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# ThreeSixty

Minnesota Teens Report Stories & Issues That Matter



## Nekima Levy-Pounds

The Minneapolis NAACP president and activist talks Jamar Clark, racial tension and more.

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## DO TEENS CARE ABOUT POLITICS & VOTING?

And if so, what can they do about it?

■ Pages 11-12, 19



### ALSO INSIDE:

Teens & civic engagement, pages 9-15, 18-21

The problem with skin bleaching, page 23

Body image: not just a women's issue, page 27



REAL STUDENTS. REAL STORIES.

# ThreeSixty

Volume 6 • Issue 2

JOURNALISM

**Contributors in this issue:** Yusra Abdi, Ubah Medical Academy • Aidan Berg, Minneapolis Southwest HS • Lucas Johnson, St. Paul Academy and Summit School • Sebastian Alfonzo, St. Paul Central HS • Zekriah Chaudhry, Minneapolis South HS • Skyler Kuczaboski, St. Paul Harding Senior HS • Zaid Khan, Anoka HS • Marissa Abara, Wayzata HS • Ann Jerry, Blaine HS • Va Yang, St. Paul Johnson Senior HS • Erianna Jiles, Como Park Senior HS • Danielle Wong, Eastview HS • Katia Kozachok, Perpich Arts High School • Mina Yuan, Wayzata HS • Selam Berhea, Blaine HS

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## ThreeSixty Journalism

Mail 5057, 2115 Summit Ave.

St. Paul, MN 55105

[www.threesixtyjournalism.org](http://www.threesixtyjournalism.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/threesixtyjournalism>

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**Bao Vang,**  
Engagement Coordinator



**Chad Caruthers,**  
Executive Director



**Miles Trump,**  
Program Manager

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**Ex officio member:** Dr. Terence Langan, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of St. Thomas

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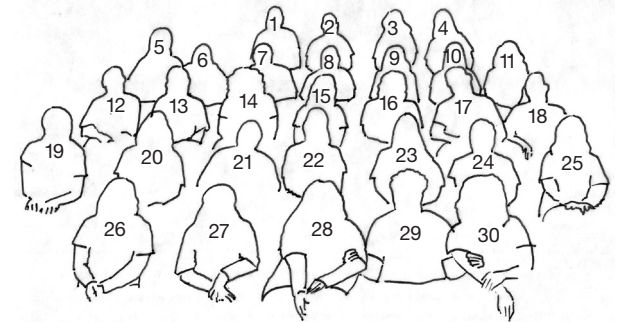
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PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ThreeSixty Journalism students, staff and volunteers after a News Team meeting in December 2015.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers                    | Erin Golden (volunteer)   |
| 2. ThreeSixty Program Manager Miles Trump                          | 12. Minnesota Public Radio associate producer Britta Greene (volunteer) |
| 3. ThreeSixty Engagement Coordinator Bao Vang                      | 13. Marissa Abara   |
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| 5. Yusra Abdi  | 15. Star Tribune reporter Jessie Van Berkel (volunteer)                 |
| 6. Salma Ali   | 16. Star Tribune editor Katie Humphrey (volunteer)                      |
| 7. Pioneer Press reporter Fred Melo (volunteer)                    | 17. Star Tribune reporter Libor Jany (volunteer)                        |
| 8. Zekriah Chaudhry  | 18. Sebastian Alfonzo   |
| 9. Shay Radhakrishnan  | 19. Skyler Kuczaboski   |
| 10. Va Yang  | 20. Erica Dao,  |
| 11. Star Tribune reporter  | senior marketing  |



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| communications specialist at Our World Shops, Inc. (volunteer)                                | 24. Katia Kozachok   |
| 21. Daniela Garcia  | 25. Minnesota Public Radio associate producer Marcheta Fornoff |
| 22. Kristy Ornelas  | 26. Melisa Robles-Oliver                                       |
| 23. Erin Lillienkrantz, account coordinator at Bellmont Partners Public Relations (volunteer) | 27. Bayan Algazi   |
|   | 28. Jennifer Delgado   |
|   | 29. Nesani Sabal   |
|   | 30. Louisa Akoto   |

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**Standing out in IT and computing** Programs and resources exist for young women interested in the male-dominated fields. ■ 7

**Teens + Civic Engagement** ThreeSixty high school journalists tell the stories of teens playing an active role in society — whether that means voting, starting a business, sharing with others, swaying lawmakers or creating change from the streets. ■ 9-15, 18-21

**ThreeSixty Focus on... Nekima Levy-Pounds** As part of a new series that takes a deeper dive into the life of Minnesota newsmakers and difference-makers, one ThreeSixty journalist sits down with Nekima Levy-

Pounds, the president of the Minneapolis NAACP, a leader in Black Lives Matter, an attorney and a University of St. Thomas law professor, to talk Jamar Clark, racial tension, young people and more. ■ 16

**The problem with skin bleaching** Two ThreeSixty journalists write about the dangerous effects of skin bleaching and the cultural pressures to look lighter that some dark-skinned women face. ■ 23

**The mental illness stigma** In the Somali community, culture can be a barrier to receiving treatment for a mental illness. ■ 26

**The quest for more muscle** Body image isn't just a female issue. It affects a number of young men, as well. ■ 27



## NOTEWORTHY

### About the ThreeSixty Scholar Award

Each year, high school seniors who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholar award—a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas. Currently, there are four ThreeSixty scholars attending St. Thomas.



#### **Amira Warren-Yearby, 2015 Scholar**

In her first semester of college, Warren-Yearby, a freshman, became actively involved in Black Empowerment Student Alliance, Swing Dance Club and Concert Choir at the University of St. Thomas. She also works on campus at the Opus College of Business. Off campus, Warren-Yearby also has been involved with WCCO's Urban Perspectives show.



#### **Deborah Honore, 2014 Scholar**

Honore, a sophomore, is gaining video production experience while working for the University of St. Thomas videographer. In January, Honore will travel to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to film a documentary on the relationship between Ethiopian churches and poverty in the country. The documentary in Ethiopia, where Honore was born, is part of a college project.



#### **Simeon Lancaster, 2013 Scholar**

Lancaster, a junior, returned in December from Morocco, where he spent four months studying journalism and freelancing with Round Earth Media, a 2014 Peabody Award winning news organization. Lancaster spent time reporting on medical students' nationwide protest — Al Jazeera published his work — and the government's crackdown on human rights organizations.



#### **Grace Pastoor, 2012 Scholar**

After spending her summer as an intern at the Duluth News Tribune, Pastoor, a senior, spent the past semester serving as the production editor at TommieMedia, the University of St. Thomas' student-produced news website. Pastoor has been named director — the highest position — for the spring semester. She also serves as an assistant adviser to high school students on The Rubicon, the St. Paul Academy and Summit School newspaper.

# A world of opportunity at ThreeSixty Journalism

## OPPORTUNITY.

My job at ThreeSixty Journalism is to think about opportunity for students, in some form, every single day.

How can we at ThreeSixty offer better opportunities for students to learn the craft of journalism? In what ways can we help students discover their voice and seize on their passion for telling stories? How can we use journalism to open doors that might've been previously closed to students?

Whether you're picking up this magazine for the first time, or you're a longtime supporter of ThreeSixty, you've probably figured out what general opportunities we offer.

We teach students the craft of journalism.

We make them better writers.

We help them gain confidence in their skills as communicators.

We publish their work in our magazine (thanks for reading!) and in the Star Tribune and the St. Paul Pioneer Press — the two largest newspapers in Minnesota — at least once per year.

We work one-on-one with them on their college essays.

And, we give one full-tuition scholarship to a ThreeSixty student each year to study Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas.

ThreeSixty, however, offers many more opportunities, both small and large, to students who take part in our program.

Let's take a look at some of the lesser-known impacts of being a ThreeSixty student.

## DISCOVER YOUR VOICE

What's your story?

ThreeSixty equips teens to go out and tell other people's stories — one of the fundamental tenets of journalism.



**By Miles Trump**  
Program  
Manager,  
ThreeSixty  
Journalism

Students learn who they are in relation to the world around them.

We also recognize that all of our students have a story to tell. All of our students' voices matter.

With those two principles in mind, we at ThreeSixty give students the opportunity to discover their voice — and how it fits in with the chorus of other voices in our world — and teach students the skills to tell their own story, all in the hope they'll tell the stories of others with more confidence and ability than before.

## MEET THE PERSON WHO MAY HIRE YOU SOMEDAY

When I worked at ThreeSixty Journalism as a University of St. Thomas student several years ago, I crossed paths at summer camp with an editor at the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

The following summer, that same editor hired me as an intern reporter at the Pioneer Press. And that internship kicked off my journalism career in a big way.

Similar to the example above, ThreeSixty puts high school students in a unique position to connect with, work with and develop relationships with professionals who might be able to help

*All of our students*

*have a story to tell.*

*All of our students'*

*voices matter.*

them find internships — and jobs — in the future.

First, we bring in top-of-the-line professionals to work directly with students. Several of these people are leaders in their newsrooms and in positions to hire interns — or to influence their hiring manager's decisions.

Secondly, those hirers at times turn to us, looking for talented ThreeSixty alums and college students to fill their internships.

Recently, ThreeSixty alums have interned at KSTP, The Current (Minnesota Public Radio), Round Earth Media in Morocco and the City of St. Paul Communications Department, among other places. Not to mention, in partnership with the Minnesota Newspaper Association and Pohlad Family Foundation, ThreeSixty has offered a nice little paid internship for a couple of graduating seniors.

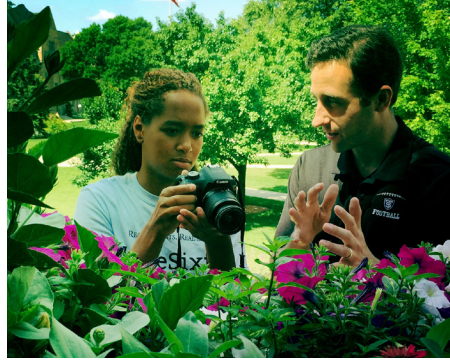
Students interested in seriously pursuing a journalism career need internships to get jobs. ThreeSixty can provide a bridge to the professionals who might one day hire you for an internship.

## LEVERAGE JOURNALISM OPPORTUNITIES

Young Reporters Series. Asian American Journalists Association's JCAMP. National Association of Black Journalists' JSHOP.

These are all examples of fantastic journalism opportunities that several ThreeSixty students have taken advantage of alongside their commitment to ThreeSixty. One former ThreeSixty student's JCAMP experience brought her to Washington, D.C. Another's took her to Boston. A handful of students honed their skills at JSHOP in the Twin Cities this summer, and soon (if not

**IMPACTS** continued on page 8



# 4 reasons why you (yes, you!) should apply for summer camp

IT BECAME CRYSTAL CLEAR to me in high school what I wanted to study once I got into college. I thank my summer camp experiences for that.

I reserved that break from school to explore different careers at some of the hundreds of programs offered to Twin Cities teens each year. Specifically, broadcasting and Spanish camps struck a chord with me. They amplified my love for each area of study and prompted me to major in broadcast journalism and Spanish when I went on to attend the University of St. Thomas.

Working for ThreeSixty Journalism, I now have the honor of being part of a team that creates enriching summer programs that have lasting impacts on local students. With our 2016 summer camps, we plan once again to inspire a whole new group of young writers and communicators to tell their stories and the stories of their communities with passion and pride.

Here are four reasons why you should apply, right now, for one of ThreeSixty's summer camps.



**By Bao Vang**  
Engagement  
Coordinator,  
ThreeSixty  
Journalism

## Take advantage of this opportunity!

Get the most out of your summer — join ThreeSixty today! Meet great people; learn new skills that will help you in high school, college and beyond; experience life on a college campus; and complete your college essay. Apply for ThreeSixty Journalism's Rookie Journalist Camp and ThreeSixty Journalism's News Reporter Academy TODAY!

To apply, go to [www.threesixtyjournalism.com/summercamps](http://www.threesixtyjournalism.com/summercamps) and follow the directions to fill out the application. Summer camps take place on the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul campus. Application deadline is May 23, 2016. Space is limited, and it is a competitive application process.

Questions? Contact me at [baovang@stthomas.edu](mailto:baovang@stthomas.edu) or at 651-962-5225.

## 1 UNLEASH THE POWER OF STORYTELLING AND GET PEOPLE TALKING!

It's not every day that teens are getting published in a magazine that is delivered to 10,000 of their peers across the state of Minnesota, posted online on ThreeSixty Journalism's website and shared via social media.

But that's exactly the opportunity you'll have during one of ThreeSixty's summer camps.



A select group of students also will be chosen to have their stories printed in the St. Paul Pioneer Press and the Star Tribune, the two largest newspapers in Minnesota. Those two papers have a combined readership of more than 1 million people per week.

## 2 CONNECT WITH AMAZING PEOPLE!

When you put a group of young people together who have a passion for storytelling, something magical happens. They forget about where each goes to school, they forget about their economic and social backgrounds, and they forget about the colors of their skin.

At ThreeSixty, we provide a safe place for teens to connect with others and feel comfortable to share their thoughts and opinions about what's going on in their lives and their communities.

"ThreeSixty Journalism has given me the best of friends," says one alumni.

In addition, students inevitably will have the chance to connect with really awesome professionals. The vast majority of our volunteers are experienced journalists, speakers and media experts who take time out of their busy schedules to support, guide and coach you.

Other volunteers, some of them Minnesota "celebrities" and newsmakers, make time for students to interview them. Last summer, ThreeSixty intern Lujain Al-Khawi sat down with Minnesota Twins player Byron Buxton in the Target Field dugout for nearly 30 minutes to interview him for a story. Wow!

## 3 COMPETE FOR A FULL-TUITION SCHOLARSHIP TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS!

Each year, one ThreeSixty student receives a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to study Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas. That's worth almost \$150,000 in tuition!

All students who complete at least one summer program are eligible to apply.

For ThreeSixty scholars, the ThreeSixty connection continues throughout their time at St. Thomas. We encourage our alumni to swing by our offices to catch up, learn about ways to give back and check in about new internship and job openings.

We also provide opportunities for students to network with others from the impressively large ThreeSixty alumni association, many of whom are now media professionals. ThreeSixty stays connected with program alumni personally, academically and socially throughout college, and into their professional lives.

## 4 BOOST YOUR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS!

All ThreeSixty students have the capacity to attend college. Some face bigger challenges than others to get there. At ThreeSixty, we break down the barriers by making sure students gain the skills necessary to succeed in college and in their careers.

That's because our programs teach more than writing. We emphasize learning the ability to be aware of your strengths and limitations, as well as showcasing your uniqueness. We help students understand goals and give them strategies to achieve them. We encourage students to see things from different points of view. We give them opportunities to establish and maintain positive relationships with professional adults. And we provide numerous examples of the importance of responsible decision-making, which has the potential to affect all of us.

How do we know our students are college- and career-ready by the time they graduate from high school? Ninety-five percent of last year's high school seniors are now enrolled in college.



