

SPRING 2019 NEWSLETTER



PAM KINGERY, FOUNDING CIS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RETIRING

By Tony McDonnell, CIS Board President

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo, I announce the retirement of our founding Executive Director, Pamela Kingery, which will occur at the end of June, 2019.

For more than two generations, Pam Kingery has used her social work training and policy, planning and administrative experience with others who care about the Kalamazoo community. In December 1999, Pam Kingery took on the challenge of developing the Kalamazoo version of Communities In Schools, using a national model to overcome the barriers that derail kids, giving them hope and the belief they can succeed in school, graduate and be prepared for life. Building and nurturing a strong board of leaders from across the Kalamazoo community, Pam garnered community support to place CIS Site Coordinators within the Kalamazoo Public Schools—women and men who bring the community and all the ways it

can help, into the schools. Under her leadership and vision, the organization has steadily grown: from three employees to 116 today, from serving three KPS schools to twenty.

Rest assured, the CIS Board has already embarked on its search for the next executive director. We look forward to a smooth transition and finding someone with the same passion and drive, a new leader who, in the wake of exciting opportunities and intriguing developments, will take this incredible organization to the next level, and help us serve even more students.

Please join the board in thanking Pam for her extraordinary leadership.

The CIS board has formed a Search Committee and engaged HRM Innovations in their search for the Executive Director position.

ENGAGED READING A PREDICTOR OF LIFE SUCCESS

“Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home.”
– Anna Quindlen

Study after study finds that engaged reading is a strong predictor of life success. “Literacy opens the door to economic and social power, regardless of socio-economic class,” says Pam Kingery, Executive Director of Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo (CIS). “And our community holds the key. Now is the time to be better, and for CIS—for all of us—to up our game for our kids.”

“What we all want,” says Kingery, “is for all kids to be good readers. What I also really want is for all kids to love reading. A question we should be asking is: *How do we help kids become technically good readers and help them love reading, and discover how their lives can be enriched by reading?*”

One way that CIS is answering that question is through volunteer power. Volunteers are a significant source of academic support, and CIS is working to:

Retain and recruit even more volunteers, especially male volunteers, and offer literacy and math trainings to volunteers, working with the school district and community partners.

On behalf of kids, let’s step up our game together. An hour a week can change the life of a child. Whether its one-on-one tutoring, classroom support, or after school helper, our kids need you. Join our awesome team of volunteers in supporting students in Kalamazoo Public Schools. Apply online today at: <http://ciskalamazoo.org/volunteer/>.





BUILDING CHILDREN'S READING STAMINA

Reading stamina is a child's ability to focus and read independently for a period of time without being distracted and without distracting others. As children grow, ideally, the length of time they can focus increases as well. For new and struggling readers, building reading stamina is critical to success.

At Woodward School for Technology and Research, students involved in the CIS After School Program had an opportunity to do just that with the Reading Stamina project.

"Angela Justice, the KPS coordinator for English language arts, social studies, and library services, was instrumental in helping to get the project off the ground," says Artrella Cohn, Senior Director of Community Engagement & Student Investment. "Kalamazoo College student volunteers were trained by Dea Mulolli, a Western Michigan University graduate student who was focusing on literacy as part of her Capstone project. She shared learning strategies that build reading stamina with students. The objective was for students to increase their endurance and focus on incrementally increasing their amount of uninterrupted reading time."

Children's stamina is likely to increase if they are engaged with their reading. So, following silent reading time,

students discussed with the college volunteers what they had read, pulling out key themes, important ideas, and asking questions.

CIS After School Program Coordinator at Woodward School for Technology and Research, Ebony Ragotzy provided on-site support for the month-long project. "It was wonderful to see students reading silently—and being encouraged by the K volunteers to read silently as well as share with them what they were reading," she says. "The elementary students involved loved this reading project. The Kalamazoo College students, armed with the reading stamina training, were incredibly helpful in assisting and leading this project."

A tip for developing reading stamina in your child/grandchild/niece/nephew:

Variety, it has been said, is the spice of life. So, too, with reading time. New and struggling readers often respond well to varying the way reading is done. So, have your child read to themselves, read to someone else, and listen to reading.

The CIS After School Program is funded by the Michigan Department of Education (21st Century Community Learning Centers grants).



WHY IS READING SO HARD FOR ME?

