



Communities  
In Schools

Kalamazoo

# Connections

2015-16 Volume I

## The Promises You Keep

**O**n Saturday, August 15th in beautiful downtown Bronson Park, this community celebrated the ten year anniversary of The Kalamazoo Promise®. At our CIS station we heard a mantra of thanks offered throughout the day:

*“I wouldn’t be in college right now if it wasn’t for The Promise.”*  
*“I still can’t believe we have this awesome gift in our community.”*  
*“How can I help support The Promise through CIS? Can I volunteer? What can my business/organization do?”*

But, it was what happened before the event, even before the park filled with people, that underscored the beauty of this tremendous gift.

While attempting to put up the tent, we were approached by a stooped, old man in dingy clothes. After explaining the event, the man replied: “I’m just a street person,” as if to apologize for his presence. “I don’t have kids in the Kalamazoo Public Schools. Am I even allowed to come to this event?”



*Young attendee at the Promise Community Celebration*

“You are a part of this community,” we told him. “That means that you are also a part of The Promise. Help us celebrate!” His face lit up. He seemed to stand a little straighter. Before he left, he gave us the one gift he had—he generously blessed us.

There were a variety of community volunteers working together and our tent would not have been set up without their help.



*Emily Demorest, CIS Site Coordinator at Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts, with the prize wheel at the Promise Community Celebration.*

The recent words of Von Washington Jr., Executive Director of Community Relations for The Kalamazoo Promise® came to mind. He said, “The celebration in the park is designed for everyone in the community to come out, have some fun and revel in being a part of a city that enjoys this wonderful asset.”

*“We need each other to lift the tents that separate us from each other.”*

No city, like no person, is perfect. We need each other to lift the tents that separate us from each

other. The Promise is a wonderful reminder that we too, must be generous and give, however and whenever we can. We are responsible for each other and for making sure all of our kids can take advantage of the profound gift of The Kalamazoo Promise®.

So many of you work together with us to overcome the barriers that derail kids, giving them the hope and belief that they can succeed in school, graduate, and be prepared for life. We thank you!

If you are reading this newsletter, you are a part of The Promise. Want to play a bigger role in helping Kalamazoo Public School students stay in school, graduate and be prepared to take advantage of the gift of The Kalamazoo Promise®? Volunteer, donate, or, partner with CIS today! Help us keep our promise.

# On Track for The Promise



*Arieonna Atlas is now a senior at Loy Norrix High School.*

**A**rieonna Atlas was a junior at Loy Norrix High School this past school year. In the beginning of the year she faced challenges with academics, attendance, and behavior, all of which were leading her down a difficult path. She was failing her classes, skipping school, and when she did attend, was tardy. Thanks to AT&T for generously supporting CIS, Arieonna had a CIS Site Coordinator in her school to help her get on the path to success. While Arieonna was not yet ready to follow through on things she agreed to do, she was a great listener and trusted the Site Coordinator with many things going on in her life. But, it wasn't until the second trimester, when she got into a fight and was suspended from school, that she returned to the CIS office seeking help.

Together with her Site Coordinator, Arieonna established new goals and strategies she needed to pursue in order to have a successful school year. The two big goals she wanted to accomplish were passing her classes and getting a job. Goals and incentives related to attendance and tardies were also established. The Site Coordinator connected her with Tyler Harris, a WMU Medical Student, who tutored her in English and math on a weekly basis. She began taking NovaNet classes after school where she could earn credits for classes online. She attended these every day.

Accompanied by her Site Coordinator, she spoke with several of her teachers and began building stronger relationships and getting extra assistance when needed on homework and assignments. Arieonna also attended a resume workshop CIS hosted, as well as an AT&T Career Exploration tour which she loved. It helped her overcome her fear of speaking before groups. On her own, she chose to stop hanging out with some students who were a bad influence on her. She began flourishing and building better relationships all around.