**NOTEWORTHY**

*"I really enjoyed working with such bright, motivated students. Bao [Vang, the engagement coordinator,] and Miles [Trump, the program manager,] did a great job of coordinating and keeping everyone on task, and at the end of both days, I felt like I had made an impact."*

—Erin Golden, reporter at Star Tribune and a volunteer at ThreeSixty

*"I liked empowering these kids, and making them feel like they mattered."*

—Whitney Oachs, University of St. Thomas sophomore and a volunteer at ThreeSixty

*"I love to watch young journalists learn about our craft. I'm proud to have the opportunity to share it."*

—Jocelina Joiner, Manager, News and Content at LAKANA and a volunteer at ThreeSixty

# QUOTABLES

**What people are saying about ThreeSixty Journalism**

*"I'm eternally grateful for ThreeSixty and all the opportunities I have received because of it."*

—Maya Shelton-Davies, ThreeSixty alumna and freshman at the University of St. Thomas

*"I feel I have a lot of friends here. And I've become really used to coming here [to the University of St. Thomas campus], and it's kind of like something for me to do. And it's also because it makes me feel like I have a purpose ... There are a lot of valuable skills (learned) here."*

—Shay Radhakrishnan, ThreeSixty summer camp graduate and News Team journalist

**"I continued with ThreeSixty because I love writing, and they provide more than just writing skills, or ways to be a better writer, like career opportunities, school options and mentors that help you with whatever—even just a place where you can safely talk about what is going on around the world."**

—Skyler Kuczaboski, ThreeSixty Journalism summer camp graduate and News Team journalist



# A step toward a career path

## STEP-UP jobs program connects young people with internships, experience

WHILE LIVING IN ETHIOPIA several years ago, Lensa Gudeta's brother had a heart issue that made it difficult for him to breathe.

Due to a lack of resources in her home country, she said, her family had to travel all the way to India so her brother could have surgery.

This was when Gudeta knew she wanted to become a surgeon.

"I want to go back to Ethiopia and help people like my brother," said Gudeta, 17, who attends Minneapolis South High School.

Gudeta is now an intern at Hennepin County Medical Center, an internship she received through a Minneapolis program that helps



By Marissa Abara  
Wayzata High School

several hundred local young people gain career experience and workforce training before enrolling in college.

STEP-UP Achieve, part of the the City of Minneapolis' STEP-UP program, is a summer jobs program directed by AchieveMpls, a nonprofit partner of the Minneapolis Public Schools district that helps students become college- and career-ready.



MARISSA ABARA / THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Matthew Vue, a program associate at STEP-UP Achieve and a former STEP-UP participant.



MARISSA ABARA / THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Lensa Gudeta, 17, is a Minneapolis South High School student who interns at Hennepin County Medical Center, a position she received through STEP-UP, a jobs program for young Minneapolis people. Gudeta hopes to become a surgeon, she says.

One of the country's premiere youth employment programs, according to the program's website, STEP-UP Achieve matches students such as Gudeta with high-quality paid summer internships in 160 local businesses, nonprofits and other agencies.

"STEP-UP has helped me get this internship and it has helped me with gaining more experience and getting more money to save for college," Gudeta said. "It has also helped me determine what I want for my career."

Since its founding in 2004, 17,000 to 20,000 students have successfully gone through STEP-UP, according to Matthew Vue, a STEP-UP program associate. STEP-UP Achieve places 800 Minneapolis youth in

internships per year and more than 4,000 students apply every year.

STEP-UP Achieve gives internship opportunities to urban students ages 16-21, providing experience in their careers of interest. STEP-UP's other program, Discover, is geared toward 14- and 15-year-olds. Students' households must meet certain income guidelines for students to be eligible to apply.

Vue, a former STEP-UP participant and a recent college graduate, describes the program as an outlet for students to explore their interests, to challenge themselves and to enhance their skills.

"(STEP-UP) not only enhances their work life and academic life," Vue said, "it gives them overall life skills in general of how to interact

with folks in your community, knowing business etiquettes, time management and how to navigate the Cities. Just overall life skills."

STEP-UP has five career pipelines that students can choose: financial services, health, legal services, outdoors and STEM. Students who are admitted into the program go through work readiness training, which includes creating a strong resume, practicing through mock interviews and learning how to communicate professionally. Based on their skills and interest, and the needs of the employer, students will be matched up with jobs, according to STEP-UP's website.

On top of earning up to \$2,000 in their internship, students get the chance to work with mentors, advance their career opportunities and network with professionals.

**AN ALUMNA'S PERSPECTIVE**  
Felicia Johnson, who was in the program in 2008 and 2009, describes **STEP-UP** continued on page 8

*"My experience with (STEP-UP) was better than I could ever imagine, and, I mean, it still affects me to this day, how great of an experience I had."*

—Felicia Johnson, a former STEP-UP participant



# Standing out in IT and computing

## Resources exist for young women interested in careers in technology

DEVAN SAYLES, A BUSINESS application analyst at General Mills, doesn't have to look far for a mentor in her field.

Her mother was in the information technology profession, just as Sayles is. But her mom wasn't her primary motivator.

"If she tried to influence me into going into technology," Sayles said of her mother, "she was super sneaky about it, to the point where I don't ever really remember her trying to tell me, 'You should go into technology and computer science.'"

Her motivation was her own personal interest: "In high school is where I really figured out, 'Wow, I like this programming thing.'"

Sayles oversees web developers for pillsbury.com, a division of General Mills, a position in which she benefits from her background in computer science. But her career path hasn't always been smooth.

"I don't think the job search is the struggle; the struggle starts earlier," she said.

Information technology is a largely male-dominated industry. However, resources and opportunities exist for young women looking to enter the field.

The percentage of women in computing fell to 26 percent in 2013 from 35 percent in 1990, according to the American Association of University Women. Certain careers have traditionally been stereotyped for certain

technology is not for them — it's for boys," Sayles said.

### 'CLASS ... FULL OF DUDES'

Some computer science classes in high school, as well as in college, can be full of males, and "women feel like, 'Everyone else around me is smarter than me. I'm just this impostor,' so they second-guess their skills and their abilities," Sayles said.

Sayles took AP programming classes in high school, though, which "was a huge advantage," she said. She said those classes made the transition into college easier.

She remembers her first day in her college Intro to Programming class. She walked in and noticed there were "about 100 males and only a handful of girls." It left her thinking, "Wow, this class is full of dudes," she said.

But the programming classes she took in high school gave her a "bit more confidence," she said.

### COMPUTING PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

High school programs, such as those offered by Advance IT Minnesota, help break through those gender barriers. The Minnesota Aspirations for Women In Computing Awards Program, one of Advance IT Minnesota's programs, honors young women at the high-school level for their computing-related achievements and interests throughout the Twin Cities.

Ariana Pooley, a Macalester College freshman who studies Computer Science, Mathematics and Data Science, was a 2015

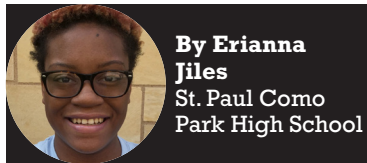
national runner-up and a 2014 Minnesota runner-up in the awards program. It has opened doors for Pooley, giving her access to a community of other women.

"Before you receive the award, you might think, 'Oh, I'm not good enough,'" Pooley said. "... Then you receive the award, it's reality — like 'Wow, if I'm good enough to receive the award, I'm on par with everyone else.'"

Pooley says girls interested in computing should not get discouraged by feelings of inadequacy.

"Even if they [young women] feel like they're not qualified, they should apply [to programs] anyway," Pooley said, "because that's a part of the reason why not as many girls are in computer science, because they don't feel like they're good enough."

**IT INDUSTRY** *continued on page 8*



By Erianna Jiles  
St. Paul Como Park High School

genders, and technology seems to be one of them.

"In middle school, in high school, girls start to get this impression that



Sayles



A group of high school girls from across the Twin Cities and Minnesota pose for a photo during Advance IT Minnesota's annual Sustaining Passion, Ambition and Resolve for Career Success (SPARCS) camp at Macalester College and Metropolitan State University technology camp in June. The camp included an introduction into coding, analytics, gaming, tech gadgets, post-secondary education, professional skills development and more.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACALESTER COLLEGE DEWITT WALLACE LIBRARY





PHOTO COURTESY OF ACHIEVEMPLS

Felicia Johnson poses for a photo with former Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, whose office she used to intern at through STEP-UP, during the 2014 Annual Partner Breakfast.

#### STEP-UP from page 6

STEP-UP as an amazing experience that still impacts her today. She first heard about the program when program leaders came to her sophomore history class.

“... I think that for everyone at that time, the most interesting aspect of the program was that you could have a paid internship at that age,” said Johnson, 22. “So that’s how I heard about the program. And my experience with it was better than I could ever imagine, and, I mean, it still affects me to this day, how great of an experience I had.”

Johnson held a STEP-UP internship at Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, an insurance company, her first year. Her second year with the program, in 2009, she worked in then-Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak’s office.

“I had the greatest experience,” said Johnson, who took calls, went to press conferences, scheduled

meetings and more during her time at the mayor’s office.

Using the networking skills she says she’s learned from STEP-UP, Johnson is now working as a program associate for a study abroad program in Uppsala, Sweden. Her work includes scheduling trips and planning activities for students.

“In a couple weeks, we’re going to go up to the north of Sweden and go dogsledding and to an ice hotel,” Johnson said over the phone from Sweden in the fall.

Johnson eventually plans to return from Sweden. And she has high hopes. The Macalester College graduate is looking at going to graduate school to study economics.

“After that, I want to move back to Minneapolis,” she said, “and I think it would be really awesome if I could have the opportunity to run for mayor.”

#### CAREER GOALS

After her STEP-UP internship at

Hennepin County Medical Center, Gudeta was hired by the hospital to stay on as an intern during the school year. She also has spent the past three years volunteering at the medical center.

On Tuesdays and Fridays, Gudeta works at the information desk, where she assists people, makes badges for visitors and delivers flowers to patients. She also has other duties at the hospital. She works three times per week and volunteers twice per week.

Gudeta didn’t know much English when she first arrived in Minneapolis from Ethiopia three years ago. Since then, she said, working at the hospital has helped improve her English and her confidence. It also has helped her in school, she said.

“I spend more time than I used to on homework,” Gudeta said, “because I know that to be a doctor, you have to work hard in school.”

*“A lot of what (high school females) don’t realize is that those skills and interests can become awesome careers.”*

—Devan Sayles, business application analyst at General Mills

#### IT INDUSTRY from page 7

Russell Fraenkel, interim executive director of Advance IT Minnesota, says about 25 percent of women are actually employed or engaged in the IT industry. There’s a demand for more women, but there’s also a general talent gap in the IT field regardless of gender, he said.

“One sure way to get more people into the pipeline is just attract more women,” he said.

Many companies have more job

openings than qualified applicants for positions in IT, creating more opportunities than ever for women to enter the industry. While college computer science classes remain heavily male, female coders and web developers have new resources available to them, often as early as high school.

“A lot of what (high school females) don’t realize,” Sayles said, “is that those skills and interest can become awesome careers.”

#### For more information

For more information on Advance IT Minnesota and its programs for young people, go online to <http://advanceitmn.org/for-middle-high-school-students/>

#### IMPACTS from page 3

already), you should hear another of our students on Minnesota Public Radio, reporting a story for the Young Reporters Series.

In many ways, ThreeSixty can act as a launching pad for your journalism career.

#### SINK YOUR TEETH INTO THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

When I was a high school student, attending college seemed difficult to envision.

How was I going to live on my own? How would I scrape together the money to pay for school? Could I even get accepted to college?

Is this for me?

Then I took my first visit to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. Everything changed. I realized college wasn’t only for me — it was a place where I could flourish.

That’s exactly what we want for every student who comes through our doors — to know that you (yes, you!) can succeed in college, too. At ThreeSixty, you have an opportunity

to sink your teeth into the college experience. You can explore the campus. Eat the food. Hang out in the quad. Talk with admissions staff. Buy the gear. Live a portion of the college lifestyle, all while learning about journalism.

It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, really.

#### JOIN US!

If you’re a high school student and you’re still reading this column, I’m glad. That means you must be remotely interested in something I wrote in the previous 800-some words.

All of the things I mentioned above truly take shape in one of ThreeSixty’s summer camps. So, here’s your call to action: Join us this summer and come find out for yourself.

You won’t regret it.

In fact, this will be one opportunity you won’t want to miss.

*Want to know more about summer camp? Flip to page 4.*



How  
teenagers  
are playing  
an active role  
in society

## TEENS + CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

IT BEGAN WITH A SIMPLE QUESTION: What should be the theme of this magazine? + In September, ThreeSixty students pondered that question individually and in small groups. The answer became clear: They wanted to write about teenagers and civic engagement, or more specifically, how their peers are — or sometimes aren't — playing an active role in society. + The result is a great package of stories, ranging from teens' interest in politics, voting and current events (pages 11, 12 and 19) to organizations that help teens create change (pages 9 and 15), from students who volunteer their time (page 20) to students who don't mind sharing their leftovers (page 21). + These stories say a lot about this generation of young people. They want to be heard (page 13). They want to influence leaders. They want to run businesses (pages 14 and 18). They want to create change in their communities. They want to help others. + They want to be active members of society.

## Putting power in the hands of youth

**In St. Paul Youth Commission, students have chance to create 'measurable change'**



**By Danielle Wong**  
Eastview High School

NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO, adults always seem to hold the power.

However, as a nonprofit organization in St. Paul proves, there can be strength in the innovative ideas of young people.

The Saint Paul Youth Commission was created nine years ago by Mayor Chris Coleman to provide local high school students with an opportunity to have their voices heard and to make their communities better places.

The 22-member group meets regularly to discuss public policy issues ranging from sex trafficking to teen homelessness, sometimes presenting solutions to city officials. It's a commitment of 10 to 15 hours per month, with tangible outcomes.

In 2008, the commission helped design the Canvas, an arts-based, teen-run space within the Hancock Rec Center near Hamline University. In 2013, the mayor's office approached the commission about addressing the topic of

sex trafficking. What ensued was a two-year project that highlighted the correlation between sex trafficking and teen homelessness, even advocating for the passing of the Youth Homelessness Act at the state legislature.

At the commission, members say, everything is run by youth. Meetings are led by rotating co-chairs, and all issues and solutions are chosen by the teens themselves.

Sebastian Alfonzo, a junior at St. Paul Central High School, has been on the commission for three years — two of which he has served on the Transit Access Subcommittee, which has recently advocated for free city bus access to all St. Paul high school students.

Alfonzo said the group sometimes has had adult facilitators, but "we all decided what (were) the projects we were going to do, we all decided what (were) the philanthropy organizations we were going to work with — pretty much every decision is made by the young people."

When the youth do work with adults or other organizations, it is stressed that the relationship is a partnership. Tabitha Mitchell, the coordinator of the commission, said if not done the right way, a "partnership" can become disempowering to teens.

