wanted to be a doctor. I was asked by my community to become a teacher and haven't turned back since. When you are a teacher, your reward is the response you get when the "lightbulb" goes off, or the ways you can help students who really want to learn think critically and explore what the world has to offer. I really love to teach science because of the inquiry and experimental nature of learning in that discipline. The opportunity our scholars have to be in a rigorous academic environment challenges them to go beyond what they might think they are capable of. Our schools, along with Crossroads support, don't allow our scholars to just settle or "get by."

Q: Over the years Crossroads has had a couple different taglines – first, "Changing Pittsburgh One Teenager at a Time," then "Turning Students into Scholars," and now, under our new rebranding, "Where Potential Finds its Path." They all capture an essential part of what Crossroads hopes to achieve. My question is this: to you, what is that essential thing that Crossroads wants to see happen for each of our scholars?

A: I think Crossroads has always been the place where potential finds its path. Our work has always been about creating ways for scholars to achieve their potential. And it is not just about providing support for academic pathways, but a much more holistic approach which is focused on having our scholars realize who they are as a person and the role they play within their community. So, the essential thing that Crossroads wants for every scholar is for them to be able to become fully who they were meant to be.

Q: Last question, what tagline would you write to summarize your 32 years working with Crossroads?

A: I hope it has been this: "Igniting young minds to learn with passion and live with hope."

CROSSROADS CONNECTIONS

Alumni and friends passionately committed to our mission

Ryan McCarthy '99 Crossroads Board of Directors



Ryan graduated from Central Catholic High School in 1999, a proud member of a hard-working family from the Spring Garden neighborhood of Pittsburgh's Northside. In 2003, he earned his Bachelor's in Biology at Penn State University, Main Campus, before deploying to Iraq with the United States Army. When he returned, he was awarded the Bronze Star and Combat Medical Badge for his service overseas and went on to earn his Juris Doctor from Georgetown University in Washington, DC in 2012.

Ryan is currently employed by Westinghouse Electric Company. Outside of work, Ryan loves to travel, read, exercise and reflect. He is an active member of the Crossroads Board of Directors, stating that he loves to give back and spend time with the staff and scholars. He said that scholars should strive endlessly to be a good person. *"Be kind, generous, intellectually curious and live with an open heart,"* he said. *"If you do this, good things will happen for you!"*

Brionna Street '12 Crossroads Office Administrator



Brionna is a graduate of Oakland Catholic High School and a driving force of the Crossroads family as the Crossroads Office Administrator. She handles not only the day-to-day operations, but also manages logistics for scholar applications, internal communications, events, and program and development needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Brionna assisted in developing the Let's Talk series where scholars and their families learn from each other through important life discussions. This program has since adapted to current needs and continues as a series throughout the year.

In addition to her career, Brionna is a proud mother of a beautiful 2-year-old son. She is also a licensed cosmetologist and coaches the Oakland Catholic Step Team (OC H.Y.P.E.). Her advice to other scholars: *"Always follow your heart, never falling into peer pressure or comparing your life to those of others."*

Marissa Park

**Mother of Alumni Rashad '16 and Darnell '19
Crossroads Board of Directors**

Marissa Park is the proud mother of three young men, two of whom were Crossroads scholars. Both Rashad and Darnell graduated from Central Catholic High School and have gone on to college. Rashad recently graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a Bachelor's in Communications and Rhetoric, earning a full scholarship as a Division I football player. He recently obtained his PA State Insurance License and started working for a life insurance company in Pittsburgh. Darnell is a current student at Point Park University and plans to enter the Film Conservatory next year.

Marissa is the Manager of Customer Relations at Direct Energy, offering electricity, natural gas and home services across the United States and Canada. Outside of her career, she is the National Co-Chair Black Origination for Leadership and Development, as well as the Founder of PowerUp! Toastmasters Club and Founder of the Pitt Football Parent Association. She joined the Crossroads Board of Directors in January 2021 and is a member of the Crossroads Marketing Committee.

