

CIS QUARTERLY, WINTER 2023

Growing to Give. Giving to Grow.

All children deserve a chance to give back. This opportunity to give back to peers and the community is one of “five basics” underlying the work we do at Communities In Schools (CIS). Working together, we create environments in which young people’s gifts are nurtured, and service to others is both expected and rewarded.

We’re excited to introduce you to two graduates—Sebastian and Artazijah—who, after graduating from Kalamazoo Central High School, chose to give back to students participating in CIS Think Summer!

Sebastian first connected with CIS when, as a sixth grader at Linden Grove Middle School, he participated in the CIS After School program. So giving back to CIS students was especially fun for him. “I can’t do just that one class,” he said. “I have to do it again. I’ve got to!” A 2021 graduate of Kalamazoo Central High School who went on to graduate from West Michigan College of Barbering, Sebastian is now enjoying his ideal career and sharing his talents with the Kalamazoo community, serving as one of six barbers at UncLee’s Barber Shop.

You were a special guest this past summer, visiting students at CIS Think Summer! Tell us about that experience of giving back.

It was really nice! As part of CIS Think Summer!, my dad [Leland ‘Unclee’ Pratt] and I went into the classroom and talked with the students about hair cutting. To demonstrate, we even cut some of the students’ hair. The students gathered around and watched me cut as I explained what I was doing. Then my dad even let them cut his hair.

How does barber school work? Were you able to utilize the Promise for any training related to barbering?



No, I didn’t. I actually started my training during my junior year of high school as part of EFE [Education for Employment]. But because of Covid, that threw things off for me, so I basically had about another year of barber school after graduating high school.

What has most surprised you about life after high school as you’ve pursued your career in barbering?

That anything is possible! That’s what has surprised me most, that I can really do anything. I’m now a barber and doing what I want to do for the rest of my life.

Where does that passion come from?

My dad and seeing all the work he’s put into his business. It makes me want to be in that place with him.

**“I can really do anything.”
- Sebastian**

If you could go back and talk to yourself when you were a KPS student, what advice would you give yourself?

Easily, I would tell myself to get all my homework done. Don’t procrastinate. Don’t slack off. Stay focused, for sure. And I’d tell myself to go full-time to barber school. If I had done that, I’d have graduated a lot sooner.

In what way(s) did your experience with CIS help you prepare for your career?

Most definitely in the social skills area. Talking with everyone in CIS helped me with social skills. I was a pretty quiet kid. I stayed out of the way and just did my thing. CIS created spaces where I would be with other people and we would have opportunities to talk and connect with each other.

Was there any particular CIS relationship, be it a person, a partner, or resource that sticks out as most helping in becoming the successful young person you are today?

Ms. Jenee [McDaniel] for sure. It was always helpful having her to talk to. Plus, she’s pretty smart, so it was good to hear what she had to say. She’s a cool person.

Artazijah first connected with CIS as a third grader at Woodward School for Technology and Research. So giving back to CIS students was especially meaningful to her. “It felt good giving back,” she said. And when the students didn’t want her to leave that day, she said, “That just makes me want to do it even more!” A 2022 graduate of Kalamazoo Central High School and now in her freshman year at Grand Valley State University, Artazijah is studying marketing and entrepreneurship.

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Student Spotlight



Aniyah, 5th grader at Spring Valley Center for Exploration



James, 7th grader at Linden Grove Middle School

What is your favorite part of school?

Aniyah: Reading class and social studies. I'm doing global reading this year. We receive books to read and challenge other teams on how much we know the book.

James: Getting to learn new things. Social studies is my favorite. I love learning about the world.

How has CIS helped you?

Aniyah: By making me feel welcome in their space and talking with me about staying out of drama.

James: Providing a safe space to talk about anything happening or to decompress from a stressful day.

How would you describe your site coordinator in one word?

Aniyah: Mrs. Triemstra is caring.

James: Ms. Degasperis is endearing.

Two New High School Supports Coming Soon!

Due to the increased needs of students for mental health supports and the exacerbated challenges due to the pandemic associated with successfully completing freshman algebra, CIS of Kalamazoo has created a new school-based therapist position and relaunched the math push-in tutoring initiative.

The school-based therapist will support the high schools to provide assessments, individual, and small group therapy sessions. Insurance status or ability to pay will not be a barrier; any referred student with an assessed need will be eligible.

The math push-in tutoring initiative will support freshman students taking Algebra 1 by placing paid, qualified-trained tutors into the classroom during instruction time. Tutors will support students who need additional help understanding the concepts associated with Algebra.

CIS is excited to launch these two supports in 2023. A key component of our ISS model is to assess the needs of our schools and students and work with community to bring forth resources with as few barriers as possible to our students.

Shine A Light On Someone Special: Honor A Champion Today!

