

Alray Scholars Program

Giving Boston students a second chance at college

Pioneering New Pathways to Success



The scourge of high college debt and low graduation rates isn't going away. But thanks to your generous support, the Alray Scholars Program is pioneering a successful new pathway for turning things around. In just the past year, the total number of Alray Scholars who have gone from college dropout to college graduate jumped by nearly 50 percent.

Kevin Fudge, the ombudsman and director of consumer advocacy for American Student Assistance, is providing invaluable high-level guidance for scholars who get caught up in higher education's labyrinthine financial aid and loan system.



Your continued support will enable the Alray program to help more students change the trajectory of their lives. As awareness of this program has grown, so too has our applicant pool. From that larger pool, we admitted a record-high nine new scholars into the program in the spring cycle, plus another group in the fall.

“As awareness of this program has grown, so too has our applicant pool... as demand for our services grows, we need and appreciate your support more than ever.”

Last year, we told you that 13 scholars had earned their college degree to date. This year, that number has grown to 19, with still more graduates expected by the end of this semester.

Those numbers may still be small, but the difference this grassroots program is making in the lives of some pretty wonderful students is enormous. And the Alray model of offering financial assistance combined with guidance from a personalized mentor is proving to be eminently scalable as this program continues to grow. To ensure we're prepared for this continued growth, we've welcomed two new talented professionals to our board of directors. **Treasurer and board member Frank Brayer**, a CPA and regional vice president of finance at Live Nation, is leading a comprehensive upgrade of our financial system. And **board member**



This year we've also expanded the reach of the program, providing our scholar graduates with expert career counseling and training, to make sure the degrees they worked so hard to earn actually lead to good jobs with good salaries. (See page 5)

None of this would be possible without the support of our dedicated donors. The Alray model is working, but as demand for our services grows, we need and appreciate your support more than ever.



Meet Recent Graduate Lissette

Lissette DeLeon's graduation from Mount Holyoke College marked the end of an arduous path through college. "It was a really tough year, I was pretty much enrolled double full-time," said the 21 year-old Alray Scholar from Hyde Park. "I almost didn't make it."

Lissette graduated from Fenway High School in 2012 and enrolled at Dean College. But when she ended up with a bill she couldn't pay, she took a semester off to work at a car dealership, putting in up to 60 hours per week. "I was really sad to leave school—it had been my entire life," she said. But with three younger siblings at home, "I was really thinking about my mom's pocket."

By spring of 2013, Lissette was back in school, this time at Mount Holyoke, working towards her Bachelor's in biology, with a minor in psychology. She learned about the Alray Scholars Program through the tennis and literacy program Tenacity, and became a scholar in fall of 2015. She immediately "clicked" with her mentor, Kathleen Head. "There were times I would call her and say 'I can't do this', and she would say 'you can.'"

As she was about to graduate, Alray awarded her a Sam Swidey Finish Line Fund Award to give her extra support to get over her final financial hurdle. After graduation, Alray connected Lissette with a career counselor and she recently landed a research

job at Children's Hospital. In the future, she aims to become certified in phlebotomy and pursue a Master's degree as a physician's assistant.

Being part of the Alray family helped her finish school and envision a bright future, she said. "It's not like the Board just accepts you and disappears. They stay connected with you. I'm really grateful for what they've done for me."



Spread the Word

The Alray Scholars Program accepts qualified students year-round. If you know promising students who have returned to college, encourage them to apply at www.alray.org. Don't miss our twice-a-year deadlines of June 15 and Oct. 15.

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Meet Our Spring 2016 Scholars

Anne Demonsthene

Anne is a graduate of Boston Latin Academy who first began her higher education experience at UMass Dartmouth. Like a lot of freshmen, she wasn't fully prepared for challenges that being on your own at college can introduce. She withdrew from UMass and began taking classes at Mass Bay Community College, working a full-time job, and also serving as a peer tutor in her community. Wanting to make a difference in her community by empowering others to do the same, she soon resumed her studies and is now a full-time student at Mount Holyoke College. Thoughtful and self-motivated, Anne is determined to achieve the goals she has now set for herself.