Her sons, Rashad and Darnell, encourage scholars to go into a career that makes them happy and do what they enjoy. Being open and willing to try new things is important, especially when it comes to college and finding a career. *"Don't wait! You never know, you may find something you enjoy doing that you never knew you would."*



Malik Johnson '10

Crossroads Board of Directors

Malik graduated from Central Catholic in 2010, and went on to attend Robert Morris University. He received his B.A. in Accounting in 2014, and his Masters in Information Security from Robert Morris in 2015. Malik currently works at BDO USA, LLP, a public accounting firm, where he serves as the Manager for their Risk Advisory Services. When he's not working, you can find him involved in the community, volunteering with the Hill District Rebels (Youth Football Team), with Crossroads as a Mentor and Board Member, and serving as treasurer for the Central Catholic Cultural Network. Malik also enjoys watching sports, trying new restaurants, and traveling with his lovely wife.

If he could give two pieces of advice to Crossroads scholars, they would be: *"1. Be a solutions driven person. It is easy to identify a problem, but the most impactful people help drive resolution*

2. Surround yourself with people who are just as, or more successful than yourself, so that you are constantly challenged and working toward improvement."

Fun Fact Malik became an entrepreneur in 2020 when he started a freight delivery company in January. He went from two to six employees within eight months.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

Fred Green '93

"I love that I can affect the lives of hundreds by being that positive force in their lives."

Fred graduated from North Catholic High School in 1993. He attended Virginia State University, graduating in 1997 with a BS in Economics and Finance. He also earned his Masters in Educational Leadership from Concordia University in Portland. Fred currently works as a math teacher for the Trenton Board of Education in New Jersey and as a four-year president of the Teachers Leadership Team. He recently passed the Principals exam, so is looking forward to continuing his career as a Vice Principal. Fred is a happy father of three and is an active mentor, showing young men in his community that they are capable of great things, no matter where or how they've grown up.

Fun Fact Fred and his business partner started a medical supplies company in 2020, earning over \$1 million in sales for the first year!



Kenneth Blocker '99

Kenneth is a graduate of Central Catholic High School and earned his Bachelor's in Child Psychology from Duquesne University in 2003. He currently works for Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina as a Success Coach, helping 9th grade students transition into high school. Ken is married and a happy father of three daughters. He has worked as a football coach for both college and high school teams, and established the 1st and Goal Program to assist athletes with their personal, social and emotional developments. His advice to scholars:

"Trust the process, take one's time and use every unique experience as a way to mold one's motivation for learning. Don't Compare...Compete!"

Fun Facts Kenneth was awarded the iHeartRadio "I am Carolina Black History" award for his service in his community. As a football coach, he saw that 100 percent of his students graduated.

Quiana Golphin Ph.D, NCC '96

Dr. Golphin graduated from Serra Catholic High School in 1996. She attended Saint Vincent College, graduating with a degree in Psychology. She earned her MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Indiana University of PA and her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision from Waynesburg University. She is currently employed at The University of Pittsburgh, preparing students to practice rehabilitation and mental health counseling through the Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Master's Program.

Dr. Golphin is a member of several counseling professional organizations. Most notably, she is the 2020-2021 President for the Pennsylvania Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (PASERVIC), which is a division of the Pennsylvania Counseling Association (PCA). Her involvement with PASERVIC further supports her desire to ensure that the spiritual and religious values of clients are honored. As a licensed, ordained minister, Dr. Golphin uses her platform to advocate for counseling among marginalized and Christian populations. She also opened the Seasons Counseling Center, which is an affiliate of her home church, Deliverance Baptist Church in Wilksburg, PA.

Advice to scholars: *"Being a Crossroads scholar positions you for many opportunities to network and grow. Crossroads is setting you up to actualize your fullest potential by helping to open doors you may have never imagined you could walk through."*





Brandi Cheatom '01

Brandi graduated from Oakland Catholic High School in 2001 and earned her Bachelor's Degree in Communications from Saint Vincent College in 2005. She currently works as the Office Administrator and Scholarship Coordinator for the Extra Mile Education Foundation in Pittsburgh. She provides the main support for daily operations, families and schools. In her free time, Brandi loves to sing, dance and cook, as well as always remaining a loving and caring person.