We all know someone who has touched our lives, gone above and beyond to lift others up, and makes our community stronger. We recognize some of these outstanding people each year at our annual Champs Celebration. Being recognized as a CIS Champ is inspiring for the honoree, the person who nominated them, and all who learn about these special members of our community. We think there should be more of these uplifting moments.

Our Honor A Champion giving initiative lets you turn your CIS support into a special moment for someone else. Please honor a champion in your life. Learn more by scanning the QR code.



Growing to Give. Giving to Grow. [Artazijah cont.]

You were a special guest this past summer, visiting students at CIS Think Summer! Tell us about that experience of giving back.

I loved coming out and talking with the students. I made a slideshow for them about how I started my “Sweet Treats” business. I shared some fun facts, such as: there are two hundred seeds in one strawberry. They were surprised by that. I also taught them how to make chocolate-covered strawberries, my cheesecake crumble strawberries, and white-chocolate strawberries. And then I got them the cutest little boxes so they could take them home. It felt good giving back. I love putting smiles on other people’s faces. And just to see all those kids so happy and feeling proud that they could make the strawberries, well, they didn’t want me to leave that day and that just makes me want to do it even more.

You seem to have quite the entrepreneurial spirit, having started your own business— Julian’s Sweet Treats—while you were still in high school!

I’ve haven’t been able to devote a lot of time to that now that I’m in college, but I recently had a pop-up shop on Grand Valley’s campus. It was a business market. But being in college and not yet having a consistent clientele, that makes it hard to keep it going right now. But one of my goals down the road is to get in touch with Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo organizations to move forward with my business.

And now that you are a Promise scholar as a freshman at Grand Valley State University, what are you most enjoying most about college?

The freedom I have, and also, I like that I get to plan my classes how I want to.

What has most surprised you about college?

Honestly, nothing has really surprised me. Maybe taking tests, but actually, it’s not too bad. I mean, I’m used to taking tests now.

If you could go back and talk to yourself when you were a KPS student, what advice would you give yourself?

Focus more on taking tests!

In what way did your experience with CIS help you prepare for college?

I got involved with CIS when I was around third grade and attending Woodward School [for Technology and Research]. CIS gave me opportunities to learn how to connect well with peers. For instance, as part of CIS After School, we would practice introducing ourselves. We’d learn how to handle ourselves when meeting someone new, like giving eye contact and shaking hands.

You’re talking about those soft skills that are so important for success in life.

Yes, and those were helpful skills I took with me to middle school, high school, and use now in college.

Was there any particular CIS relationship, be it a person, a partner, or resource that sticks out as most helpful in becoming the successful young person you are today?

CIS connected me with Girls on the Run when I was in elementary school and I did that for as long as I could. Also, tutoring support, from the K College students who came into Woodward. Also, other mentors and tutors I had along the way. Those all helped shape me.

[You can learn more about these talented individuals on the CIS blog, *Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids.*]



Artazijah

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From our executive director

Kalamazoo students and families face many challenges. And you, our community of support, have rallied around kids because you see these challenges and respond by giving, volunteering, and partnering with CIS. It is your belief that with action, you can do something to make a positive impact in their lives. That is your sense of *agency*. But we must also remember that students have their own personal *agency* too.

Factors such as race, gender, economic status, and inequitable systems may limit our students' opportunities, but they do not eliminate their agency – or their own power to take actions that will make a positive impact on their life or the lives of others. As we continue to empower our children academically, socially and emotionally, we must also provide opportunities for them to develop their agency through service. In doing so, their awareness of and confidence in their own agency grows by leaps and bounds.

In this newsletter, you have heard stories of CIS students and alumni that demonstrate their agency by graduating high school, continuing their education (trades and college), and by "giving back" or "paying it forward" through community service. Students were supported by CIS staff that believed in them, but it was also essential for them to realize and demonstrate their own agency. CIS and our community of supporters provided the keys, but they were the ones that twisted the knobs and opened the doors of opportunity.

Thank you for helping CIS fulfill our work to support and empower students to stay in school and achieve in life. You are indeed making a difference in the lives of our children.

James Devers, Executive Director

CIS News and Updates

- Last year's Walking With Purpose initiative raised over \$35,000 and included over 200 participants. Thank you to everybody who Walked With Purpose for Kalamazoo kids!
- The 2022 Ugly Sweater Party was a success! Thank you to those who supported by joining our party or making a financial donation! The fundraiser raised over \$18,000 to support our work.
- Save the date for the 16th Annual Champs Celebration: Wednesday, April 19th at the Radisson Plaza Hotel. More information is forthcoming.

Sign up for our e-newsletter



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.

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 donors like you.

Photos in this newsletter were taken by contributing CIS staff, unless otherwise noted.