"The youth should benefit from this transaction so that you can tell their story," Mitchell said. "(The **POWER** continued on next page



**POWER** from previous page adults) can say that you have youth voice in your report, but let's really make it about building relationships."

Sometimes, Mitchell said, organizations or city officials approach the youth commission with the intent of doing what she calls the "tokenization of youth voices," or, in other words, when adults give superficial importance to youth voices.

"That youth voice is often taken for granted because, well, the adults are the ones who have the power, they've lived longer, they know what they're talking about," said Spencer Willits, a junior at Great River School in St. Paul who is one of the youth commissioners. "I think (it's) incredibly important to provide that outlet for youth to be heard. Because they have a lot to say."

As some city officials are learning, there is power in youth voice, ideas and involvement.

"What do they [youth] see as a solution — not to end it [an issue], but how to make it a little better?" Mitchell said. "To take one step forward in progress, what do they see, as opposed to adults swooping in?"

### MAKING AN IMPACT

Last June, the commission wrapped up its Transit Access project, which had a long-term goal to provide free city bus passes to all St. Paul students — just as Minneapolis does.

Transportation is an issue that Willits has been passionate about for a while and that he is well versed in. At Great River School, a public Montessori charter school that Willits attends in St. Paul, it is cheaper to provide free bus passes than to hire school buses for a small population, he said.

"Ever since seventh grade I've gone to school in this certain environment where I have access to transportation and I can get wherever I need to, and I took it pretty much for granted," he said.



Young people involved in the St. Paul Youth Commission.



Members of the St. Paul Youth Commission pose for a photo.

"Then when I joined the youth commission, and saw this as a topic, I realized I have valuable input."

Collaborating with Metro Transit and the St. Paul school board, the organization launched its own pilot program at select high schools using a grant of \$30,000 over two years from various contributors.

"The four of us [on the Transit Access Subcommittee] worked with the grant that had been given the previous year and ran our own small-scale pilot program, providing youth with free bus access for approximately a dozen ... high schoolers at

Harding and Central High School," Willits said.

Over the course of three months, the team collected weekly data on how the bus passes were being used and how often, and on other feedback. They then compiled that data and presented it to the school board and Metropolitan Council.

Overall, students were "very on board" with the idea of free bus passes, Willits said, but the biggest roadblock seemed to be parents concerned with the safety of their teens on a city bus.

Alfonzo believes the organization

has been effective within St. Paul communities, especially in the case of the Transit Access Subcommittee.

"I think it's put pressure on groups like the school board and the Met (Metropolitan) Council to keep considering the issue," he said. "They know that it's important to young people so they know it's an important issue in general ... [It has] put pressure on people in power."

### 'MEASURABLE CHANGE'

For students who are already hyper-involved in activities at school, Alfonzo said there is more than one

### To learn more

Visit the St. Paul Youth Commission's page at <https://www.stpaul.gov/education/youth-commission> or contact Coordinator Tabitha Mitchell at 651-247-5538 or [tabitha.mitchell@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:tabitha.mitchell@ci.stpaul.mn.us).

New members are recruited each May and applications are due in June. Applicants must be residents of St. Paul and be in high school (ninth through 12th grade).

way for youth to be empowered and involved.

"I think it's truly important to stay educated on what's going on ... not just in the world, but in your own community," he said. "Sometimes a lot of us read huge news organizations or read all these books, and we don't really know what's really going on in our own backyard."

Even if you're able to only attend neighborhood events, it makes a difference, he said.

As for the youth commission, Willits said it is having a positive impact on students and is a good opportunity to be proactive in his community.

"I think the youth commission, more than anything else," he said, "has given me a way to actually project my voice and cause measurable change."



# Do teens care about politics and civic life?

**Though they know of current events, students see themselves as less active in making change than previous generations**

WHEN THE BELL RINGS at Wayzata High School, Syed Hasan is just another high school junior, rushing out of the classroom with his phone in hand and friends in tow.

But rather than checking Twitter or Snapchat, Hasan reads campaign updates. Instead of discussing weekend plans with friends, he champions the virtues of Napoleon Bonaparte's policies. Whether debating political ideologies in class or watching campaign debates at home, Hasan constantly immerses himself in politics.

"It's important to know as much as one can in politics to ensure the formation of valid opinions," he said. "I won't be able to vote in the 2016 election, unfortunately, but I would most likely vote (if I could)."

Hasan described himself as "apathetic to the whole process" until an eye-opening freshman civics class. A combination of excellent teachers and politically involved peers inspired him to pay closer attention to his community's policies. His classmates say it is now impossible to talk with him without mentioning politics.

However, most teenagers are not as civically engaged as Hasan. Some don't associate day-to-day problems



By Mina Yuan  
Wayzata High School

with politics, and others feel discouraged when adults ignore their opinions, they say. Yet both view teenagers as not as politically active as they once were.

"I'm not going to say any of us are too familiar with (politics)," said Contessa Bostic, a senior at Highland Park Senior High School in St. Paul.

## WHAT TEENS SAY

Mary Takgbajouah, a senior at Cretin-Derham Hall, said few of her peers "are very aware of what's going on."

"I mean, I hear a lot of people talking about Donald Trump ... but sometimes me and my friends are reading about (the Syrian refugee crisis) or trying to have conversations about it with other people, and they won't even know where Syria is on a map," Takgbajouah said.

With the 2016 presidential elections coming up, Takgbajouah fears that her peers who can vote will do so simply because they can, rather than because they truly care about



A Ramsey County voting sign sits outside of a polling location at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul in 2015. Some say young people are not as civically and politically active as they once were.



Harry Boyte, a professor at Augsburg College, says teenagers often equate politics with what politicians do, not with what young people do.

changing their community.

Karimah Tongrit-Green, a junior at Twin Cities Academy High School, said, "Our generation was forced. Take tests, take tests. Politics is something that's just so abstract, it's not something that really gets into schools."

For some students, an absence of politics in schools has caused a misconception about what constitutes

politics. One student said she cares more about "things that affect me more directly," like police brutality and teenage deaths, than what she calls politics. Yet, according to Augsburg College Professor Harry Boyte, issues such as those also qualify as political problems.

"Young people today, if you ask them what they think of politics, they say they hate it," Boyte said.

"But they think politics is what politicians do. It's not things that (young people) do."

## TRACING POLITICAL ROOTS

This mental separation of citizen and partisan politics is ironic, considering the word "politics" is derived from the Greek word for citizen, "politēs." From the time of the Greeks through the late 20th century, citizen movements, not politicians, comprised politics' core.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s particularly stands out as "a different kind of politics," one in which youth played a huge role, according to Boyte.

As the son of a Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) staff executive committee member, Boyte grew up in a politically charged environment. His parents were part of a small group of Southern whites promoting integration in schools.

Boyte remembers himself as a 12-year-old, lying in a sleeping bag on his father's hotel room floor as he listened to Martin Luther King, Jr., rehearse his "I Have A Dream" speech the night before the March on Washington.

Boyte then started working for an SCLC program to establish citizenship schools for potential voters. He was assigned to work in a predominantly Ku Klux Klan community.

"That's really puzzling to young people today," Boyte said. "Like 'What, did (King) want you to be a spy or something? Sabotage them?' No, he actually felt, as did a lot of people in (the) SCLC, that there were probably common things you could find."

Understanding the principles of compromise and negotiation in politics makes all the difference in teen interest in politics, Boyte said, especially when combined with family influence.

Both Tongrit-Green and **CIVIC LIFE** continued on page 28

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE TWIN CITIES DAILY PLANET

MINA YUAN / THREESIXTY JOURNALISM



# Young people fight political discouragement with passion

**Getting involved, regardless of your views, offers ways to effect change — even without voting**

FROM OPPOSITES SIDES of the political spectrum, then-high school students Amanda Peterson and Conrad Zbikowski were on the sidelines while decisions were made on issues they care about — gay marriage, the cost of health insurance and college tuition among them.

“I wasn’t able to vote in 2012, so the first time I voted was the next year after that,” said Peterson, who became a student at the University of St. Thomas, where she has chaired the university’s College Republicans. “It definitely makes students feel like they can’t do anything about the situation.”

She said teens not having their say on topics they are passionate about “discourages some students.”

This discouragement is dangerous, according to Zbikowski, treasurer of the Minnesota Young DFL and a grassroots organizer for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in the state’s 5th Congressional District.

“If we want equal rights for all, as a generation we need to participate and follow the lead that those just a little bit older than us did in 2008, did in 2012, and do it again in 2016 by electing people who believe in the values that millennials believe in,” Zbikowski said.

The perception among teens of feeling uninvolved in decisions affecting their future is commonplace, according to Debra Petersen, an associate professor in the



**By Zekriah Chaudhry**  
Minneapolis  
South High  
School

Communication and Journalism Department at the University of St. Thomas.

“Many young people don’t feel they have as much stake in what’s going on,” Petersen said.

“If you don’t participate and you’re just complaining about something, what’s going to change?”

## SHAPING THEIR VIEWS

For Zbikowski and Peterson, personal circumstances helped shape their views on controversial political issues.

Zbikowski, who said he is bipolar, was 20 years old when he had to spend two months in the hospital. The much-debated Affordable Care Act allowed him to be covered by his mother’s health insurance until age 26.

“I would not have been able to afford my hospital bills had I not been on my mother’s health insurance,” he said. “If it were not for Obamacare, I would be in poverty right now.”

Zbikowski said feeling the impact of the new healthcare law led him to become more involved in politics. He attended a precinct caucus in 2012 and volunteered on multiple

campaigns.

Peterson, on the other hand, was raised in a conservative household and always swayed toward being a Republican. But after years of experiencing the contrast — between liberal and conservative and Democrat and Republican — she developed her own views while holding onto the roots of where she came from.

“My ideology I got from my parents, which is probably defined as classical liberalism, the principles I was raised to believe, it’s mostly hard work, but strong moral compass, those types of things,” Peterson said. “I was raised to believe those more than I was to align just with the Republican party.”

Peterson supported gay marriage, despite it being a more liberal viewpoint.

“Freshman year, my best friend from high school, my closest friend since seventh grade, came out to me as gay,” she said.

Peterson had been on the fence about gay marriage throughout high school. After her personal experience with her friend, she became an advocate.

“I convinced a guy that he should support gay marriage when he was against it,” Peterson said, later adding how the people in the Republican Party were generally accepting of her — occasionally liberal — viewpoints, something important enough

**POLITICAL** *continued on page 28*



Amanda Peterson, who has chaired the University of St. Thomas College Republicans group, says teens can become discouraged when they don’t have their say on certain topics.

*“Many young people don’t feel they have as much stake in what’s going on.”*

—Debra Petersen, associate professor of Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas



Conrad Zbikowski (left) poses for a photo with Minneapolis City Council Member Jacob Frey and others during Frey’s 2013 campaign. As a young person, Zbikowski was led into politics after feeling the impact of the Affordable Care Act.



# Social (media) activism

## Young people take to Twitter, Tumblr and other online platforms to speak out and organize

A GROUP OF ABOUT 100 high school students gather together in a room on an early December evening, discussing their feelings about the Jamar Clark controversy and the protests it spawned.

This gathering was possible, in part, because of a few taps on a smartphone by Amir Sharif.

Many of the students knew about the get-together because they saw a message on social media that described what, where and when the event was. Sharif, 17, a junior at Minneapolis Southwest High School, was among those who notified students.

He is an example of a group of young activists who use social media to organize events and share ideas and opinions with their followers.

“Social media is a great outlet for activism because it’s easy to connect with people, get information and spread ideas,” Sharif said. “Plus, coming across news is much faster than waiting for the news by word of mouth.”

According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2013, 81 percent of teens between ages 12-17 used social media. As of 2015, 92 percent of teens went online daily, and 24 percent



By Aidan Berg  
Minneapolis  
Southwest High  
School

reported going online “almost constantly.”

“Social media is where young people live these days, and they understand the tools very well and are very comfortable using them,” said Wendy Wyatt, associate vice provost for undergraduate studies at the University of St. Thomas and a former professor of communication ethics.

Social media can have a reputation as a forum of vanity and self-indul-

gence, such as crude jokes made for a laugh or an Instagram picture posted solely for the purpose of seeing how many likes it can get. But some students are using social media to promote activism and civic engagement.

“Social media is a fun way to connect with friends and share funny content, but if you follow the right people it can be a great place to learn about civics and what’s happening in the world around you,” Sharif said.



Tyner



Wyatt



Aidan Berg / THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Amir Sharif, a junior at Minneapolis Southwest High School, uses social media as a tool for speaking out, connecting with others and organizing. “Social media is a great outlet for activism,” he says, “because it’s easy to connect with people, get information and spread ideas.”

### BEING ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

There are multiple ways a person can use social media to be civically involved, including sharing their thoughts, following current events, talking with others, making calls to action and organizing.

“I mainly use social media as an outlet for all of my ideas and thoughts on current events and social issues,” Sharif said, “but the couple of times I’ve used it for organizing a meeting or an event, it worked well.”

It matters what social media site you use, as well as who you follow. For example, Sharif mainly uses Twitter and Tumblr because “they have more relevant content on those sites, more users who are involved in civics and the civil problems in

America,” he said. He follows other young activists such as DeRay McKesson and Mica Grimm, as well as Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, he said.

“... Their accounts always keep you updated and informed on what’s happening around the world and they always have vital info and share their opinions with limited bias,” he said.

The concept of activism on social media has its pros and cons, according to Wyatt. She stresses that while social media works for organizing events and sharing ideas, in-person communication is still important.

“Talking with people face-to-face about issues should be most prominent,” Wyatt said. “While there are things that are concerning about

*“Talking with people face-to-face about issues should be most prominent. While there are things that are concerning about social media, there are a lot of promising things, too.”*

—Wendy Wyatt, associate vice provost for undergraduate studies at the University of St. Thomas and a former professor of communication ethics

social media, there are a lot of promising things, too.”

One of the concerns in engaging civically on social media is the presence of Internet trolls, or people who post comments to upset others or disrupt the discussion. This problem could be magnified in conflicts over ideals, which sometimes can become emotional.

Artika Tyner, a professor of Leadership, Policy and Administration at the University of St. Thomas and the university’s interim diversity and inclusion officer, advises high schoolers to not engage with trolls.

“Unless it’s educational, something you can learn from, don’t respond,” Tyner said.

Another issue that could arise when untrained adolescents have a forum to speak out are ethical and legal problems, such as defamation. Tyner said civically active students on social media need to be taught critical and analytical thinking skills, understanding and breaking down the issues so they can formulate their own stances — as opposed to jumping to an uneducated opinion. This could help to avoid defamation,

**SOCIAL MEDIA** continued on page 23



# Finding a path in business

## A student's experience with DECA points toward a career in business.

"ZAID KHAN"

As the announcer declared my name, an applause erupted in the Plymouth hotel's jam-packed conference room. I started walking toward the stage and I could feel everyone's eyes on me.

