

Coming Back to Give Back

In 2013, Cassandra St Cyr graduated from Brooklyn Generation School (BGS). After two years away from BGS and with a few semesters of college under her belt, she returned to support the community from which she drew support. Cassandra came back to give back.

“I wasn’t supposed to be here” as a student, Cassandra recalled as she explained the auspicious circumstances that led her to Brooklyn Generation. “It wasn’t my first choice,” she continued. “I came here [to BGS] with my cousin for an open house, and a student convinced us to put the school down on our applications.” That student, according to Cassandra, sold her on the school’s robust student life and supportive school structure. When she started at BGS in 2009, however, she remembers BGS being a bit different. “I was surprised to be honest. BGS was nothing like high schools were on TV. I thought it was going to be more like *Degrassi* with lockers in the hallway, cool clubs, and an open community.” When Principal Lydia Colon Bomani joined the school as principal in 2010, Cassandra saw a huge opportunity. In fact, Principal Bomani and the staff would pave the way for Cassandra’s immense personal development.



Cassandra St Cyr - AmeriCorp Employee and Brooklyn Generation School Alum

The beginning of high school was rough for Cassandra. At a time when most students are focused on the new experiences of high school, Cassandra was still struggling to recover from physical and emotional trauma she suffered after a car accident a few years before. “[The accident] affected the way I spoke to people, the way I saw myself, even the way I woke up in the morning,” Cassandra acknowledged. “One of the reasons I had such a hard time in BGS was that I had my own issues that I wasn’t willing to be open about, nor did I have people around to realize that those issues were the reason I acted out.” At BGS, she started the process of healing and finding herself through the participation in Sisterhood, a Rites of Passage program at BGS that gave her and other students at risk the opportunity to be trained and serve as mentors. Also, through the Rites of Passage program, she discovered an outlet for her thoughts through a host of mixed media, but especially the use of poetry. “It wasn’t until mentoring that I realized I really loved talking to people, and that I really loved poetry. These became my lifeline. Now art is my life. My hope is to share it with the world and help everyone through my creativity.”

This Rites of Passage program wasn’t the only factor in her development; key staff members pushed her to be better and encouraged her to progress—staff members like Tanya Odums, Director of Wellness and Michele Hill, Director of College and Career. “Ms. Odums was there for me. She helped me realize that I had potential...she built me up and believed in me, putting me in leadership roles and investing the time

for my growth.” Michele Hill provided similar supports. “I genuinely love Ms. Hill. She was like a mother to me, and always told me about myself when I needed to hear it. I didn’t always want to hear it, but it really helped me in the long run.”

Cassandra is currently enrolled at York College where she majors in Speech Communications / Theatre Arts and minors in Fine Arts. She hopes to create a career in media that allows her to fuse her many passions of art and community.

As an AmeriCorps employee focused on family engagement at BGS, Cassandra is responsible for assisting in the organizing of events for families and supporting overall parent engagement. Not surprisingly, she is also co-running BGS’ free write club. This opportunity is not lost on her, as she recognizes the importance of this opportunity to deeply connect with students and their families, and impact the structures that support young people. “It’s beautiful to go back to your old school and support change. All the things that you wished were different when you were a student, you now have the opportunity and responsibility to improve. I want [the students] to have an even better experience than I did.”