Finally, CIS worked with her on her time management skills; she started using her planner more and putting important assignments in her phone as reminders. By the third trimester, Arieonna was passing all classes but one, had not missed any of her classes, and had no tardies. The Site Coordinator wrote her a recommendation letter and performed a mock interview which helped her get a job with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), as a youth worker at Christian Life Center Day Care Center.

Arieonna is a young lady who just needed to have some guidance, structure and another person who cared about her well-being. Once she realized she had great potential, her confidence boosted, she soared, and has been on track ever since.

*All of the great work you've been reading about is made possible by people like you who volunteer with or donate to CIS. Please invest in local kids and be a part of more success stories like Arieonna's.*

*Make a gift to CIS today.*

## How Has The Promise Supported You?

### *A Heavy Burden Lifted*

Sue Hough's two sons attend Woods Lake Elementary School and both participate in Kalamazoo Kids In Tune (a partnership between The Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, Kalamazoo Public Schools, and Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo) and CIS Think Summer. "I'm so happy my boys have The Promise," says Sue. "Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to afford college for them." April Glass, the boys' aunt, agrees. "The Promise has changed things in Kalamazoo; even how we talk to each other."

"Yeah," agrees Sue. "Like the other day, a police officer stepped out of his car and said to my boys, 'You have The Kalamazoo Promise®...so what do you want to be when you grow up?' One said he wants to be a cop, the other an EMT. "I don't know if that would have happened if we didn't have The Promise."

### *A Way to Give Back*

Phil Hegwood is a CIS After School Coordinator at Woodward School for Technology & Research. He graduated from Loy Norrix High School in 2007 and the second year of Promise students. "I always knew I wanted to go college, but I didn't know how I was going to afford it. The Kalamazoo Promise® took a huge weight off my shoulders, and I was able to get my bachelor's debt free. The Promise really showed me that money shouldn't be a barrier that holds people back. I am super grateful for The Promise. Now, working as an After School Coordinator has pushed me to help future recipients. Being able to give my students the opportunity to see things they may have never seen before, or taking them on a college tour to show them that they can go to this institution in the future makes my heart sing."

### *A Chance to Catch My Breath*

Joe Barth graduated from Kalamazoo Central in 2009 and began attending Kalamazoo College. "After several years," Joe said, "I wasn't getting the best of grades. I realized I needed a change." He tapped into The Kalamazoo Promise® and began classes at KVCC. It was the right move for Joe. The Promise helped him catch his breath. He brought his grades up and the change gave him the direction he was seeking. "I worked as a substitute teacher in KPS during that time and learned that I wanted to work in Kalamazoo and work with kids."

Joe returned to Kalamazoo College with renewed passion. In June 2015, he graduated with his Bachelor's degree in Mathematics and then began serving as a Youth Development Worker in CIS Think Summer! "It was a great experience and it confirmed for me that I wanted a career that gave me the chance to impact youth. It allowed me to see the great work that CIS does every day and I wanted to be a part of it." Now, as the new Data, Tracking and Quality Coordinator for Communities In Schools, Joe Barth is well positioned to help Kalamazoo Public School students succeed and find their own path to their Promise.

# Conversation with CIS Board



*Dr. Janice Brown is a CIS Board Member, former Executive Director of The Kalamazoo Promise®, and former KPS Superintendent.*

*This conversation took place on the heels of the 10th Anniversary Promise Community Celebration Kalamazoo Promise event. A CIS Board Member since 2000, it was Dr. Janice Brown, who was then Superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools, who announced on November 10, 2005 that anonymous donors were providing graduates of the Kalamazoo Public Schools with to up 100% of their tuition to Michigan public universities and colleges (along with 15 private liberal-arts colleges in the Michigan Colleges Alliance, thanks to a 2014 expansion announcement)*

**Not to put you on the spot, but what three or four words, for you, encapsulate The Kalamazoo Promise®?**

The joy of giving.