Walking up to the stage, I felt like the stairs would never end. Moments later, in front of hundreds of other people, I was announced as a finalist for the DECA competition.

Looking out at all my friends and peers from the stage, I had found success in a way that I had never imagined.

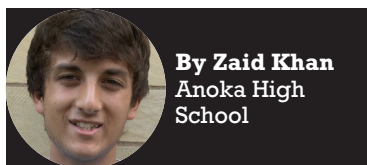
I had found my path.

### JOINING DECA

Going back to the weeks and months of preparation, I never would have thought I would find the success I did at the DECA conference.

DECA is a national organization that prepares youth to be leaders and entrepreneurs in the global world. It has chapters at high schools throughout the U.S. that students like myself can join. The organization is centered on competitive conferences where students are evaluated by judges in career areas such as marketing, finance, hospitality and management.

My first encounter with DECA came in Fall 2014 when I heard some friends of mine talking about going to a meeting for the club. I had never heard of DECA but was intrigued



By Zaid Khan  
Anoka High School

at what all my friends were talking about.

They talked about dressing up in business clothes and spending a weekend at a hotel for a competitive conference. The thought piqued my interest even more, as I started thinking about myself dressed in a business suit at a hotel.

I started to attend all club meetings and eventually signed up and made the commitment in November 2014 for the conference.

At that point, I didn't know really what to expect from the conference, but I was thrilled for the challenge ahead.

As I stepped off the bus and walked into the hotel lobby in January 2015, I was overwhelmed by how many people were attending the conference. With hundreds of students from all over the district, it seemed DECA had taken over the hotel.

After taking a test on marketing and business the night we arrived, sleep was nowhere to be found. My mind buzzed with images of my event the next morning.

The following day my partner and I, feeling prepared and ready to go,



Zaid Khan (right) poses for a photo with his DECA advisor, Douglas Orr. Khan writes that his experience with DECA has helped him realize his passion for a business-related career.

*I can envision myself 10 years from now in a business suit, presenting a proposal to a group of investors — just like in my judged event. Before, I had seen only black when picturing my future career.*

walked into a small conference room and sat down with a judge, a middle-aged woman who looked friendly. We presented a marketing research plan, role-playing as if we were truly presenting the plan for a local airport and the judge was our boss.

The conversation went smoothly, with my partner and I hitting all the objectives we set out at the start.

In other words, we killed it. Leaving the room, we felt confident with our presentation.

Later that night, papers were posted in the hotel lobby, showing who did and who didn't advance to the competition's final round. Students' reactions varied from ecstatic to dismal, as some moved on and others were left behind.

Luckily, or perhaps skillfully, our

names were on the paper.

On the final morning of the conference, we presented one more time, and afterward we all met in a large conference room to find out who would become a finalist and qualify for the state conference.

As I stood there waiting for my name to be called, it felt like I was being sucker-punched with anxiety. But, as people continued to be announced, I suddenly heard a name that sounded familiar: my own.

The following moments were a blur, a mixture of clapping, walking up to the stage and almost passing out from anxiety.

As I stood on stage, I was awarded and announced as a finalist with my partner. We both stood there in front of the crowd and gave each other

knuckles. In my mind, this is what success looks like.

And all of a sudden, a path was formed in my head.

### ENVISIONING A FUTURE

Finding something I was not only interested in, but also successful at, has opened my eyes to possibilities and opportunities in a career spectrum I didn't even know existed before. I've now chosen a college with a great business program that will fuel my passion for business-related careers.

I can envision myself 10 years from now in a business suit, presenting a proposal to a group of investors — just like in my judged event. Before, I had seen only black when picturing my future career.

Writing this story now, almost a year after the conference, that path has led me to become Anoka High School's DECA president.

And I believe that my success won't stop there.

It's only just begun.



# ‘They need to listen to the youth’

## Young people help Neighborhoods Organizing for Change on the front lines in the fight for racial and economic justice

WHEN IT WAS CeCe Monn-Price’s turn to speak to the Minneapolis City Council, she was terrified.

Standing at a podium in the middle of the council chambers on Dec. 9, a camera pointed her direction, the 16-year-old North Minneapolis resident nervously began to address City Council members about the equity issues she’s witnessed in her community.

As she continued speaking, touching on her worry for the lives of her black male friends and the unrest outside the Fourth Precinct of the Minneapolis Police Department, she felt both anger and release, she said.

“I think they need somebody who’s witnessed every single thing first-hand from the minute she was younger to now,” Monn-Price said. “I have witnessed so much. If they are not going to listen to the older people, then they need to listen to the youth.”

Monn-Price is part of a vast group of young people involved with a Minneapolis grassroots organization that fights for racial and economic justice in the Twin Cities.

The organization, Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC), supports that cause in under-resourced communities of color across the Twin Cities. The member-led organization creates political campaigns that involve more than 1,000 youth,



By Sebastian Alfonzo  
St. Paul Central High School

such as Monn-Price, every year, estimated Wintana Melekin, NOC’s civic and political engagement director.

“Young people are a part of NOC in every single way,” Melekin said.

“If you look in the history of social justice movements, (they) are led by the youth,” Melekin added. “We strongly support that, we strongly believe in that. I don’t think you can come to the NOC office and not see the role of youth. Almost all of our staff is under the age of 40.”

Founded in 2010, NOC has focused campaigns on improving public transit, workers’ rights, police accountability and expanded voting rights, according to its website. For example, the organization recently has pushed a bill that allows felons to vote as soon as they get out of jail, petitioned for a special prosecutor instead of a grand jury in the Jamar Clark case and called for better working conditions for Target Field temp employees.

Among many things, young people travel door-to-door to talk to community members about specific issues and gather support; call people in their communities and ask



CeCe Monn-Price, center, a junior at Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis, speaks to the Minneapolis City Council about issues in her neighborhood on Dec. 9 in Minneapolis.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE GRIFFIN, NEIGHBORHOODS ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

them to participate in campaigns; and organize events.

“The young people have always had the most energy, the most creative ideas, the most creative anything when it comes to organizing,” said Anthony Newby, NOC’s executive director. “That’s historically true.”

### A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Newby believes NOC is part of a long-standing tradition of young people being at the helm of movements.

“We’re following that long line of giving space and leadership opportunities to young people to help craft the vision and future not only as the organization, but as the country itself,” he said.

Roy Magnuson, a veteran activist and a social studies teacher at St. Paul Como Park, believes in the importance of young people’s involvement in civics.

“It’s real important, because they get a chance to see that they’re not alone in caring,” Magnuson said. “They get a chance to see that they can make a difference.”

He added: “They get a chance to see that carrying a belief from a concept, to action, to reality, works.”

Magnuson provided an example with the “Vote No” campaign in 2012, when an overwhelming amount of young people voted against the gay marriage amendment, a large win for same-sex marriage. Young people did not only vote in opposition, but also they spread the word to their parents and grandparents in an organized effort to change people’s viewpoints on an issue through conversation, he said.

Melekin shares similar beliefs about youth involvement in politics and creating change.

“If they start and get involved at a very young age, by the time they’re a voter they can make really well-rounded decisions and they can have (a) huge effect on the candidate around them,” she said.

### ‘STUFF ... A LOT OF TEENAGERS MY AGE NEED TO HEAR ABOUT’

Monn-Price, a junior at Patrick Henry High School, joined NOC in the fall through her mother’s involvement with the organization. Monn-Price credits her mother for



Newby



Melekin

being a large influence on her activism, and the two have bonded through this experience, she said.

“My mother’s been pushing me and helping me and working with me every step of the way,” Monn-Price said. “I work with her so it makes it so much easier for us to communicate.”

Monn-Price works on the canvassing team, which goes door-to-door conducting surveys and talking with people about current issues and how

to work on them. She also works on phone banking, where NOC members invite people to the organization’s events and inform them on NOC’s work, as well as on what the organization would like to work on in the future.

Monn-Price encourages young people to join NOC.

“I have gotten a lot of information out of NOC,” Monn-Price said. “Stuff that I didn’t even know was going on in my neighborhood and in my community that I think a lot of teenagers my age need to hear about.”



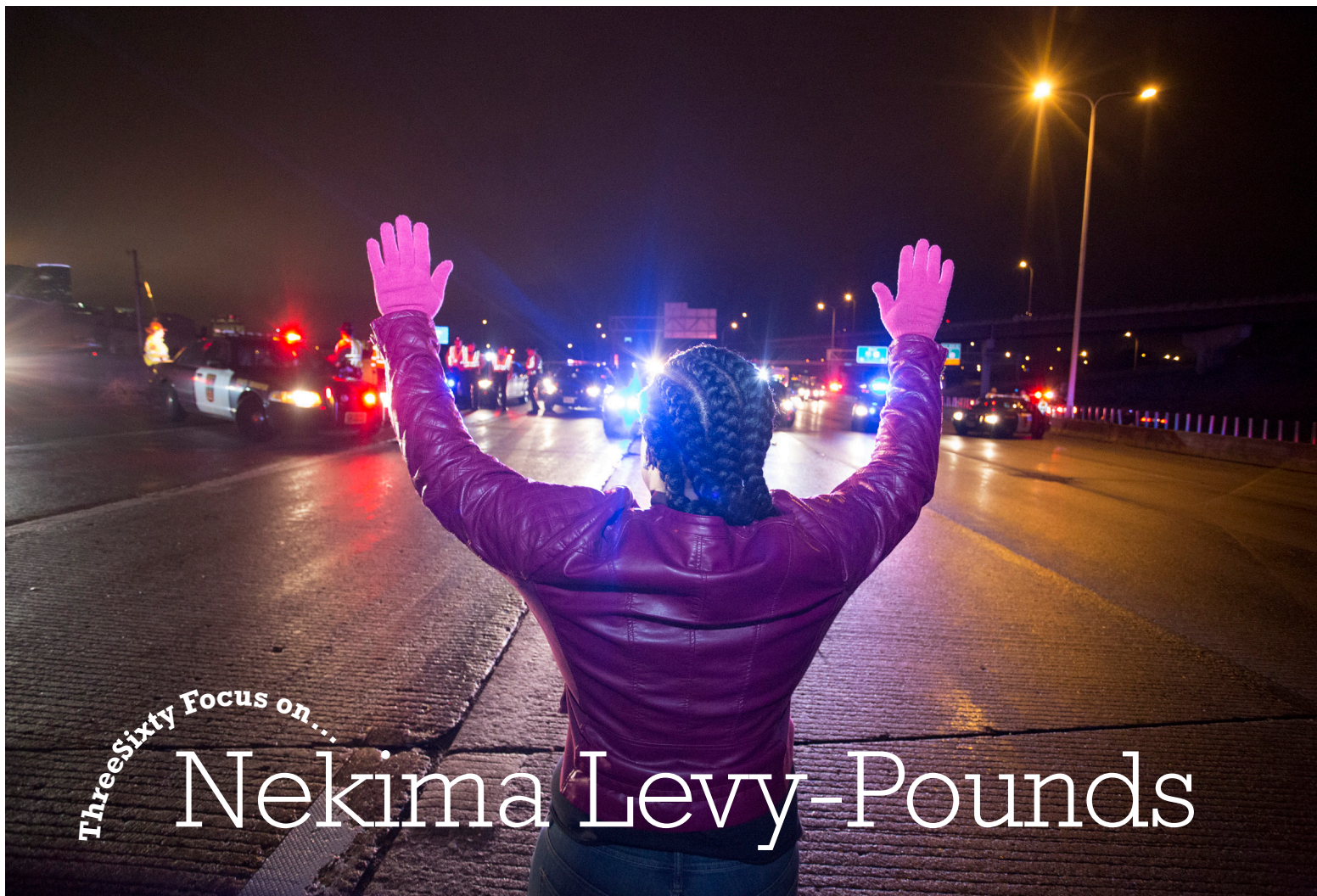


PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS JUHN

Nekima Levy-Pounds, the president of the Minneapolis chapter of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, a University of St. Thomas law professor, an activist in Black Lives Matter Minneapolis and a civil rights attorney, kneels on the I-94 freeway in Minneapolis and raises her arms in the air in front of authorities as protesters behind her blocked the freeway on Nov. 16, one day after Jamar Clark was shot by Minneapolis police.

## The Minneapolis NAACP president, civil rights attorney, activist and law professor talks Jamar Clark, racial tension and how youth can create change

THIRTY MINUTES AFTER our interview is scheduled to start, Nekima Levy-Pounds finally walks in, the apology on her lips oddly juxtaposed with the joy in her eyes.

She sincerely apologizes over and over for being late. But it is clear that the cause of her delayed arrival, a press conference that resulted in the removal of barricades outside the Fourth Precinct police station in North Minneapolis on this early December day, also has made her very happy.

The 39-year-old Minneapolis NAACP president, Black Lives Matter activist, University of St. Thomas law professor, civil rights attorney and



By **Mina Yuan**  
Wayzata High School

mother of five cannot hold back her passion and energy throughout the interview. She clutches her hands to demonstrate a human bridge, she pounds the table as she criticizes racial prejudice, and when a stranger knocks on the window, raising a fist to show solidarity, Levy-Pounds' face breaks into a radiant grin.

Since the age of 9, Levy-Pounds knew she wanted to create positive change in her South Central Los Angeles community, like the lawyers she saw on television. She graduated from the University of Southern California with a degree in African-American Studies — the first in her family with a bachelor's degree — and eventually went on to become a law professor at the University of St. Thomas, where she teaches strategies for carrying out social justice in

poor communities.

Since the shooting death of unarmed 24-year-old Jamar Clark by Minneapolis police on Nov. 15, 2015, Levy-Pounds has been busy leading marches, blocking I-94, occupying the Fourth Precinct and demanding police tapes of the shooting, all while balancing her roles as law professor and mother.

**Mina: To start off, I know you grew up in South Central Los Angeles. Could you tell me a little about what challenges you faced as a teenager trying to contribute to or create change?**

Nekima: Well, one of the things that impacted me most as a kid in South Central was the fact that one of my classmates was killed.

So when I was 14, I got a scholarship to attend a boarding school in North Andover, Massachusetts, called the Brooks School. And I was there at this affluent boarding school, and then ... right before spring break, my mom called me, and she told me that one of my classmates by the name of Latasha Harlins was killed. She was shot in the back of the head by a store owner.

*Levy-Pounds explains how, in 1991, Harlins was accused by the store owner of stealing orange juice — she wasn't stealing, Levy-Pounds says — got into a physical altercation with the owner, and was later shot in the head and killed by the owner. Tupac Shakur, an influential hip-hop artist, has dedicated songs to Harlins, Levy-Pounds says.*



### About this series

This story is part of ThreeSixty Focus, a series in which ThreeSixty's teen journalists sit down with Minnesota newsmakers and difference makers — from athletes to musicians, mayors to activists — for a Q-and-A session that takes a deeper dive into their lives.