At the end of February, 10 CIS Volunteers took part in the training, “Why Is Reading So Hard For Me?” They considered the “reading brain,” participated in simulations, and learned some of the underlying reasons for struggles with learning to read. Tina Jordan, SLD Read Curriculum and Instruction Manager led the workshop, sharing several causes of reading difficulties and ways volunteer tutors can support and engage the brains of struggling readers. Ellen Batten, a long-time CIS volunteer out at Woods Lake Elementary, said, “I really like taking advantage of the SLD Read trainings that CIS has offered this year. Every little bit of knowledge helps when you are working with a struggling reader.” Thank you, SLD Read!

CIS Volunteer, Ellen Batten practicing letters with students in shaving cream at Woods Lake Elementary School.

Sue Bourget, a CIS volunteer at Woods Lake Elementary is practicing syllables using SLD Read techniques with a CIS student.



TRUTH TOWN

*All the rivals start saying false things
to find the truth for racism.
To escape racism, you have to defect from the country.
But you have to prepare for silence.
You don't need to blame, just tell the truth.
You need to shake it up or you will
be lost in lies and be silenced.
After you defect, you have to stop racism
and your lies or false actions and
be truthful.
You need to be truthful to your rivals
and prepare to be silenced.
What is the place I speak of?
It is Truth Town, so don't blame and don't lie.*

-Robert Fields

Robert is an eighth grader at Milwood Magnet Middle School. He wrote this, and other awesome poems, during the Courage to Create Poetry Club in the CIS After School Program.



EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

Tardies
Early Checkouts
Excused Absences
Unexcused Absences

Missed Learning

MORE MINUTES=MORE SUCCESS

EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

Missing 10 percent (around 18 days) of the school year—regardless of reason—results in students who are likely to lag behind academically and more likely to drop out.

A groundbreaking statement on chronic absence released in February by the American Academy of Pediatrics states that not only does poor school attendance typically results in poor academic outcomes, it is linked to poor health outcomes and can lead to health challenges in adult life. It also calls attention to the critical role pediatricians can play in educating families and communities about how to prevent health-related absences.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX TO KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL

By Taylor Goes, CIS Intern

At Washington Writers' Academy, a school-wide program called "The Amazing Attendance Club," designed to encourage and increase attendance, is underway. Every month, students with perfect attendance are recognized among their peers on a hallway display board. CIS staff update the bulletin board by placing stars next to each student's name indicating the number of perfect attendance months. At the end of each marking period, students with perfect attendance are celebrated. This year, celebrations included a special coloring book made by CIS staff and a pancake breakfast. We are excited to celebrate this marking period with a pizza party!

Currently, 20 students participate in the dedicated CIS Daily Attendance Check-In Program. To build upon the school-wide initiative to improve student attendance, each child has their own personal calendar hanging up in the CIS office. Every morning, these students place a sticker on their calendar for the day they are in school. CIS staff give each child a few minutes of individual attention before school, and express how happy we are to see them! Every six consecutive days of attendance, students receive a prize from the prize box. The program has increased attendance rates and, as an added bonus, allows us to start their day off with a smile!





Communities
In Schools

Kalamazoo

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

www.ciskalamazoo.org



CONVERSATION WITH CATE JARVIS ON GRIEF & LOSS

Every day, children suffer loss that can include the death of a loved one, divorce, incarceration of a caregiver, or other separation issues. Since 2006, CIS has been able to turn to Hospice Care of Southwest Michigan for their support and expertise in this area. From the beginning of this partnership, Cate Jarvis, a Hospice School Grief Support Counselor, has been supporting grieving students. She runs eight-week sessions of “Grief 101” in seven to ten Kalamazoo Public School buildings each year. We tap Cate’s expertise to help us explore grief and loss.

How do you define grief?

Grief is a natural process that you go through when you have lost someone or something. Not just the death or loss of a loved one, but it could be losing one’s sense of safety and losing a sense of how one functions in the world due to a variety of things: incarceration, foster care, recent changes in home or school. Who am I going to be without this person? Who is going to take care of me? In that process of grieving, you can feel many different emotions, such as anger, confusion, sadness, and relief.

At Hospice Care of Southwest Michigan, we talk about “the tasks of grief.”

**To accept the reality of the loss,
Experience the pain of the loss,
Adjust to the new environment, and
Reinvest in the future.**

You can go back and forth between these tasks, there is no one way to move between them. ...When it comes to grief, you never get over it. You live with it. You let it be. Sometimes the grief is going to be more and sometimes it’s going to be less.