Shaka McPherson

Shaka is a graduate of John D. O'Bryant High who earned an Associate's degree in Computer Engineering & Technology from Ben Franklin Institute of Technology. He went on to UMass Boston where he, like so many other young college students, encountered financial struggles that led to his having to log 50 or more hours per week. He often worked overnight shifts before heading to class in the morning. But burning the candle at both ends caught up to him, physically and mentally. The burden of having to decide between staying in school or working to keep a place to live was a real one for Shaka. He decided to take time away from schooling, but never lost sight of his desire to earn a degree and solidify his future in IT. Shaka recently completed his prerequisite coursework at Bunker Hill Community College and is now enrolled in the fast track Science & IT program at Northeastern University.



Richard Eugene

A graduate of Brighton High School, Richard started his post-secondary career at Year Up, a program that combines hands-on skills development, courses eligible for college credit, and corporate internships to prepare students for success in professional careers and higher education. Through Year Up, Richard enrolled at Cambridge College and obtained an internship at JP Morgan. As a credit to his performance he was ultimately hired for a full-time position as an accountant specialist. He continues to work with the performance team in the company's treasury department. Now enrolled at Bunker Hill Community College, he is a full-time student pursuing an Associate's degree in Finance, and determined to attain a Bachelor's as well.



Samantha Rivas

A Charlestown High graduate, Samantha has been pushing her way toward the top despite hardships, struggles, and obligations. She is a mother of three who is holding down two jobs while taking online classes at Lesley University. Samantha started her journey at Lasell College before withdrawing due to financial burden. She then enrolled in an online program at Post University where she maintained a 4.0. Now back at Lesley, she aims to earn a Bachelor's and a Master's degree. She works as a paraprofessional in Boston Public Schools, and her goal after earning her Bachelor's is to advance to a position where she has a direct impact on policy and curriculum. She is already exploring advanced-degree programs that will support her ultimate goal to become a "game changer" in the BPS system.



Darlyn Noel

Darlyn graduated from Madison Park Tech Vocational High School and went on to Regis College in pursuit of a degree in Human Services. She soon realized that Regis was not the right fit for her and withdrew, instead earning her Associate's degree from Quincy College. Following graduation, Darlyn got married, continued working in Human Services, and continues to volunteer as a youth minister at the New Pentecostal Church of God. While managing full-time work, family, and ministry, Darlyn considers education a top-priority. She resumed her education at Lesley University where she is pursuing a Bachelor's in counseling, with a concentration in Sports Management. She intends to earn her Master's as well. Mature and strong-willed, Darlyn possesses all of the leadership qualities that we look for in an Alray Scholar. She plans to work directly with youth in a school setting, building on her experience as a youth minister over the past eight years.



Terry Voong

Terry is a graduate of Boston Latin Academy who is in her final year of Simmons College where she is earning a Bachelor's of Science degree as a Registered Nurse. Terry decided to take time away from Simmons after experiencing a setback with one required course. While other students may have let that turn into a major roadblock, Terry wisely used the time to work full-time as a nurse's assistant at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. The decision turned out to be crucial because in the process, she equipped herself with the necessary skills and invaluable knowledge to thrive in her upcoming psychiatric nursing course. Terry is a semester short of earning her degree and entering the workforce as one of the next great ER nurses.



Will-Angee Raymond

While her parents remained in Haiti, Angee came to the United States when she was 15 years old, speaking almost no English. She has been making her way, largely on her own, ever since.

A graduate of TechBoston Academy, Angee enrolled at UMass Boston where she plans to earn a Bachelor's of Science in Biology. No stranger to hard work, by 18 she was a full-time college student and working at the Dimock Community Health Center as a rehabilitation counselor. However, she had to leave both school and work for an extended period of time because of illness. While some would have lost hope, Angee remained unwavering. She understands the importance of earning her degree and improving her chances of serving and supporting her fellow Haitians to seek educational and economic stability.