My mom called me and told me about it, and it impacted me in a significant way, because I felt that it could have been me. You know, I was friends with Latasha. She was just a normal teenage girl, and there was no reason that she should have been dead over a bottle of orange juice. ...

What happened to her was symbolic of the unreconciled racial issues in America that we've not resolved, the racial issues that, time has gone on, and somehow we pretend that things have gotten better when we've never really dealt with the root causes of racism, segregation and discrimination that Dr. (Martin Luther) King talked about. In fact, after he was assassinated on April 4 of 1968, the movement really went underground, and some would argue that it dissipated altogether.

So as a kid, seeing that happen to Latasha, it impacted me in a significant way, because the person who killed her never served any jail time. She received five years probation and community service. And around the same time, a man kicked a dog, and he got 45 days in jail in the LA area. And it led to comparisons between the lives of black people being worth less than a dog. So as a kid, it just — it impacted me.

This was around the time of the Rodney King beating. And it just gave me a sense of purpose in terms of knowing that I had to use my gifts and talents to begin to address these issues. And so, I remember going home on spring break, I went to view Latasha's body, and I thought, "That could have been me." Because the store wasn't that far away from the house where I grew up. And I had just hung out with Latasha in the summer before I went off to boarding school. I got the



Levy-Pounds during her community justice project clinic on Sept. 17, 2015, at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis.

opportunity to go off to boarding school to receive an elite education. Latasha was left in South Central LA. And she experienced the wrath of what happens when you don't address root-level causes of racial issues. So I had felt a burden since then of continuing in the fight for justice and demanding that we treat people with respect and dignity, even if they're poor, even if they're a person of color. And that is what has fueled my fire for justice all this time.

**M: I've been talking to some teenagers lately about their own involvement with politics, and a lot of them have been saying that yes, they care a lot about these issues in society, they want to make change, but sometimes adults don't take them seriously. So did you ever experience anything like that?**

N: Absolutely. For some reason, adults, older adults, tend to discount the voices of young people. It's as though they feel that if you're not at a certain age or have reached a certain stature, that your contributions are not valid, or you don't know what you're talking about. And I take issue with that. Especially



Levy-Pounds was one of more than 50 people arrested after blocking I-94 in Minneapolis on Nov. 16.

because at 9 years old, I knew that I wanted to be a lawyer, and that's the path that I took. And that's the path that I've been able to utilize in order to affect change.

So think about how many kids see something wrong with the issues that are happening in society, and who aren't given an opportunity to express their perspectives, to stand up for justice and to speak truth to power. I think that adults need to open the doors for young people to be able to use their voices, to use

their skills, to advance the cause of justice.

And this isn't the first time that this has happened. During the 1960s, there was something called the Children's Movement that happened in Alabama, where as people began to grow weary during the Civil Rights Movement, because it was a long period of time — I mean the Civil Rights Movement essentially started on Dec. 1 of 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. It lasted all the way to April 4 of 1968

when Dr. King was assassinated. That's a very long period of time, you know, close to 13 years.

So during that period of time, people began to grow weary. And one of the things that happened was, adults had to get back to work. They couldn't be as active on the front lines. So Dr. King and some of the leaders who worked with him realized that children could play a role in the movement. So they went into the schools, and they gathered children, and they called children to the front lines. So children actually began marching, protesting, braving police, dogs and fire hoses, and things like that. And they got arrested. So kids as young as 8 years old would call their parents and say, "Don't pick me up from jail. I'm standing up for a cause that I believe in."

(A stranger knocks at the window.)

That's a stranger showing solidarity, which is amazing. I don't even know that person. Yeah, they recognized me, knocked on the window, and did this (holds up fist). That's incredible. But, that kind of stuff happens on a regular basis.

But kids were front-line soldiers in the movement for civil rights and social justice. I mean, to think about kids ... I mean, I have kids. I can't imagine my 10-year-old calling me, saying, "Mom, don't pick me up. I am fighting for our civil rights." I just, I could not imagine a kid being, you know, in the place of an adult in terms of that level of maturity and resolve, to keep standing for what they believe in at the detriment of their own health, their own wellness, their own physical essence, but that's what they did. ...

**M: So a couple times now, you've mentioned the roles of youth in changing their communities, and how we've got this undercurrent of racial injustice that isn't really brought to light these days. So what can youth do to change this today?**

N: The first thing youth need to do, is to know their history. They need to recognize that in schools, they're not going to learn the truth of what **LEVY-POUNDS** continued on page 29

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS JUHN



# Teens making their mark on the business world

## Young Minnesota entrepreneurs turn their visions into reality

BHARAT PULGAM, at the age of 16, is already the chief executive officer of mXers Audio, a company developing a new type of earbuds.

Isabel and Caroline Bercaw loved bath bombs — scented, hard balls of essential oils and other ingredients that fizz in water — so much when they were younger, the sisters created their own. And they added their own touches by putting surprises, such as a toy figurine or bouncy ball, inside. In 2012, the Bercaw sisters launched their company, Da Bomb Bath Fizzers, and now split their time between high school and managing their business.

People tend to think of entrepreneurs as college-aged or older people who create startups, such as Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. But teenagers such as the Bercaw sisters and Pulgam also are making their mark in the business world, and there are programs to support teens interested in entrepreneurship.

“We have the potential to grow into this really big company,” Pulgam said of mXers Audio. “We may only be 16, 17 and 18 [years old], but we have the potential to do really great things.”



By Ann Jerry  
Blaine High School

### STARTING A BUSINESS

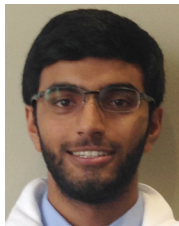
The Bercaw sisters and Pulgam turned their business visions into reality, but in different ways.

The Bercaws, of Edina, started out selling their homemade bath bombs at local art fairs and were discovered by a local retailer who wanted to sell the sisters’ products. Today, their products can be found at more than 100 stores across six states and online.

The sisters draw on each other’s strengths and interests to run their business.

“She’ll make the bath bombs and do packaging, but I’m more into entering the orders,” said Isabel Bercaw, 14. “We both do selling, but [Caroline] does more technology stuff. ...Two is better than one.”

In January 2015, Pulgam, who attends Wayzata High School, took his idea for customizable, modular earbuds to the Chicago-based Catapult Incubator program. The program mentors youth entrepreneurs and challenges them to take their ideas from “concept to reality”



Pulgam



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA BOMB BATH FIZZERS

Sisters Isabel (left), 14, and Caroline Bercaw, 13, make bath bombs at their home in Edina. Their products, Da Bomb Bath Fizzers, can be found in more than 100 stores across six states and online.

*“You can make money off of solving people’s problems, which I think is really cool. After I got a taste of entrepreneurship I felt like I found something I was passionate about.”*

—Bharat Pulgam, student at Wayzata High School

over the course of six months. It culminates with the students pitching their ideas to a panel of investors.

Pulgam walked away with the Most Innovative Idea Award. He came back to Minnesota and started his company with a new team, composed of 12 high school and college students. mXers Audio is currently in the funding phase.

Pulgam found a passion in entrepreneurship after going through the Incubator Program.

“Products and services offered in today’s world can really impact how people live,” he said. “You can make money off of solving people’s problems, which I think is really cool. After I got a taste of entrepreneurship I felt like I found something I was passionate about.”

### CREATIVITY AND COLLABORATION

There are many different types of entrepreneurs, among them introverts, extroverts, analytically minded and non-analytically minded, said Laura Dunham, an entrepreneurship professor at the University of St. Thomas. The characteristics that good entrepreneurs share are creativity and collaborative spirit, she said.

Both Pulgam and the Bercaw sisters founded their companies on innovative ideas, a key aspect of entrepreneurship.

“What you do have to be is open-minded enough to look at the world around you,” Dunham said.

Pulgam realized that although earbuds break easily, it’s often just one or two parts that are causing the

issues. So, he decided to explore the idea of creating modular earbuds with customizable parts, so that if one part breaks, the consumer needs only to replace the broken part.

“It’s easy to repair ... and it’s affordable because you don’t have to keep buying entirely new things,” he said.

The Bercaws’ bath bombs are themed with creative prizes inside. Their Ninja Bomb is orange, with a tiny ninja figure inside. Their Earth Bomb has a sea creature inside, and a portion of the proceeds go toward the cleanup of the world’s oceans.

Collaboration also was a necessary component in the Bercaws’ and Pulgam’s businesses.

Our “parents have been so supportive,” said Caroline Bercaw, 13. “They’ve helped us create a website, they’ve helped us reach out to different stores. Without them, we wouldn’t be this far and we wouldn’t have learned this much.”

The Bercaw sisters brainstorm ideas for new bath bombs, make bath bomb batches, help out at their **BUSINESS** continued on next page



**BUSINESS** *from previous page*

mall kiosks and monitor their business. They work with 12 employees, including a graphic designer and branding agent.

“Starting the business, I was really shy and didn’t like talking to people, but it’s really helped me communicate with people,” Caroline Bercau said. “I feel a little older since I can talk to adults.”

At mXers Audio, Pulgam leads a team of 12. He coordinates all the departments, from engineering to advertising, but stresses that it’s a team effort.

“Leading from above, in a hierarchical structure, just doesn’t work, especially on a small scale,” Pulgam said. “It’s not like people are working for me, it’s like they are working with me.”

**FINDING THE FUNDS**

Coming up with ideas is one thing, but coming up with the money to make a business happen is another.

There are three main sources of funding for entrepreneurs, according to Dunham: personal (including friends and family), debt (such as bank loans) and investment capital.

Pitching the idea is integral to receiving funding. Pulgam’s sales pitch took place in front of a panel of investors at Catapult’s Incubator program, and he utilized both technology and speaking skills to craft his pitch.

“You should be so comfortable

**Find them online**

- Interested in Da Bomb Bath Fizzers? Go online to <http://www.dabombfizzers.com>
- For more information on mXers Audio, go online to <https://mxersaudio.com>
- To learn more about DECA, go online to: <http://www.deca.org>

**BUSINESS** *continued on page 20*

# The (lack of) youth vote

**Young people need to take part in their civic duty and vote in upcoming elections.**

ELECTIONS ARE HOW WE hold officials accountable.

When politicians fail to act on their constituents’ interests or lose the public’s confidence, voters have the ability to remove them through the election process.

But in order for that to work, people need to actually vote.

However, few people in the youngest block of eligible voters are doing their civic duty, especially in non-presidential election years. In the November 2014 general election, only 21.5 percent of young people in the U.S. (ages 18-29) voted, according to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.



By Shay Radhakrishnan  
Math and Science Academy

**Commentary**

Primaries, especially, can have extremely low turnout. Montana had the highest participation in 2014 with 26.3 percent of voting-capable people casting their vote, according to the Washington Post. Iowa had the lowest with a 9.7 percent turnout rate.

Minnesota’s voter turnout was 10.2 percent, its third-lowest mark in state records, for the primary in

August 2014, according to the Star Tribune.

Primaries are where major decisions are set in motion.

“It’s the opportunity for the voters to become involved and participate in who their eventual candidate is going to be,” said Kevin Sauter, a Communication and Journalism professor at the University of St. Thomas whose primary scholarly focus is political communication.

Primary elections have the power to choose which candidate represents the major party. The choice can swing an entire election, and it can even affect the campaign of the opposing candidate.

“Primaries are interesting because, depending on what the party faithful decide, that could determine who’s going to be the candidate and that’s going to determine the ideological leaning of the overall election,” Sauter said.

Low voter turnout among any age group, in both primaries and general elections, could be because people are busy with their own lives and don’t feel like they have time to do proper research on candidates. It can be a hassle to get voter IDs, and the act of voting does take time.

Debra Petersen, a Communication and Journalism professor at the University of St. Thomas, believes the reason young people might not vote could just be simple voter apathy.

“It’s not that they don’t care, they just don’t feel as much of a stake in that,” Petersen said. “And then there’s also the question of, who’s out there and is it worth voting?”

Even in the general elections, when there is a heightened awareness of a coming election, turnout can still be low. Only 53.6 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote in the 2012 general election (a presidential year), according to the Pew Research Center. In 2014, 36.6

**Register to vote**

To register to vote, go online to <https://mnvotes.sos.state.mn.us/VoterRegistration/VoterRegistrationStep1.aspx>

percent of U.S. voters cast ballots in the general election, according to the United States Election Project. Minnesota’s total voter turnout rate was 50.2 percent in that election.

Those numbers are mostly driven by older voters. The U.S. Census Bureau says 72 percent of people aged 65 and older voted in the 2012 general election, compared with 45 percent of people 18 to 29 years old.

These statistics should alarm younger voters. Politicians will address the issues of the people who participate in heavy numbers in the political process — the people who put them in office. Rather than focusing on younger voters, politicians turn their attention to older voters, pushing on issues such as pension and retirement plans, social security and Medicare.

The problem with this level of disparity is the potential lack of attention to issues that younger people care deeply about, such as climate change, student loan debt and minimum wage.

We will be living with the changes that current politicians might set in motion, so we should take the initiative to make sure we like the decisions that are being made.

“It’s better to participate than not,” Sauter said. “I think that’s the hallmark of democracy — we all need to put our two cents in.”

Younger generations have different values than other generations. If they want their values and issues to be given attention, they need to show that they have an active voter base.

They need to show that they care.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRISTETA BOARINI

In the 2014 general election, only 21.5 percent of young people in the U.S. voted, according to voting data.



# IB students are called to community action

## In St. Paul Harding's CAS program, International Baccalaureate students design, execute and serve

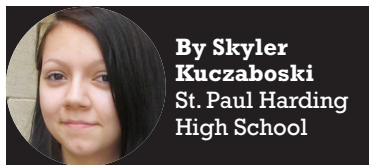
ST. PAUL HARDING SENIOR Zena Vue came across St. Jude's, a hospital in Memphis, Tenn., whose main source of income is donations, while researching for a fundraising project for student council.

Vue and Augustine Vega, a fellow Harding senior and International Baccalaureate diploma candidate, decided to partner and organize a T-shirt fundraising project and support St. Jude's through Create, Action, Serve (CAS), a program in which IB students come up with their own project, researching it and organizing it independently.

The 18-month program has to be completed during an IB student's senior year.

"It's really important to make people feel connected by helping others," Vue said. "[CAS is] more related to the community and you really have to step it up because you're the owner of yourself and you have to plan everything."

CAS encourages students to become more vocalized leaders in their community and to try



By Skyler Kuczaboski  
St. Paul Harding High School

something new.

"It's one of the main components of the IB diploma program," said Jayson Spence, CAS coordinator and a Spanish teacher at Harding. "It involves [getting] diploma candidate students to start thinking about how they can find balance in their lives,

between their hectic schedules and all their studies and testing, to still find outlets for creativity."

Harding is one of three IB World Schools in St. Paul, according to the school. Starting at Harding in 1993, the IB program includes rigorous, academically challenging studies that help students prepare for college.