What is the relationship between grief and academic success?

One of the symptoms of grief is an inability to concentrate and focus. To be centered and able to focus is a requirement in school. You need to be able to do that to be successful in school. If struggling with grief and loss, a child may become preoccupied with Where am I going to live? If my dad is in jail, is he okay? My mom isn’t living with me. Where is she? Is she okay? It’s hard to focus on your math when these concerns weigh on your mind. With kids, their grief can often show up as agitation. They may not be able to sit still and concentrate.

In teens, grief may express itself with more risk-taking behaviors, such as smoking or drinking. Kids may use substances or engage in other harmful acts, like cutting. Generally speaking, their feelings are overwhelming and these feelings are compounded by the stress of I need to get this paper done.

So, which do you tackle first—academics or mental health? Connect the student with a tutor to get them on track academically, or address mental health

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needs by connecting them with a therapist in hopes that academics will follow? Or do you do both?

What do you say?

You address them both, all at the same time. With teens, for instance, when they find they are falling behind in their grades, that stresses them out further. You may think some kids don't care, but they do care about their grades. That's one of the many reasons we value working with Communities In Schools, because kids don't have to wait to get connected to services they need. Hospice is in the school working together with CIS. So while I am working with a kid who needs something else besides the grief support Hospice offers, CIS can get that kid connected to tutoring or other services that they may need.

Grief can also affect social development and emotional health. Can you unpack that a bit for us?

One of the symptoms of grief for young people, as well as adults, is withdrawal. You see this a lot with teens. They withdraw from potentially supportive resources, such as friends and family, and because of this, isolation sets in, and feeling that you don't have people who care and support you.

It can become circular thinking. As part of my

symptoms of grief, I withdraw. Boy, I wish people would notice. Why isn't anybody noticing that I'm hurting? I'm withdrawing as part of my symptoms, so nobody knows I'm in pain and therefore, because nobody is noticing that I'm grieving, nobody cares.

When CIS refers a student to me, that is one of the questions that I ask students on the pre- and post- tests I give them: "Since my loss, nobody understands me/my loss." On a scale of one to five, the kids consistently rank this as four or five in the pre-test. At the end of the eight weeks, they will rank this question at two or three. They will say things like, I felt heard. I felt I wasn't alone anymore. They still feel the grief, but it's a reduction, and that is a win. That is movement.

How can the rest of us, as parents, caregivers, teachers, school and CIS staff, volunteers, and partners foster a supportive environment for grieving children?

Notice behavioral changes and ask about it. "I notice that you seem stressed/sad/worried..." Being aware and noticing are two powerful tools to help us with grief.

Remember, kids don't need to be fixed. They need to be heard. Sometimes there aren't answers, especially to complex loss issues. But it is important to check in with kids. That also helps kids feel noticed and cared for. When the school environment feels safe, that helps the kids in the grieving process. There is a sense of safety in consistency and knowing this is how it's going to be: I know when I'm getting my meals. I know the rules. I know the expectations my teachers have of me. When I don't have to worry about those things, it's a big deal, and a huge relief.

You've been working with children for many years, any surprising insights about loss or grief?

It's surprising the amount of grief and losses that a young child or teenager experiences...It also makes you realize that we are made for it.

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YOU'RE SAYING WE'RE BUILT FOR GRIEF.

Think about it. Think of the losses you've experienced throughout your life. If you took those out, what would be left? I realize that's a philosophical way to look at it, but it is stunning to consider how much loss our kids endure. It is endurance; it's a marathon.

Think of a child—elementary school age—who has witnessed her mom being arrested. So, she goes to live with her granny, and then a few years later, when she's in middle school, her granny dies. That right there is a lot of loss to deal with...

I've been doing this work for so long—and one of the great things about our partnership with CIS in the schools—is that I will see this student when they are in elementary school. CIS may again refer that student when they are in middle school or again in high school. Grief and loss is processed at developmental levels. So, what a child may experience as a third grader, they may struggle with that loss again—in a different way—as a teen in junior high school, and then again in high school.

That loss keeps coming back up is a common and natural part of the grieving process. Say that student is now a senior. Senior year, everything changes. There are many milestones, they are getting ready to graduate, and the very people who are supposed to be there and help them navigate and celebrate these milestones aren't there. They are missing their mom who isn't there to guide them through the process. It can be overwhelming.