**What's the biggest misconception about The Kalamazoo Promise®?**

That it is destined to cure all the ills of the community when, in fact, it the opposite. The

*“The Kalamazoo Promise  
how important it is to*

Kalamazoo Promise® is an example of how important it is to work together. The mentality that is dangerous is that now that we have The Promise everything is okay. I'd say that now that we have The Promise, our work is clearly articulated for us and the work is extremely difficult as we now have the obligation to educate all of the youth in our community to their fullest potential.

**Since the announcement of The Kalamazoo Promise®, what have you learned over these past ten years?**

I've learned many things since the announcement of The Kalamazoo Promise®. The first thing I've learned about our youth is how committed and resilient they are in carving their future. I'm amazed at how many times they keep trying. It's very difficult to go to college. When I see somebody who has struggled and left college but then shows up and says, "I'm here to try again," that makes me so happy.

How unknowingly smart we were to offer a ten year window. So much growth and maturation can take place in that time. Youth are not stagnant. They can grow over that ten year period and that can help them accomplish their dreams. I've learned that the youth understand the privilege and the obligation about such a tremendous gift and they are interested in paying it forward.

We don't even know yet the implications of The Kalamazoo Promise®. We are in our tenth year and being a ten-year-old is like being a fifth grader. While we think we know everything, we are just beginning to understand the implications and the ripple effect this is starting to create.

## Guest Member: Dr. Janice Brown

**Kalamazoo, as you know, is rich with so many resources to support kids. What is unique about CIS?**

I have been a long-time advocate of Communities In Schools. The reason is because it is the organization that helps frame the wonderful work that nonprofits do. CIS has the capacity to individualize the nonprofit work and get those services to the children who need it. And, of course, the vehicle is through the schools. As an educator, I'm a CIS endorser. We now have an arm-in-arm partner who can take away the burden of the social needs of our students so that teachers and educators can do the best that they can do—and that is teaching for learning. I also believe in CIS because of the measurement system. CIS measures its progress based upon student data from KPS in reading, math, behavior, and attendance.

**Creating The Promise took vision. What are your hopes and visions for the future of The Kalamazoo Promise®?**

Ten years from now we'll continue to see that slow and steady increase in students who complete their degrees. We will have better conquered the dropout rate in KPS. That is the last thing to come, Dr. Rice has said, and I agree with him. What has been accomplished within the first ten years—sending 95% of students to college—is tremendous.

*se® is an example of  
to work together.”*

Getting them through graduation is the next challenge. We need to get that 95% through college or their chosen post-secondary vocation. That's going to take the next ten years. We've now picked up the most challenging students we have in our community and they have begun their journey of success.

**The anonymity of the donors puzzles people. What unique opportunities does this anonymity give our community?**

I've never asked the donors why they chose to be anonymous. It doesn't matter. It places the burden on the development of the community and in the hands of the families of the children and that is where it belongs. The donors have more than done their part by their incredible investment of dollars. We have to figure out the rest. We don't want to burden them with further work when they have already worked so hard to give this money. Now it's in our hands.

**Any final thoughts?**

Never miss an opportunity to say thank you to The Kalamazoo Promise® donors. And thank you CIS, for being such a strong organization for bringing our students to The Promise.

**Thank you, Dr. Brown!**

### Did You Know?

This November 10-12, Kalamazoo will host the seventh PromiseNet meeting at the Radisson Plaza Hotel. PromiseNet is an opportunity for Promise community stakeholders to come together and

share best practices around designing, implementing, and sustaining place-based scholarship programs. While these programs vary in their structure, they all seek to expand access to and success in higher education, deepen the college-going culture in K-12 systems, and support local economic development. For more information about PromiseNet go to: <http://promisenet.net/>.



# Promising Futures

Local employers play a big role in supporting students on their path to using The Kalamazoo Promise®. From encouraging their employees to volunteer to providing career exploration opportunities, businesses have made it their business to ensure all children fulfill their promise. Here are a couple highlights from the summer.