CAS was developed to provide options for students to strive for balance with a rigorous curriculum. About 3.3 million U.S. high school students are expected to graduate

*"Go out and volunteer somewhere, and then through these experiences, you start to discover your own strengths."*

—Jayson Spence, CAS coordinator and a Spanish teacher at Harding

*"It's really important to make people feel connected by helping others."*

—Zena Vue, St. Paul Harding senior

in the 2015–2016 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Of those students, 2.4 percent are IB diploma candidates.

"It's for kids to go out and do something they haven't done before," said Spence. "... Go out and volunteer somewhere, and then through these experiences, you start to discover your own strengths."

In order to graduate, students at Harding are required to volunteer for 12 hours during their four years. IB diploma students can volunteer through their CAS project.

"I try not to make more of a burden on them," said Spence. "... They're planning on going to a four-year college, probably getting a doctorate, hopefully, and they usually have some kind of aspiration for themselves."

While balancing student council for Vue, and other extracurriculars in Vega's case, and completing many hours of homework each night, the students still have time to give back through CAS.

"CAS projects can be pretty broad, and then we ended up looking for donation type [of projects]," said Vega. "We ended up deciding for St. Jude's and the T-shirt thing because it's something we've never done before and it's ... pretty interesting."

CAS differs from typical class projects, which are assigned to students rather

than created by students. It involves independent research and decision-making, which is expected from seniors in the IB program.

"It's a creative, active, service-oriented outlet," said Spence. "That's what the whole experience is really about."

In the past, students have put on performances through a newly created glee club to raise money for an international cause.

CAS students are required to keep a journal and reflect on their project and themselves. The goal is to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses.

"It shows how they plan, implement [and] reflect," Spence said. "Through this experience they learn, and the next time they do this they're more prepared."

CAS can be a guide to self-discovery for IB students who juggle extracurriculars, classes, tests and other obstacles in their lives.

IB students work on their CAS projects during advisory, a class similar to homeroom that every Harding student attends two days a week. Spence oversees and guides their process for completing their project.

"I don't think any other advisory talks about how you can balance your life and social life," said Spence. "I think it all focuses on balance and self-discovery."



Vega



Spence

### BUSINESS from page 19

with the pitch that you could give it in your sleep," he said. "You want to convey a story that people can connect to. No one's going to connect to a bunch of numbers on a screen. Connect to the audience and getting them on board. Your visuals should be pictures, with a three-word maximum."

### FINDING SUPPORT

Programs such as Vantage and DECA in high schools give students an opportunity to develop business plans and entrepreneurial thinking, Dunham said.

DECA, with more than 3,500 high school chapters, including in Minnesota, offers conferences and competitions to help grow

business skills. University of Minnesota-Duluth offers the UMD Teen Enterprise, a week-long summer camp for students ages 14-18.

The real learning for an entrepreneur is found outside the classroom, Pulgam said.

"Even in Catapult, sitting and listening to those lectures was one thing, but going out and talking to a venture capitalist in the Wells Fargo

Tower, that's completely different," Pulgam said. "They'll give you real advice that's not on page 56 of a textbook."

Pulgam's advice to teens interested in entrepreneurship: Just go for it.

"You develop as a person, a leader," he said. "... All around, it just moves you forward as a person."



# Sharing your leftovers

## Special tables in local school cafeterias help reduce waste, feed students and promote sharing culture

A FEW MINUTES BEFORE the 11:44 a.m. bell rings to end lunch, students at St. Paul Johnson Senior High School walk toward the garbage bins with their lunch trays.

Those with leftovers have a decision to make. Students can either throw some of their uneaten food into the trash or they can place the food on the nearby Sharing Table so other students will have something to eat.

More often than not, there's food on the Sharing Table.

The Sharing Table, located at some school cafeterias in the St. Paul Public Schools district, not only helps reduce waste and feed hungry students at school, but also helps build a culture of sharing among students, school officials say.

"It gives us an opportunity to be less wasteful and also to (give) food to students who need it and really do want it," said Racquel Maronde, an environmental assistant at St. Paul Public Schools.

The school district works under an "Offer vs. Serve" policy, which aims to decrease food waste and give students food options to choose. Students are required to pick at least three of five items — meat or meat alternate, fruit, vegetable, grains and fluid milk — offered at lunch.

The Sharing Table is a concept that encourages students to not throw



By Va Yang  
St. Paul Johnson  
High School

away unused food. Students may put unused items, such as bananas, baby carrot bags or wrapped string cheese, on the Sharing Table so other students can have the food.

"A benefit for having the Sharing Table is ... that you're providing unopened, unused food and beverages that other kids might want, so then they can drink it or can eat that, which in turn creates less waste..." Maronde said.

At the end of the lunch period, potentially hazardous food that needs to be kept at a certain temperature, such as milk, is thrown out. The USDA has permitted the concept of the Sharing Table, although each school has to comply with laws and regulations in its state.

### USING THE SHARING TABLE

About 73 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch in St. Paul, according to Minnesota Public Health data.

"This means that almost three-fourths of our families are living at or near the poverty line and may have trouble putting food on the table," said Angie Gaszak, a nutrition



The Sharing Table at St. Paul Johnson High School. Some schools in the St. Paul Public Schools district, as well as in the Minneapolis Public Schools district, use Sharing Tables, which help reduce waste, feed students and promote sharing in schools, school officials say.

specialist at St. Paul Public Schools. "We want to make sure that students are not going hungry. Hungry students can't learn. Studies show that well-nourished kids do better in school."

St. Paul Public Schools has expanded its Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows schools in low-income areas to provide students with free breakfast and lunch. This school year, students in 39 out of the 59 schools in the district automatically receive free lunch, in addition to the free breakfast that the district already offers.

The Sharing Table has been in the St. Paul Public Schools district for at least 20 years, according to Gaszak. However, Maronde, who has been to all the schools in the district, said some schools do not have the Sharing Table available.

One of the benefits of the Sharing Table is that, at times, it can encourage students to talk with each other while giving them a chance to give back to their peers.

"With our advisories and all the stuff we're doing is to build a better community, so students are feeling

like they are part of a team together," said Micheal Thompson, the principal of Johnson High School. "... We're sharing that stuff and (it) doesn't go to waste and it has a sort of green feel to it, as well as in our community, we've got each others' backs: you're hungry, here's some more food."

When asked if she uses the Sharing Table, Tiffany Thao, a junior at Johnson High School, was unsure of what it is. But once directed to the Sharing Table, she immediately recognized it. Although she doesn't take food off the table, she does occasionally put food on it, she said.

"It is (important) because you are helping someone else when you put food on there instead of throwing it away," Thao said. "When you throw it away, it's just wasting food, so it's not good."

Sade Allison, a senior at Johnson, uses the table sometimes. On one occasion, she took several bananas off the table and offered them to other students. She needed the banana peels for compost for her senior project.

"I feel that if someone else needs

the food, it's a good place where they can just go get some food. Not everyone has food at home, where they can have (a) reliable source where they can go home and eat, so the Sharing Table, I think, is a really good idea," she said.

### SHARING TABLES IN OTHER SCHOOLS

Sharing Tables are prominent in other districts outside of St. Paul Public Schools. The Minneapolis Public Schools district also has Sharing Tables, according to Paul Marietta, the associate superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools. About 63 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch in Minneapolis.

Schools in other states such as California, Indiana, Florida and Tennessee also have Sharing Tables as well, according to media reports.

Maronde said she doesn't know how extensive Sharing Tables are in other schools statewide or nationwide, but she added, "I just think a lot of schools do it because they know it benefits the students who need that food or want that food."



# Extracurriculars: Choose quality over quantity

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## Join activities to feed your passions, not just to pad your college application.

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SENIOR YEAR IS a transition period for high school students, a time to discover who they want to be in their adult lives.

With this transition comes the ultimate question: What does your future hold? For many high school seniors, the answer is at first simple: college.

But as the process of applying to a university becomes more real and daunting, students may realize that college may not be as simple an answer as it first appeared.

Colleges look for more than consistently high grades and a well-crafted essay. In today's application process, universities are searching for the whole package, a model student who also is sufficiently involved in his or her community and holds leadership positions in varying activities.

Students are forced to display, in essence, why their accomplishments in high school are more impressive than the applicant next to them.

Sounds like a lot right?  
Absolutely.

The pressure that comes with fulfilling a university's expectations can cause a student to overcompensate in an attempt to appear versatile and involved in their communities. In actuality, some students are getting involved simply for the opportunity to list a new activity on



### Commentary

their college application.

I've seen this phenomenon take place in high school. Students are constantly complaining about their commitments and how much time each activity takes up. When asked why they would even be involved in something they don't enjoy, the answer is consistent: "Because it looks good on a college application."

For example, a student may decide to take part in debate team, volunteer at a library or take a class that "looks good" on an application, even if those activities or classes do not genuinely interest the student.

College admissions staff and experts caution against this.

The problem with this logic is the inherent selfishness and laziness

that accompany it. Instead of taking the time to seek out an activity or organization that is engaging and challenging, some students decide to take the easy road: involve themselves in activities they may dread attending, but are willing to endure for the prospect of standing out among other applicants.

This is wrong, and it showcases a youth culture in which selfishness and laziness reign king, and hard work and research take a distant back seat.

### JUSTIFIED?

At first glance, the choice to join a club or volunteer strictly to boost your college application may seem justified, considering how selective the college application process has become. Over the past roughly 20 years, the application process has changed in a number of distinct ways, according to KD College Prep, a Texas-based company that provides classes and tutoring for college entrance exams.

First, the competition has significantly increased. Harvard, one of the most prestigious universities on the planet, had an 18 percent acceptance rate in 1994. But for the class of 2015, the acceptance rate plummeted to a mere 6 percent.

Second, the cost of college has skyrocketed. Over the last decade, tuition costs have increased at a higher rate than inflation and family income, according to KD College Prep. The average tuition and fee price of a single year at a public four-year school is 40 percent higher in 2015-16 than it was in 2005-06 (adjusting for inflation), according to the College Board's website. The average price at a two-year college is 29 percent higher than 10 years ago, and the average price at a private, nonprofit four-year school is 26 percent higher.

Additionally, some colleges have begun charging students for submitting applications, meaning students have begun to pay for college even before an acceptance letter has been mailed out. If the worst should happen, and a rejection is on its way, those dollars have been wasted.

All these reasons, and more, might make the prospect of falsifying genuine interest seem more and more justified. However, this is not the appropriate approach to take for applications.

That kind of dismissive attitude, that an activity is "just for a college application," is one that should not be accepted.

### CHOOSE ACTIVITIES THAT SET YOU ON THE RIGHT PATH

Look at it this way: you're a senior in high school, and you're incredibly passionate about politics and bringing about change. You figure

that a great outlet to share your passion would be to run for student government. You work tirelessly at your speech, trying to convince the student body why you would be an excellent addition.

You deliver your speech well, and as you listen to the other candidates' speeches, you feel nervous about your chances. At the end of the week, the voting results are in, and to your dismay, you were not elected. You, being the considerate sport that you are, congratulate the winner and move on.

Later in the day, you hear the winner speaking with some fellow students. You overhear a snippet of their conversation.

"Yeah, I really don't care all that much about student government. I'm excited because it'll look great on my college app."

You're devastated.

This student has taken a position from you that you were enthused about, and their motive was so they could pen the title down on an application. Students should think about who they might be affecting before they get involved in activities for the title and not for the substance.

High school is not only about getting into college; high school also is about finding out what you want to do once you get to college. If students work hard enough, and have their priorities in place, college can be a real and exciting opportunity.

But what can set you apart from the application next to yours is sincerity. Honesty is ultimately up to you, but involvement in activities that set you on the right path toward your passions are far more valuable than activities designed to make you look desirable.

Because once school changes to real life, passion is what will chart your path to success.

*What can set you apart from the application next to yours is sincerity.  
Honesty is ultimately up to you, but involvement in activities that set you on  
the right path toward your passions are far more valuable than  
activities designed to make you look desirable.*



# The problem with skin bleaching

*"If only you were a few shades lighter, you would have been so beautiful, honey."*

AMIRA ADAWE GREW UP in a comfortable home surrounded by people who appreciated her skin.

She was constantly reminded that her skin was the skin of the celebrated Nubian queens. Dark, melanized skin. The skin of centuries of hard work under the sun. The skin that represented kingdoms.

But there were moments where strangers would try to thrust negative views of darker women onto her.

Hearing such comments from anyone can greatly distort a young woman of color's self-esteem. It was in these small moments (which happened quite frequently), that she realized that she was not considered beautiful based on European standards set up by our colonizers.

It reminds us of a quote from the ever-amazing Somali-British poet Warsan Shire:

"I am unwelcome and my beauty is not beauty here."

The belief that whiter skin is more beautiful may come from many sources. It can be unconsciously picked up from a fashion magazine



**By Yusra Abdi**  
Ubah Medical Academy



**By Salma Ali**  
Ubah Medical Academy

## Commentary

or a popular TV show. Or it can be learned through comments from family members or friends — like an aunt saying that someone's skin looks "dirty," implying that being dark is synonymous with unclean. Or perhaps that someone is spending too much time under the sun, indirectly saying that being dark is less beautiful.

As a result, some women buy skin bleaching creams because they believe that the less melanin you have, the more beautiful you are. In many cases, by bleaching their skin, women are trying to make themselves more attractive to men or battling each other for the distinction of "Lightest of the Month."

Adawe, a planner and health

educator at St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health, found that many users of bleaching products are unaware of their health effects. Mercury, found in almost half of the creams at local markets, is extremely toxic and can damage the brain, stomach and renal organs, she said. Some women use these creams while pregnant, exposing unborn children to the toxins.

"Through the breast milk it can immediately go to the baby," Adawe said. "We worry mostly about neurological effects."

Despite these creams' health, psychological and sociological effects, some in communities of color disregard these cautions, due to their yearning for acceptance, and fall victim to them. They consider the use of skin bleaching products and the cultural practices that go along with them.

A major challenge facing public health workers such as Adawe is how easy it is to purchase these products. Despite initiatives by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Food and Drug Administration, on a given day you could easily find the products at a local market, even though state and federal officials have been working on the problem since 2011.

There are many ways we could begin to combat this problem.

First, we could directly target the media, advocating a greater focus on beautiful women of color. Women like Viola Davis, Lupita Nyong'o,



**Amira Adawe, a planner and health educator at St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health, is helping lead the charge in bringing awareness about the dangerous effects of skin bleaching creams.**

Kerry Washington and Alfre Woodard should be cast (or continue to be cast) as normal, leading characters — not in the background playing small, nanny roles. This would raise hope and confidence in young women of color across the country.

Moreover, we could push Hollywood to create opportunities for disadvantaged, young people of color by eliminating discrimination in casting calls.

We would like to see white media be dismantled and replaced by outlets that lift up women of color, reminding us that we are beautiful. This would revolutionize our media structure, allowing for systematic change.

But media is just one example where, if we create spaces for young women of color to flourish, we would

see widespread positive results in both achievement and confidence.