Last year, Crossroads awarded Brandi with the Crossroads Alumni Award for her love and dedication to her community, students and incoming Crossroads scholars. When asked what she would say to scholars, she said that they should never do anything without God and to dream big. *"Walk out on faith and conquer the world. You are more than enough. You have everything you need to do the work you are meant to do...what God has for you is for you."* She continued to say that sometimes others may not see or understand someone else's vision, but their agreement is not necessary in walking in that purpose.

Maurice Speaks '04



Maurice is a graduate of Central Catholic High School. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Social Work in 2009 and his Masters in Social work in 2011, both from the University of Pittsburgh. Maurice is currently employed at Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise (PACE) as the Project and Finance Coordinator. In addition to assisting the Director of Finance and Administration with managing the accounts, he also acts as the program manager for the African American Executive Coaching Program.

Mr. Speaks says that every scholar must take full advantage of what Crossroads has to offer. He said that the guidance he received in high school was instrumental in getting him where he is today.

Fun Fact In his free time, Maurice loves playing guitar and long distance running. His ultimate goal is to complete an ultra-marathon!

Tamara Boyd '05

Tamara attended North Catholic High School and went on to study Fashion Design at Philadelphia University and earned her MS in Professional Counseling from Carlow University.

She is a therapist for Familylinks in Pittsburgh, providing mental health services to youth through the School Partnership Program. She recently passed the National Counselor's Exam and is moving forward in the process to obtain her license as a professional counselor.

Prior to her career as a therapist, Tamara worked as a Design Artist for Aero Tech Designs. In 2018, she founded her own design firm, T.Rochelle Designs LLC, which specializes in providing fashion design services to apparel manufacturers and retailers. While studying fashion design, she studied abroad in Rome, Italy for a semester and was acknowledged by the Philadelphia Inquirer during Philadelphia University's Annual Spring Fashion Show in 2009 titled "Grade A For Inspiration."



Not only is she balancing both careers, but she also volunteers in the community of East Pittsburgh. She co-founded the East Pittsburgh Basketball Clinic, which was awarded the Mon Valley Initiative's 2020 Community Partner of the Year Award. As a member of Manna from On High Ministries, she is the acting president of the girls auxiliary youth group, Talitha Cumi. In June 2020, Talitha Cumi was able to collaborate with Pittsburgh Black Nurses in Action by making facemasks as part of COVID-19 Safety Kits. These kits were donated to the council of East Pittsburgh to distribute throughout the community.

MORE AMAZING ALUMNI...



Sherry Williams '06

Sherry graduated from Oakland Catholic High School in 2006 and earned her Bachelor's in Pre-Med from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2010. She is currently employed at ImbuTec as the Executive Assistant to the CEO and Service Coordinator where she is responsible for government contract execution and managing commercial relations and day-to-day needs for the company.

Outside of work, Sherry sits on the Board of Directors for Friends & Family Initiative, Inc., and is the acting Director of Communications. Sherry and her husband have four beautiful children, three who were adopted last year. They also celebrated one year of marriage together and bought their first home! Sherry is looking to build a real estate portfolio and enjoys gardening and traveling.

Advice to Crossroads Scholars: *"Take your time to figure life out. Trust your gut and take healthy chances in life because they have some of the best rewards."*

Rachael Banks '07

Rachael graduated from Serra Catholic High School in 2007, and went on to attend the University of Notre Dame. After graduating with a degree in Arabic and International Studies in 2011, she decided to pursue her Masters in Community and Economic Development from Penn State University. Rachael currently works as the Assistant Director of Admissions at Penn State, helping the university recruit diverse students, and creating programs aimed at improving college readiness for young adults. She is passionate about advising families as they move through the college admissions process and providing encouragement and support when needed.

In her spare time, you'll find Rachael relaxing with her boyfriend, or spending time with her family and godchildren. She is a self-proclaimed "dog mom," and in her own words, "There are more photos of him in my phone than anyone or anything else."

Fun Fact She is poker wiz and often plays in a competitive league!



Darius McGhee '10

"Experience is the best teacher and Hindsight is 2020... Everything you are growing through now will make sense to you later on down the road. Embrace the challenges you face, as they will make you stronger."