Jamel Williamson

Jamel is a graduate of Charlestown High who began his educational career at Salem State University, pursuing a degree in Business Management. Jamel admitted to taking sports more seriously than his studies during his first few years of college, and his grades suffered. By the time he better understood the value and importance of his education, his financial aid dwindled to the point where he could no longer afford to pursue his degree. He is now committed to working hard in studies as a part-time student while also working full-time at a group home in Salem for developmentally disabled residents.



Jasmin Johnson

A graduate of Newton South High School via the METCO program, Jasmin has remarkable drive and ambition. Now pursuing a Bachelor's in Communications, Public Relations & Community Engagement at Bridgewater State University, she began college life at Pine Manor before finances required her to transfer to UMass Boston. But working full-time and managing coursework proved too heavy a load to juggle, and she left college completely. Now back at Bridgewater State, Jasmin is handling her studies while pursuing a career in community event planning and fundraising—something she has already put in motion. She and her friends founded The Workout, a free monthly event for music lovers designed to celebrate DJs and eclectic music. It won the Improper Bostonian's 2016 Best of Boston "Launch Pad" Award.



To read about the newest class of Alray Scholars, admitted in November 2016, go to alray.org/scholars

Alray

Our Mission

We are a unique grassroots nonprofit that combines scholarships and mentoring to give a second chance to promising Boston Public Schools graduates who are motivated to re-enter and finish college. Read more about why we do what we do: www.alray.org

Our Partners

We are grateful to the Cummings Foundation, the Lenny Zakim Fund, the Forest Foundation, Staples, and the Orville W. Forté Charitable Foundation for their generous grants in 2016, which makes the work we do with our scholars possible.



Alray Mentors & Mentees: In Their Own Words

Yaselis Gonzalez-Castillo & Charita Parham

Yaselis, mentee (L):

"I was sitting at a dead-end job when it hit me: the only way out was to complete my education and land a job with a purpose. Thanks to Alray, I will be the first in my family to graduate with a Bachelor's degree, and I'll walk away as a member of the National Honors Society. It's something I never thought I would accomplish. Alray gave me the opportunity to start over and finish what I felt was impossible. It pushes me, motivates me, and provides me with the support I need to battle the outside noise. Charita, my Alray mentor, is absolutely amazing. She's taken the time to listen and push me when needed. When I feel like giving up, because things have just gotten too overwhelming, she stands strong and tall, and reminds me there is no time to sell myself short."



Jamel Williamson & Jack O'Brien

Jamel, mentee (R):

"I've known Jack, my Alray mentor, since he was the varsity coach at Charlestown and I played JV. Now that I'm part of Alray, it feels like we never skipped a beat. He's somebody I already had a great rapport with. We already had the player/coach connection. I appreciate how he checks in to see how I'm doing—and he connects me with other people he's helping, so he helps me build new relationships. I'm so fortunate to have the Alray scholarship to help me finish at Salem State this year. Alray is a tight-knit group of people who have experience and are far ahead of me. The scholarship is definitely helpful, because it helps me pay for classes and



I can focus on school. But they're not just providing funds; they're providing all kinds of resources. And the relationship stays with you. These people don't just come into your life and leave."

Jack O'Brien (L):

"When Alray first started, we talked about how we work really hard to get kids into college. But keeping them there is very difficult. There are all kinds of issues. A lot of little things can really add up. When kids fail, they realize, 'I flunked out, I have all this debt... what do I do now? I've got to do a better job the second time.' With Alray, the mentoring program is really key. The money is not enough. It's really hard to get through the bureaucracy of school. You need to be able to tell someone, 'Look, I'm really struggling.' When you're going through a hard time, you feel like you're alone. We let kids know that other people got through this and you can too. In Alray, everyone helps each other. We lean on each other and ask: What can we do to help? It's a team effort. And it's a two-way street. You're giving, but you're getting back. It's a great feeling to be there on graduation day."