We see insecurity as the root cause of women's desire to use skin bleaching creams, and one of us has had a personal experience with this feeling. As a darker-skinned black woman, family members have presented me the opportunity to bleach or "whiten" my skin. They made it seem as if they were doing me a favor by helping me look more socially acceptable. This, in turn, resulted in extremely low self-esteem and added more anxiety.

I just wanted to be beautiful. And I was not. I was conditioned to hate my own skin.

Meeting Adawe made us feel hopeful, because she reminded us that our skin is more than just beautiful: it's our identity. It's in our roots.

Influenced and empowered by education, Adawe has decided to dedicate her life to this work. She holds workshops that spread awareness for young women of color. She has taken this issue to the federal level — resulting in the ban of skin bleaching products containing mercury in 2012 — and is creating change that will affect the lives of black girls centuries from now.

We believe if we continue reaching out to communities, talking about the issues we face and lifting up women of color, we can combat this problem.

Our blackness is beautiful, and so is yours.

## SOCIAL MEDIA from page 13

as well as hurt feelings, on social media, she said.

"Ethical dilemmas could become an issue, but it doesn't override the power of education," she said.

Wyatt said all people need more media literacy training, "beginning with the young." Media literacy refers to the process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating and creating media, and understanding the messages we receive

from the many forms of media in culture, according to the Media Literacy Project.

"Everyone has responsibilities when anyone can speak out on social media," Wyatt said. "We need to be better at making sense of the information given to us, diversifying and giving feedback."

## LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Sharif, Wyatt and Tyner see promise for social media's role in the future of civic engagement.

They see the popularity of social media encouraging students to become active in their communities and more aware in the future, they said.

"It engages students early so they can stay engaged as citizens as time moves on," Wyatt said.

"It can be a precursor for your role as a citizen," Tyner said.

Sharif also feels he can use social media to help educate his less civically inclined peers.

"Social media gives me a great platform to spread my thoughts and ideas to my peers, and I feel like without it, it would be hard for me to stay up-to-date on issues," he said. "I can inform my peers, but only if they're willing to be open-minded and unbiased."

"I myself have a lot to learn on being an activist, but I'm confident in what I know and hope it's enough to spread the knowledge."





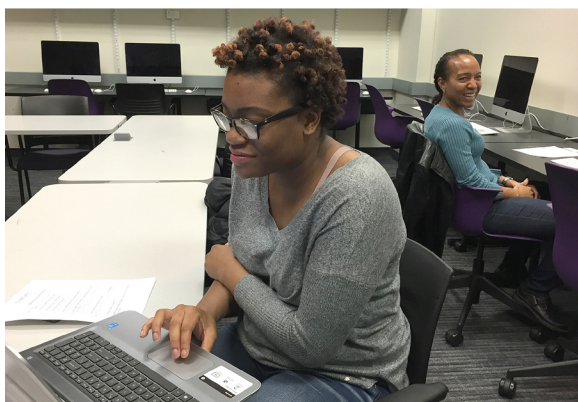
school-year



snapshots









# The mental health stigma

## In Somali community, culture can be a barrier to treatment

WAALI. WAALAN. MAJNOON.

These three words may look different, but they are commonly used in the Somali community to describe one thing: crazy.

“I first heard it when I was young, like 4, and I started understanding it when I was 7,” said Sumaya Warsame, a senior at Blaine High School. “It is used to describe a crazy person usually. When I say something weird, my mom might say, ‘waa waalantahay.’” (Translation: “You are crazy.”)

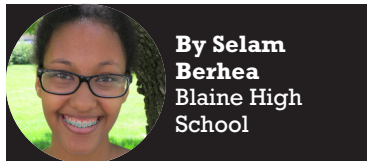
But the stigma surrounding these words can be so strong that some Somalis in the U.S. are less likely to seek help for mental illness, local experts say.

“Nobody wants to talk about depression or mental illness because back home someone goes crazy and they are just institutionalized, so there are no good pictures of someone who becomes broken down mentally,” said Fartun Weli, the executive director of Isuroon, a Minneapolis nonprofit that promotes the well-being and empowerment of Somali women.

### UNDERSTANDING THE STIGMA

To understand the stigma, it’s necessary to understand the view of mental health in Somali culture.

Sometimes mental illness is seen as brought on by God or by an evil spirit (djinn or jinn). And because it is seen as a trial from God, this results in



By Selam Berhea  
Blaine High School

quicker acceptance.

“The acceptance is part of the religion,” Weli said. “You are going through hardship, but also functioning while you’re depressed. It becomes the norm but back home ... you’re either normal or you are crazy.”

Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population in North America, experts say, and the vast majority live in the Twin Cities.

Major depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are the most common mental illnesses seen among refugees, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These are also the most common mental illnesses seen in the Somali community.

PTSD is prevalent — especially among older Somali refugees — usually due to trauma from the civil war. According to a multi-year study of Somali refugees at a Minneapolis clinic, published in 2010, 64 percent of Somali refugees over the age of 30 suffer from PTSD combined with depression.

The civil war in Somalia occurred in the early 1990s and has left the area destabilized. During the war, some witnessed murder, torture or rape of loved ones. The loss of family



Fartun Weli, the executive director of Isuroon, a Minneapolis nonprofit that promotes the well-being and empowerment of Somali women, says depression and mental illness are things “nobody wants to talk about” within the Somali community.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

members also was coupled with the loss of homeland, as stated in a 2008 study by David Schuchman of Macalester College.

Depression in the Somali community has several underlying factors, including social isolation due to immigration, poverty, change in role in society and change in family dynamics, experts say.

In coming to the U.S., some Somalis find themselves switching from communal life with large families to single-family homes. A man who was once a doctor in Somalia might find that his degree doesn’t transfer and ends up working as a cab driver. Parents find themselves relying heavily on their children due to lack of English skills.

### UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The first thing practitioners need to look at when dealing with mental health issues in the Somali community, Weli said, is the context in which their patients are living.

“Mental health is a global issue,” she said. “To the Somali community, or African community, or immigrant community, there are other issues that perpetuate it: the refugee camps, social issues — having a community connection and suddenly they are alone by themselves; the female household that doesn’t have a lot of community support because the community is busy here; the poverty of it; the

lack of preventative culturally specific services.

“I mean, I can go on and on and on, but it’s taboo.”

Untreated mental illness can have dramatic negative effects on a person’s quality of life and their overall health, experts say.

“If people hide and suffer alone, quite often they don’t learn English, they’re not able to retain a job and might have multiple chronic pain and physical issues and other illnesses that result from other unaddressed mental health distress,” said Patricia Shannon, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work.



Shannon

*“If people hide and suffer alone, quite often they don’t learn English, they’re not able to retain a job and might have multiple chronic pain and physical issues and other illnesses that result from other unaddressed mental health distress.”*

—Patricia Shannon, associate professor,  
University of Minnesota School of Social Work

### TREATING MENTAL ILLNESS

Prior to working at the University of Minnesota, Shannon was a research associate at the Center for Victims of Torture in St. Paul. She is credited with developing a new mental health screening tool for new immigrants, which involves one-on-one interviews using questions that work well for diverse refugee populations. These questions worked to identify **STIGMA** continued on next page



**STIGMA** from previous page  
people with mental illness.

Although there are internationally recognized symptoms of some mental illnesses, the way these illnesses are described varies.

Understanding how a culture talks about mental illness is a great first step toward appropriately treating the patient, experts say.

“A Somali person might talk about having a fuzzy brain ... whereas a Bhutanese person might talk about their heart in terms of emotional effect,” Shannon said.

When asked about what mental health centers and practitioners can do, Weli lists a few things: Have a workforce that reflects the demographic changes of the state. Build relationships with the patients. Provide treatments that can be adapted to the culture.

“For example, most of the moms we serve, they don’t want to take antidepressant meds, they want to do massages, they want to do acupuncture, they want to deal with the other issues they have,” Weli said.

But mental health issues are treatable, Shannon said.

“And so it’s important to say that these are normal reactions,” she said, “and not only are they normal, (but) you don’t have to suffer with it for decades.”

*In Somalia, if “someone goes crazy ... they are just institutionalized, so there are no good pictures of someone who becomes broken down mentally.”*

—Fartun Weli, executive director of Isuroon

# The quest for more muscle

## Body image is not just a women’s issue

*Editor’s note: ThreeSixty has changed the name of a minor in this article due to privacy.*

BRIAN IS ALWAYS AWARE of the space he occupies.

At 5-foot-9 and 205 pounds, the Minnesota high school student describes himself as linebacker-shaped without the muscle.

And that makes him uncomfortable. He was bullied in middle school for his size.

“I tried to change who I was and how I looked by almost starving myself except for the meals at home, but it didn’t stop anyone, or my body, from changing,” Brian said.

He is one of the millions of males who struggle each day with body image. One in three people who suffer from eating disorders are men, according to the National Eating Disorders Association. The effects of poor body image have been documented in women, but it’s not something men have talked about much until recently.

“We know that men feel bad about the way they look more and more as there are more male models and really bulky, muscular men. ... It’s changed over time and also I think we’re more aware of it now,” said Katie Loth, a dietician and assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, who has researched adolescent weight and disordered eating.

On television and social media, most male celebrities are muscular



By **Katia Kozachok**  
Perpich Arts High School

and lean. Someone’s weight is often the punchline of a joke. Ads emphasize the importance of low body fat and fitness.

### WOMEN SLIM DOWN, MEN BULK UP

It can be particularly difficult to have a positive body image, said Laura Savat, an outreach specialist at the Emily Program, a treatment center for eating disorders located in Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington.

The struggle with body image can be continually present; when you’re walking past a store and see your reflection, when you see ads with Photoshopped individuals. People see thousands of images a day, she said.

“There’s definitely a thin ideal for women and there’s this muscular ideal for men,” Savat said. “They’re put into these two groups, which is so unrealistic. I don’t think many people identify with either.”

Many men fixate on how much muscle they have, according to the National Eating Disorder Association. The association cites studies showing 90 percent of teen-aged boys exercised with the goal of bulking up, and among college-aged men, 68 percent say they have too little muscle.

“With web growth, that kind of unrealistic image for men has also grown,” Savat said. “You have no idea the kind of struggle men go through with body image and disordered eating and eating disorders.”

Brian said “the guy always has to be toned and tanned,” a perception he got from watching TV and movies, but that’s not necessarily attainable.

Savat said teens should instead focus on their passions and relationships with friends and family, not just their looks.

“I think everyone needs to feel good about the way they look and how they see themselves every day,” she said.

### ACHIEVING BETTER BODY IMAGE

Loth, a researcher at the U of M, said people should exercise and eat well, and they need to accept the way they look.

“What you can control is how you take care of yourself,” she said. “You can control these behaviors and you want these to be the things you focus on, as opposed to ‘I want this number on the scale.’”

She said there are lots of resources for women struggling with body image, but it can be harder for men to get help.

“There’s a lot of treatment for

women that have eating disorders,” Loth said. “It’s easier to capture a hundred women with poor body dissatisfaction than men.”

Some eating disorder treatment centers, like McCallum Place in Missouri and Kansas, and Fairwinds Treatment Center and Canopy Cove, both in Florida, have male-specific groups. Rogers Memorial Hospital, in Oconomowoc, Wis., has all-male eating disorder programs. Most treatment centers, however, will either accept only women or will accept men as part of co-ed programs.

Poor body image, left unaddressed, can lead to eating disorders or destructive behaviors, Loth said.

“Young people that feel bad about themselves are more likely to try risky and dangerous behaviors to change the way that they look,” she said.

Brian said the harassment diminished as he reached high school. He grew more comfortable with himself and stopped starving himself. He still looks in the mirror every day and picks out his flaws, but he also says something kind about himself so he doesn’t dwell on self-loathing.

“I just had to know who I was and be okay with that,” he said. “I needed the harassment to learn that, because I wasn’t going to learn it by always loving who I was.”

### Resources for teens

#### The Emily Program [emilyprogram.com](http://emilyprogram.com)

The Minnesota-based organization offers treatment for, and information about, eating disorders.

#### National Eating Disorders Association [nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://nationaleatingdisorders.org)

The association’s website has facts about eating disorders and links to resources, including a helpline and support groups.

#### The National Association for Males with Eating Disorders [namedinc.org](http://namedinc.org)

This association focuses on males with eating disorders and the specific struggles they face, with resources including books, research and media.

#### The Body Positive [thebodypositive.org](http://thebodypositive.org)

This organization focuses on body positivity and, in particular, resolving poor body image in teens and young adults.





PHOTO COURTESY OF CRISTETA BOARINI

A man votes last year in St. Paul. Even though not all teenagers can vote, they can still influence the political process by other means.

**POLITICAL** from page 12

to Peterson in her younger years that it played a role in declaring herself a Republican.

Debra Petersen, the St. Thomas professor, explained Peterson and Zbikowski's evolution from young people with opinions into young adult voters.

"If [teens] can see a hopeful sign that someone is really focusing on that issue and that there is a potential for change," she said, "I would think that might be very attractive to high schoolers thinking ahead to 'how is this going to impact me?'"

Petersen said teens can have political impact even without being old enough to vote.

"You can impact the campaign by helping fundraise and running events and learning the issues so that you can have an impact on the adults in your life," Petersen said.

"Even though you can't vote, you can still impact the adults around you."

**CIVIC LIFE** from page 11

Takgbajouah credited their families for stimulating their interests in politics. Tongrit-Green's mother emigrated from Nigeria at age 18 and brought her daughter to the voting polls in 2008. Takgbajouah's father is from Liberia. Both students said they care about immigration policies because of their parents' perspectives.

**'FREE SPACES' TO TALK POLITICS**

Open family and classroom environments for discussion are necessary to encourage youth to engage with their communities, according to Boyte.

Until the summer after his junior year in high school, when he attended a camp in Philadelphia, Boyte had not discussed politics with his peers.

"There were kids from all across the country (at camp), and it was so amazing to talk about ideas I had never had before with my peers. It was really exhilarating," he said. "So

*"When you're a 16-year-old kid talking about presidential candidates you can't vote for, adults are not going to listen to you."*

—Karimah Tongrit-Green, a junior at Twin Cities Academy

I came to name those types of places 'free spaces,' where young people, or people of any age, have space to explore, to take initiative, to be learners."

More than a decade later, Boyte surveyed more than 300 teenagers and discovered that while most had a plethora of relevant issues, not one surveyed teenager had ever been asked to contribute opinions or solutions.

In 1990, Boyte established Public Achievement, a student-led program that helps youth contribute to their communities.

In St. Paul, several generations of elementary school students worked through Public Achievement to build a playground

in a neighborhood adults deemed too dangerous due to suspected gang activity. They learned to communicate effectively, raise money and negotiate zoning changes with the city of St. Paul. Their perseverance earned them a playground and a standing ovation from the state legislature.

Public Achievement has since expanded to South Africa, Japan, Turkey, Gaza, Poland and other countries.