[Learn more about Cate on the CIS blog, *Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids.*]





LIVING HER LIFE WITH COURAGE AND HOPE

Annie Jett's favorite word is courage. As a seventh grader at Hillside Middle School, she practices it every day. Courage, she will tell you, takes different forms. Sometimes, it takes courage just to get up and go to school. When you share your feelings, she is learning, "even though it feels scary at times," it is healing. She is finding courage, looking people in the eye, and sharing her truth with them.

Since she was an elementary student at Northglade Montessori Magnet School, CIS has been there for her. Not long after she started sixth grade at Hillside, CIS was there to support her during the most difficult time of her young life.

Annie explains. "We had just finished doing a Prevention Works program when my granny came down to the school that day and told me my father had passed in a car crash on the highway... I went into a coma...I felt paralyzed. I felt that way for weeks, like I couldn't move."

"[CIS Site Coordinator] Ms. Precious [Miller] was there for me. She even came to my classes when I was sad and down. She helped me get through it." And when Ms. Precious took a position at WMU and Ms. Jody Sikkema stepped into Hillside to serve as CIS Site Coordinator, the support continued.

"I have found the same connection with her, just in a different way," says Annie. "Ms. Jody helps me find different ways to handle my emotions. She's gotten me involved in Grief 101 with

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Ms. Cate. Ms. Cate has helped me a lot. The Grief 101 group* has connected me with more people who have experienced the same thing. At first, I was even scared to talk about it. I tried to keep it in, but I was going to bust down...It helps to be surrounded by other people that have similar situations. I was stuck in my shell and Ms. Cate has helped me open up."

"I know how to handle things now, but I also know that some times are just going to be hard, like the 13th of every month [the date of her father's death]...All together, Ms. Precious, Ms. Jody, and Ms. Cate have really, really, really helped me a lot with this."

"If it wasn't for courage, I'd still be down and wouldn't have others to lift me up," Annie says. "I think about courage every day. It comes up in different forms, you know? Like, I might reach out and call my granny and she helps me, lifts my spirits up...I love my family and education, but at the end of the day I still have to deal with one of my parents gone. I'm moving along and finding new paths every day to take. That is the way of courage."

**Since 2006, Hospice Care of Southwest Michigan has partnered with CIS and many hundreds of Kalamazoo Public School students have benefited from their Grief 101 school-based grief groups.*



Annie hugging her supportive mom, Dewonda Williams.

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

When our needs are met, it is easier to take care of others. Parents and caregivers of school-age children can experience stresses that are often invisible to others. Knowing this, Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo (CIS), in partnership with Kalamazoo Public Schools, Family & Children Services, and YMCA of Greater Kalamazoo has hosted two evenings of Caregiver Self Care and Self Compassion.

Thanks to amazing community partnerships and a grant through the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, transportation, childcare, and dinner were provided at no cost to families. Caregivers participated in engaging sessions such as yoga with Rooted, mindfulness with Family & Children Services, nutrition with YMCA's Registered Dietician Trish Harrison, and more. "Thoroughly enjoyed the sessions," said one appreciative caregiver. "Had a great time. It was much needed," said another. In addition, caregivers received chair massages and a complimentary three-month family membership to the YMCA of Greater Kalamazoo.

93% of the caregivers in attendance stated they'd learned new skills and tips to care for themselves better as well as their family. Gratitude was expressed by many. "Very well organized and I thank everyone for throwing this event."

We feel grateful, too. For caregivers and for all our partner organizations and the individuals who have made these events a success. Thank you.

During the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school year, the Michigan Health Endowment Fund has supported students and their caregivers at Kalamazoo Central High School, Edison Environmental Science Academy, Washington Writers' Academy, Woods Lake Elementary and Woodward School for Technology and Research. As part of this grant, a full-time therapist is positioned within these schools to provide individual and group services. Most recently, a therapist came on board at Milwood Magnet Middle School.



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If you believe in our efforts to ensure that ALL kids stay in school and achieve in life, please visit 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 contributing CIS Staff.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this newsletter or would like to sign up for the e-newsletter, contact Emily Kobza (Sr. Director of Development & Business Engagement) at ekobza@ciskalamazoo.org or call 269.337.1601 extension 205.



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A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consists of a dark blue, wavy, horizontal band. Below this band is a teal, wavy, horizontal band. Scattered throughout these bands are several small, light blue and white circles, resembling stars or bubbles. The text is positioned to the right of these bands.

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