Darius is a graduate of Central Catholic High School, Class of 2010. He attended college at Saint Vincent College and graduated in 2014 with his B.A. in Sociology. Darius also earned his M.S. in Education from Saint Vincent College in 2018, and anticipates completing his Doctorate in Urban Education from the University of Pittsburgh by 2023. He is currently Freshmen Dean and the Assistant Freshmen Football Coach at Central Catholic High School. Darius assists Freshmen students with their transition into the school, helping them get acclimated to a new high school environment. He also works as a Summer Program Coordinator for Schenley Heights Community Development Program.

Fun Fact Darius was awarded 1st Team ALL-conference Offensive Tackle for three consecutive years at Central. He also was awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award by Crossroads in 2019.



Dwayne Coleman '12

Dwayne graduated from Central Catholic High School in 2012. After attending Case Western Reserve University, and earning his B.A. in Political Science and International Studies in 2016, he enrolled in law school at St. John's University School of Law in New York. Dwayne was accepted on full-ride through the Ron Brown Scholarship, and anticipates completing his J.D. (Juris Doctor) in 2022.

In addition to his studies, Dwayne is involved in several organizations, including the Moot Court Honor Society, the Black Law Students Association, the Student Bar Association Finance Committee, and the International Law Society. When he has a free second, Dwayne enjoys spending time in the kitchen, cooking and baking, and (occasionally) playing video games.

His advice for Crossroads scholars: *“Stay focused and have goals. Procrastination is real and is always tempting, but if you set real and achievable goals, it is easier to stay focused.”*

Katie Gestiehr '14

Katie graduated from Bishop Canevin High School in 2014. She attended Chatham University, and earned her degree in Nursing in 2018. She currently lives in Pittsburgh, and is the Senior Professional Staff Nurse at UPMC Children's Hospital. Her favorite part of her job is having the opportunity to help kids and their families in their greatest time of need. Katie is also proud to work with all of the amazing healthcare professionals she interacts with on a daily basis and to be a part of groundbreaking innovative care.

When she's not at the hospital, Katie really enjoys being outdoors, camping and hiking. Recently, Katie adopted an Australian Shepherd, who she named Mia, and she really keeps her busy!

Fun Fact In the last year, Katie became a Certified Pediatric Nurse after completing her exams.



Zachary Shaffer '15

Zachary graduated from Central Catholic High School in 2015, and enrolled at Allegheny College. He earned his B.S. in Computer Science in 2019. Zachary is currently a Software Developer for PNC Financial Group in Pittsburgh, and works to build quick and effective proof of concept solutions to corporate and institutional banking problems. His personal work has focused on machine learning and artificial intelligence applications for financial technologies and solutions.

When he's not working, Zachary volunteers as a liturgical musician with the parish that he grew up near and attended as a kid, Good Shepherd (now St. Joseph the Worker Parish). He also enjoys creative outlets, like playing and creating video games, watching and creating films, and (safely!) socializing with friends.

Here's Zachary's advice for Crossroads scholars: *“Life is going to throw a lot of things at you. At many points in my life, I felt completely defeated by unfortunate circumstances, my own fears, my anxieties...often, it felt impossible. My advice to everyone, whether you're a Crossroads scholar, a mentor, a counselor, or an alum, is to take the time to catch your breath when you need to. Take a nap, take a walk, listen to a new album, try something new and exciting, or take some time off of work if you can. When your phones are low on battery, most people will charge them before they shut off so that they can keep using them. Why would you treat your body, mind, or soul any worse?”*





The Calland Center
6901 Lynn Way
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15208



ALUMNI! WE NEED YOU!

Crossroads scholars are the heart of this organization and even after they graduate, we look forward to celebrating their life accomplishments. We want to learn everything we can about our alumni, but we need some help!

Visit our website at www.crossroadsfoundation.org and fill out the "Alumni Update" form to tell us more about you! If you know someone who was a Crossroads scholar, encourage them to reconnect so we can celebrate their accomplishments as well.

FOLLOW US Search for CrossroadsPGH on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter



All alumni are also invited to join the "CrossroadsPGH Alumni" Facebook page!

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