**ADULTS SHUTTING OUT TEENS**

Programs such as Public Achievement can do only so much. A major contributor to lack of youth involvement in politics is adults

shutting out teenagers, according to Tongrit-Green.

"When you're a 16-year-old kid talking about presidential candidates you can't vote for, adults are not going to listen to you," she said. "It's incredibly frustrating when you're a teenager, because you're growing out of that phase where you think adults are always right."

Said Boyte: "(Teenagers are) seen as immature or juvenile or just wanting to be taken care of or protected. I don't think that's true. It's just that young people don't get opportunities to deal with conflicts or work through things."

Boyte hopes to see a shift back toward civil rights-era citizen politics and the reappearance of a strong youth political identity. Both Tongrit-Green and Takgbajouah shared this sentiment.

"You can't expect us to become adults if you don't let us grow into that mold of adults," said Tongrit-Green. "And I just hope that youth aren't afraid to grow into that."



**LEVY-POUNDS** from page 17

has happened historically. I recommend a book by Howard Zinn called "A People's History of the United States." That book really awakened me and showed me the truth of what happened throughout our history, it showed me the truth about Christopher Columbus, the exploitation of Native American peoples, of how slaves were really treated in this country, how they were really thought about, the dehumanization and brutalization that they had to endure. And I was saddened by these things, but it also empowered me to know that I could use truth as a weapon to fight back for justice. And so, I think knowing your history is one tool that young people can be armed with when they face folks in society who simply want to maintain the status quo.

Beyond that, I think that young people can recognize that they have a place on the front lines. So recently what we've seen happen is young people walk out of their classes and go out and march and use their voices. I think that's vitally important. So often, we think that learning only happens in the classroom, and I take issue with that. Even with my law students, I tell them, "Listen, you're going to learn some things from me in a classroom in a formal setting, but I will give you credit if you go out to different events and activities, and you intermingle with the community, you ask questions, and you learn the truth about what people are experiencing. That is going to enhance your education, and it's going to prepare you to be able to not only deal with all types of people, but to be comfortable in a multicultural environment."

So I think we need to begin to articulate those messages to people so that they understand that learning is not only something you do in a classroom in a formal setting. And it also empowers people who have not received a bachelor's degree or some type of master's degree or advanced degree, to realize that they have valuable knowledge to contribute to society. ...

**M: It's funny that you're talking about Howard Zinn, because we just read from his book in my history class, but we were also kind of comparing some of the past history with more recent events, like the Jamar Clark shooting. Can you tell me what your reaction was when you first heard about Jamar Clark?**

*Levy-Pounds begins by describing how she felt called to travel to Ferguson, Mo., in November 2014, the day after the grand jury's decision to not indict Officer Darren Wilson in the*



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS JUHN

**Levy-Pounds kneels on I-94 and raises her hands in the air while protestors block the freeway.**

*"A lot of young people have the energy to carry forward this movement, even if it's discounted by older people, sometimes who mean well but have settled into the way things are."*

*shooting death of Michael Brown. Although leaving meant missing Thanksgiving with her family, Levy-Pounds flew to Ferguson as a legal observer. After being tear-gassed by law enforcement her first night there, Levy-Pounds said she realized she was not truly an activist until that moment.*

N: And so right after I got back from Ferguson, I was approached by young people who were part of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, and they asked me if I'd be willing to help them. And in all honesty, I had no idea how I could assist them, because I had seen Black Lives Matter activism unfold in other parts of the country, and I really didn't know what role there was for me to play as a law professor, as a civil rights attorney, because it was definitely a lot of youth activism and engagement, and I wasn't sure about that.

But I said I was open, and so a few days after I said I was open, their first official action was to shut down the I-35W freeway. And before Ferguson, I probably would have said, "No. I'm not helping you guys shut down a freeway." But after Ferguson, being tear-gassed, witnessing young people continuing to show up night after night, including on Thanksgiving night, to stand

up for what they believed in, it was a no-brainer.

And so I was part of that initial 35W shutdown. And right after we exited 35W, we actually marched to (Minneapolis) City Hall, and we demanded that City Council leaders stand up for equity. Because at that time, there were several City Council members who were planning to cut equity from the budget. There were several initiatives that they were just going to cut out of the budget. And we were saying, "How is this possible? This is a city that has double-digit unemployment, that has some of the worst racial disparities in the country, so at a time like this, how can you justify cutting equity programs from the budget, cutting positions and things like that?" We just thought it was unconscionable. So we descended upon City Hall, we made some requests and demands of them, and then we showed up a week later at the budget hearing, and we demanded that they put the money back in the budget, and that's what happened. Most of the money was put back in the budget.

And a few weeks later, we had the Mall of America demonstration, which I was a part of. I was one of 11 people who was criminally prosecuted in that situation. I was not an organizer at the time, I was a simple adviser to the

young people and a media spokesperson, but I was charged with eight misdemeanors. And I knew that it was unfair and unjust, because I saw the list of people who were charged, and I said, "First of all, this is a random collection of people. All these people were not organizers and agitators of Black Lives Matter." I just, I knew that it was a fallacy, so I said, you know, "We will be vindicated, because this is unfair of the law." And ... maybe now it's almost a month ago, all of our charges were dismissed, including all eight of my misdemeanor charges.

*Levy-Pounds says that a few days later, on Nov. 15, Jamar Clark was shot by police. Clark, whom authorities have said was a suspect in an alleged assault that police responded to on Nov. 15, later died in a hospital. Some witnesses and authorities have given conflicting accounts of the events leading up to the shooting. The shooting is under investigation.*

I got a call from someone in law enforcement, a high-ranking official, at 4 a.m., telling me that he had been killed. And I said, "This has got to be bad, for them to wake me up at 4 o'clock in the morning to tell me about this officer-involved shooting, this has to be bad."

And so I could not sleep the rest of the night. By 9:30 that morning, I called on some of the NAACP leaders, and I said, "Let's go to the site where this happened. Let's talk to witnesses and figure out what went on."

Within an hour of hearing from them, I said we'd need to hold a press conference, and we'd need to call attention to this issue. And that's essentially what happened. We went out, we interviewed people, we held a press conference, we called on Black Lives Matter Minneapolis to hold a rally and a march because that's what the people said that they wanted.

We encountered a hurting community. ... There were dozens of witnesses, some who lived in the apartment building outside of where it happened, but others who were coming out of what was called the Elks Lodge at the same time, and they felt that he had been executed, that he was unarmed, that he was restrained, that it shouldn't have happened.

And it touched something in my soul, because I thought, "Jamar Clark could have been my son." And I was just so outraged that it had happened, because I had gone to the Minneapolis City Council, I had gone to the mayor of Minneapolis, I had gone to the FBI, I had gone to the U.S. Attorney's Office, and I had spoken to the Hennepin County Attorney about the fact that we could become the next

**LEVY-POUNDS** continued on next page



**LEVY-POUNDS** from previous page

Ferguson, that we are essentially one incident away from becoming the next Ferguson, and they didn't listen to me. ...

So when the Jamar Clark shooting happened, it set off a firestorm. People were like, "We're not going to take this anymore," including myself. The day after he was killed, not only had I been marching and rallying and protesting with people, but I got arrested on the I-94 freeway. And the reality is, all I could think about was, "Jamar Clark could have been my son. How is it possible that in a civilized society, a man could be shot in the head, and we could find ways to try to excuse that behavior on the part of those who are supposed to protect and serve?" I just thought that was totally unacceptable. So I was willing to be arrested that night.

This was my first time ever being arrested. And I remember looking at my son, who was with me on the 94 (freeway), 10 years old, I looked at him and said, "It's possible I will be arrested tonight. Are you OK with that?"

And my son said, "Yes, but mom, I want to stay with you." He wanted to get arrested with me. And I didn't allow him because I didn't know what would happen to him in the juvenile system, I didn't know how long I would be kept and I just didn't want him, you know, in jeopardy in any situation, so I told him, "No." So I sent him home with some friends and ultimately his godmother.

But as a mom, as an advocate, as a civil rights attorney, I felt that it was my duty to stand up for justice and to defy what I felt were unjust laws, and I would do it all over again. Because he shouldn't have been killed.

He was an unarmed man. It just doesn't make sense that police cannot find ways to de-escalate situations instead of escalating them to the point of human life being lost. ...

**M: At this point, you've talked a lot about different communities coming together for Jamar Clark. So from what you've seen, what would you say about communities in this area coming together or dividing over this issue?**

N: Well, I think that it was incredible to see so many people from our community come together in the wake of the shooting and death of Jamar Clark at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department.

First of all, the occupation was organic. There wasn't any plan to occupy the Fourth Precinct. What happened on the first night was, as we were marching, we said, "We're going to stop at the Fourth Precinct." We stood outside the Fourth Precinct, we chanted, you know, we



**Levy-Pounds leads a reflection during her community justice project clinic on Sept. 17, 2015, in the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis.**

talked about what happened, we had speeches, we advocated, we agitated. And then at one point, several of us, including me, marched into the vestibule of the Fourth Precinct.

*Levy-Pounds says she and other community members banged on the doors of the Fourth Precinct in Minneapolis to be let in, but they weren't. She says young Black Lives Matter activists then spontaneously started the occupation, bringing sleeping bags and blankets to the precinct. She goes on to describe a system of occupation in which people rotated staying at the Fourth Precinct and others brought food and donations.*

This touches my heart to even talk about this, because there were folks who had never stepped foot on the north side of Minneapolis, showing up, bringing home-cooked meals, bringing gloves, bringing hats, bringing scarves for people to, you know, have access to. I'm just blown away because I felt that what happened at the Fourth Precinct was a vision of God's, of Dr. King's beloved community, where you have folks literally from all walks of life, like African-American, Native American, Hmong, Latino, white, from different religious backgrounds, showing up and bringing the items that were needed. So no one ever went without a meal during the 18-day occupation. There was always an influx of food, water, beverages, supplies — I've never seen anything like it in my life.

And that's even after traveling to Ferguson and having been part of that. This was something different. It was the essence of what happened in Ferguson, in terms of resistance to oppression that was taking place, and standing

#### **The Levy-Pounds file**

**Profession:** University of St. Thomas law professor. Civil rights attorney. President of the Minneapolis NAACP. Activist.

**Age:** 39

**College:** B.A. from the University of Southern California and J.D. from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

**Find her:** On Twitter at @nvlevy

up for what you believed in, and being perseverant, and showing up night after night, but this was something vastly different because of how well-organized it was, and how many folks from the community came together to show support in one way or another. ...

I'll never forget that experience, and I'm just thankful to God that I had a chance to be part of it and that some of my students were part of it. Because I just feel that it was unprecedented in terms of what happened at the Fourth Precinct.

*Levy-Pounds continues, saying the police clearing of the encampment at the Fourth Precinct on Dec. 4 was a "victory." Although police ended the occupation, Black Lives Matter activists felt that getting a response from the city was a massive step in the right direction, she said.*

I took my kids out there a few days. We had Thanksgiving dinner there, which was amazing, so I had Thanksgiving in Ferguson last year, and this year I had Thanksgiving in front of the Fourth Precinct.

We had a church service out there on the night of Jamar Clark's funeral. I asked for

clergy, faith leaders, grief counselors and members of the broader community to be present, because I said, you know, in Baltimore we saw that there were riots, fires and uprisings on the day of Freddie Gray's funeral, because that is the most emotional day, aside from when you find out that someone is killed. Because you can see a person in the casket. You realize, they are dead and gone, and this is real.

So we knew that for a lot of young people, they could not cope with that, the realization that their friend, their family member was gone. So we specifically put out a call to action for people to come to the occupation, who could fill those roles of prayer for people, serving as grief counselors for people, because we didn't want riots to set off in that environment. And that's essentially what happened. We had more young people at the occupation that night than we had had in the previous two weeks. And these were young folks.

*Levy-Pounds then describes praying to calm the tense atmosphere that night. Close to the site of Jamar Clark's death on the night of his funeral, she says, she and others formed a bridge between about 40 African-American young men and roughly 25 police officers, defusing a potential standoff by begging the boys to channel their energy differently. She told a person working security, "We have to stop this. Because if we don't, someone's going to get killed."*

We talk about the occupation, it's like, that's why our city didn't burn down to the ground. We provided a container for people's grief and their emotions and their hurt that they were feeling that they wouldn't have had an outlet for.

There were people who came to me and showed me gasoline, where they were ready to burn down the precinct. And I'm like, "Please don't do that. Please channel your energy differently. Don't burn down the precinct. It's not going to help anything."

There were so many people we had to redirect from doing things that were out of frustration and anger and rage, from having to tolerate police abuse for so many years and feeling their concerns falling on deaf ears. That is why we didn't have the riots and the uprisings that we've seen in other cities, because of that occupation, and because we saturated the atmosphere in prayer. Anytime something got out of hand or didn't feel right, I'm like, "Let's gather," or other people of God would say, "Let's gather," and we would pray. We would pray our way through that situation.

Literally, even the fact that when (five) victims were shot [on Nov. 23 near the Black Lives



Matter encampment at the Fourth Precinct in Minneapolis (Four men have been charged in connection with the shooting)], that no one was killed, that was by the grace of God. ... The only reason they're alive is because of the grace of God.

But it shows people the evil of racial hatred that we have to contend with. Whether it comes through law enforcement or white supremacists, it is an evil that we face. And not everybody's willing to even face that evil or take it seriously, but that's what we were forced to do during that occupation, to make the world aware that we are not going to allow this to happen in what is supposed to be a civilized society.

**M: And you've been so directly involved in all of these protests, not just trying to create change from the boardroom. So why do you take this more ground-level, disruptive approach to protesting?**

N: I will just say in terms of disruption that it's necessary in order to wake people up to the truth that the protests are really about disrupting the status quo and awakening people from their day-to-day routines of just kind of going about their lives as though this doesn't matter. And we're saying through the disruption that this does matter, that it is important and that people's lives are being taken as a result of our indifference toward their plights.

**M: OK, so one last question. For teenagers who want to get involved with their society, whether that's through Black Lives Matter or some other type of organization, what kind of advice would you give them?**

N: Well, I would tell them to follow their consciences. So if young people feel compelled to act, that they need to act, that they should seek the advice of elders, people who have perhaps been involved in a struggle on some level ... A lot of young people have the energy to carry forward this movement, even if it's discounted by older people, sometimes who mean well but have settled into the way things are.

That they need to trust their instincts. And they need to be willing to push against the status quo. And to realize that their voices are important. And to not let anyone tell them otherwise. We've seen students walk out of school, we've seen them agitate on the front lines, we've seen them speak truth to power. All of those things are necessary to fight against injustice in our society. So I urge them to use the tools at their disposal to advocate and agitate peacefully and nonviolently until they see the changes they want to see.

*This is an edited transcript of this interview.*



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### Questions?

Contact Engagement Coordinator

Bao Vang at [baovang@stthomas.edu](mailto:baovang@stthomas.edu) or (651) 962-5225.



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