Charita, mentor (R):

"I serve as an Alray mentor because I know how life-changing education can be. This program helps individuals reach goals they may not otherwise reach. Alray is unique because we seek to establish relationships with our scholars, and we know the extra support and resources are more likely to keep them on track. As a former Alray Scholar, I found the mentoring component was a blessing at times when I needed an extra push. I always keep my own experience in mind when I am mentoring, because I want to be that for others who are working to achieve. I want to help them see that Alray is just the beginning—more opportunities are out there. They just have to seek them out and take full advantage. Alray is a tool for not only achieving short-term goals, such as college degrees, but also for changing long-term perspectives. We want to impact students who come through the program for the better, and for them, in turn, to impact their spheres of influence greatly."

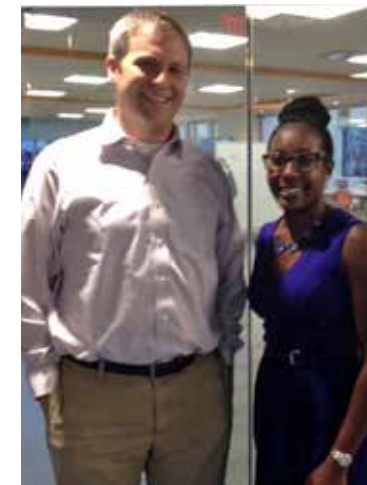
"The fact that our Alray graduates are becoming mentors to new Alray Scholars says so much about the power of our program to change lives."

—Janet Altman,
Program Director



Match Beyond Helps Alray Scholars Move Into the Work World

Graduating from college is no longer the finish line for the relationship between students and the Alray Scholars Program. Now Alray partner organization Match Beyond is donating its career development services to help our scholars break into satisfying growth-oriented careers after graduation.



"Who we serve is similar to who Alray serves: folks who attempted to go to college but were not able to persist," said Michele Carroll, director of employment for Match Beyond (pictured here with Founder & COO Mike Larsson), which offers college completion assistance and career services to low-income students in Boston. "They're just not able to balance life with going to school full-time."

The program, which partners with Southern New Hampshire University's online College for America program, provides academic and employment coaching, work space, meals, babysitting, T passes and laptops to its students. That, Michele said, helps "remove all the low-hanging fruit that impedes progress."

Michele has helped Alray Scholars—and many others—position their education and experience, explore career options, and navigate the job application and interview process. She also communicates regularly with local employers and refers students directly, "so they're not lost in this black abyss of online job applications." She continues to track students after they're hired, helping them understand the workplace. "It's not just helping them get the job, but helping them keep the job", she said.

"Boston can be a tough city when you don't have connections," she said. Yet organizations like Alray and Match Beyond give low-income students of color the support their "typical middle class counterparts would have."

"It's really about providing access and advice that is nurturing," she said.

"This is not about charity. This is about trying to do the right thing for the young people we serve, for our society. We all see the potential our students have."



How to Get Involved

Mentoring

Too many Boston students start college but never finish. Mentoring support helps keep our scholarship recipients on track. You can make a difference too. Become a mentor or corporate partner and help more students change the trajectory of their life. Please contact Janet Altman at jaltman@alray.org for more details.

Financial Donations

Help us assist deserving students.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation using the donor form on page 7 or visit www.alray.org/donate.

Questions? Please contact Janet Altman at jaltman@alray.org

Make Your Donation Grow

Ask your employer if it has a corporate matching gift program. If it does, you can multiply the power of your donation to the Alray Taylor Second Chance Scholarship Fund.

Her Giving is Personal: Donor Susie Bruce Admires Alray Scholars Program's Grassroots Passion

For donor **Susie Bruce** (seen at center with sister Betsy and father Robert), giving to the Alray Scholars Program aligns with her life's work and her family's values. Its mission fits her father's philosophy, as embodied in the Bruce Family Foundation—that education and hard work empower people and create self-sufficiency. "My parents were always supportive of education," she said. "Their philosophy was, it didn't matter what kind of work you do, education is worthwhile."