Sixty-five students participating in CIS Think Summer! had the opportunity to create artwork for Pfizer's Portage Road facility. Pfizer commissioned the artwork as part of its local Community Art project. Pfizer employees also

hosted a career exploration event at the CIS Think Summer! program for these students to talk with them about potential careers with Pfizer and the education and training needed for those jobs. Organizers Julie Righter and Laura Martin said, "Partnering with organizations like CIS on Pfizer's Community Art project is mutually beneficial to both Pfizer and the students. The artwork the students create will hang on the walls in Pfizer to inspire our colleagues every day as we manufacture safe medicines for the community. Through the Career Exploration Event, we hoped to give students a glimpse inside of Pfizer and inspire them to pursue



*Students learning about career options during a career exploration event hosted by Pfizer.*



*High school students practice making financial decisions during the Making Cents money management workshop.*

careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and skilled trades– perhaps even starting a career at Pfizer in the future!"

Local Comerica employees joined other community volunteers to help prepare our high school students for starting careers and making independent financial decisions as part of CIS' Making Cents money management workshop, sponsored by Comerica. Students worked with the volunteers on resumés and cover letters, participated in mock interviews, and practiced their budgeting and financial decision making skills.

## Join CIS & The K-Wings on Nov. 13



The Kalamazoo Wings hockey team has teamed up with CIS to support the CIS Kids' Closet! On Friday, November 13 when the K-Wings take on the Evansville IceMen at home at 7:00 pm, Wings Event Center will have bins to collect new clothing, school supplies, and hygiene items to benefit students in Kalamazoo. Don't forget to try your hand at chuck-a-puck. Proceeds benefit the CIS Kids' Closet.

**Get your tickets from the downtown Kalamazoo CIS office, 125 W. Exchange Place, or email [joprea@ciskalamazoo.org](mailto:joprea@ciskalamazoo.org) for more details.**

## Get Your Official Kalamazoo Promise T-Shirt

Communities In Schools is selling official The Kalamazoo Promise® t-shirts at their Downtown Kalamazoo Office: 125 W. Exchange Place (across from the Radisson.) Shirts are available in youth (S-XL) and adult (S-3X) sizes and range from \$10-\$12 each. Proceeds will support CIS' work to ensure that all kids in Kalamazoo can take advantage of The Kalamazoo Promise®!



If you believe in our efforts to ensure that ALL kids stay in school and achieve in life, please visit [www.ciskalamazoo.org](http://www.ciskalamazoo.org) or call 269.337.1601 for more details on getting involved with CIS. On our website you will find ways to support local youth through volunteer opportunities, ways to make a gift, event information, and our Kids' Closet Wish List.

The work of Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo is supported by the Kalamazoo Public Schools, the City of Kalamazoo, the Michigan Department of Education (21st Century Community Learning Centers), local foundations, and individual donors like you.

Photos in this newsletter were taken by Don Kingery (CIS Volunteer): page 1, Artrella Cohn (Director of Secondary Sites & Artrella Cohn Photography): page 6, and contributing CIS Staff. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this newsletter or would like to sign up for the e-newsletter, contact Jessy Oprea (CIS Fund Development and Marketing Coordinator) at [joprea@ciskalamazoo.org](mailto:joprea@ciskalamazoo.org) or call 269.337.1601 ext. 217.



Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo  
125 Exchange Place  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

[www.ciskalamazoo.org](http://www.ciskalamazoo.org)  
Ph: 269.337.1601  
Fx: 269.385.5806

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*Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo overcomes the barriers that derail kids, giving them hope and the belief that they can succeed in school, graduate and be prepared for life.*



# The Promises You Keep

Let's give a hand to The Kalamazoo Promise®! Sponsored by Fifth Third Bank, this activity literally captured 20.5 pounds of thanks as people were invited to complete the following statement: "Because of The Kalamazoo Promise®, I..." People wrote their thoughts on a metal graduation cap and then placed it on a huge metal sculpture shaped like Michigan (created by local artist Jon Reeves). Thank you for the opportunity for students to reach for the stars!