A longtime counselor at North Suffolk Mental Health Association in East Boston, Susie works with children and counsels public school students; she deeply understands the challenges they face in attending college. Prior to receiving her Master's in Social Work through Simmons College, she worked in community-based mediation programs.

She learned about the Alray program through Lisa Fliegel, who ran an innovative art therapy nonprofit for girls that was affiliated with Susie's agency. Lisa was a founding board member of Alray and continues to share her talents with the organization as a member of its advisory board. After being introduced to Alray founder Neil Swidey, Susie said she was impressed by the group's mission and Neil's book that inspired it, which focused on high school basketball in Boston

and the narrow margins of urban education. "I read the book, *The Assist*, and I thought, my dad would love this book," she recalled.

Susie's father, Robert Bruce, is an investment advisor who started his family's foundation in 1999, in their hometown of Chicago. She and each of her brothers and sisters are allowed to choose three charities to support every year. For the past three years, Susie has chosen our organization.

She cites a "personal connection" to the founder as a key factor in how she chooses her charities. She prefers to support local, grassroots causes over larger, more established organizations. "I think that really makes a difference in giving, when you get to know the person and you know what they're passionate about," she said. "You admire the work they're doing and want to support them." Alray's commitment to empowering young people resonates with her.

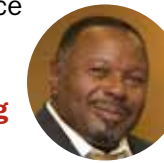
"People deserve second chances, and education is the foundation that helps you choose your work in a better way."



Team Alray Comes Together in Roxbury For Road to Wellness 5K



Alray Scholars Program Board members, scholars, and supporters took to the streets in September for an inspiring run/walk through historic Roxbury as part of the Dimock Community Health Center's Road to Wellness 5K. This event provided our team with an opportunity to join hundreds of Boston community members in support of fitness and health, while spreading awareness about our scholarship and mentoring program with race participants and observers. A collaboration between Dimock, B.A.A. and Hoodfit, the race was also a chance to support **founding Alray Board member Thaddeus Miles**, who



created Hoodfit as a way to engage communities and bring neighborhoods together to get in shape. Currently director of community services at MassHousing, Thaddeus is a longtime friend of the Alray Scholars Program and currently sits on our Advisory Board.

Know a community event where we can spread the word about the Alray Scholars Program and generate interest in potential scholars, funders and volunteers? Email our Communications & Outreach team and let us know! Contact Heidi Guarino at hguarino@alray.org.

Alray Scholars in the National News

Nationally recognized Alray Scholars graduate **Judy Rose** (L) and current scholar **Shante Leathers** (R) were featured in *People Magazine* this fall for their innovative work in finding a solution to reduce gun violence by taking their message to Boston nail salons, libraries and community centers.

Read the full story at www.alray.org/news/alray-scholars-in-the-national-news



Photo by David Yellen for People Magazine



Our Namesake

The Alray Scholars Program was founded in 2008 to honor the memory of Boston student Alray Taylor by assisting promising students in overcoming many of the same hurdles that Alray faced during his short but unforgettable life. Read more about his story at www.alray.org/alrays-story

Thank you!

Alray Scholars Program gives Boston Public School graduates a second chance at a college education. Thank you for believing in these students and supporting their dreams. Because we are a small organization, every donation makes a big difference.

Contribution Amount: \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1000 Other _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Please complete this form and mail it with your check payable to:

Alray Taylor Second Chance Scholarship Fund
P.O. Box 960400
Boston, MA 02196

Or use your credit card to donate online via Paypal at www.alray.org/donate

Find us on:



Alray in the News

Check out this *Boston Globe Magazine* article by Neil Swidey, explaining the origin story of the Alray program. <http://bit.ly/1MwFm2h>



Have a Donor-Advised Fund?

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation. When looking us up, remember the official name of this 501(c)(3) nonprofit is the Alray Taylor Second Chance Scholarship Fund.