



A Community Conversation: Youth Success Speaker Bios

Karen Pittman

Karen Pittman has made a career of starting organizations and initiatives that promote youth development – including the Forum for Youth Investment, which she co-founded with Merita Irby in 1998. A sociologist and recognized leader in youth development, Karen started her career at the Urban Institute, conducting studies on social services for children and families. She later moved to the Children’s Defense Fund, launching its adolescent pregnancy prevention initiatives and helping to create its adolescent policy agenda. In 1990 she became a vice president at the Academy for Educational Development, where she founded and directed the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and its spin-off, the National Training Institute for Community Youth Work.

In 1995 Karen joined the Clinton administration as director of the President's Crime Prevention Council, where she worked with 13 cabinet secretaries to create a coordinated prevention agenda. From there she moved to the executive team of the International Youth Foundation (IYF), charged with helping the organization strengthen its program content and develop an evaluation strategy. In 1998 she and Rick Little, head of the foundation, took a leave of absence to work with ret. Gen. Colin Powell to create America’s Promise. Upon her return, she and Irby launched the Forum, which later became an entity separate from IYF.

Karen has written three books and dozens of articles on youth issues, including as a regular columnist in the youth development newspaper, Youth Today. She is also a respected public speaker and has served on numerous boards and panels, including those of the Kauffman Foundation, the Educational Testing Service, the National Commission on the Senior Year of High School, the National Center for Children in Poverty, JCPenney Afterschool Fund, National Collaboration for Youth, and the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation Board. She currently sits on the America’s Promise Board of Trustees and YouthBuild USA. Karen has been honored with the National Commission for African American Education Augustus F. Hawkins Service Award (2002), the American Youth Policy Forum Decade of Service Award for Sustained Visionary Leadership in Advancing Youth Policy (2003) and the Healthy Teen Network Spirit of Service Award (2007), and in 2009 was recognized in The NonProfit Times' Power & Influence Top 50.

Fatoumata Sy

Fatoumata Sy is a rising Senior at Montgomery Blair High school. She is a recent W.E.B. Dubois Honor Society Inductee as well as a member of the National Society of Honor Scholars. She also currently volunteers as a tutor at the M.A.N.U.P. and ACE Academy reading programs located in Takoma Park, as well as at the Takoma Park Recreation Center, where she supports disengaged youth. Upon graduation, Fatoumata plans to matriculate to college where she will major in a STEM field along with a minor in psychology. She also plans to continue to do volunteer work in and out of the community because she believes that anyone who wants to learn should be able to so regardless of their circumstances.

Laura Furr

Laura Furr is the Program Manager for Justice Reform and Youth Engagement in the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families at the National League of Cities (NLC). Laura works to strengthen the capacity of cities to improve outcomes for youth, increase public safety, and direct scarce resources to effective programs. Prior to joining NLC, Laura was the Interim Executive Director and Senior Director of Youth Justice Initiatives at Community Law In Action, Inc, a non-profit that engages youth as active citizens, critical thinkers and advocates for positive change in Baltimore and Maryland. Laura developed, directed and facilitated programs serving youth involved in the adult or juvenile justice system or are at-risk of involvement. Laura holds a law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law and a B.A. from Washington College.

Samir Paul

Samir Paul is a computer science teacher at -- and an alumnus of -- Montgomery Blair High School. He studied computer science at Harvard and then taught high-school computer science and math in DC Public Schools. He left the classroom to work on the 2012 Obama re-election campaign in Wisconsin and then spent two years as an IBM consultant helping the U.S. Postal Service move international mail more quickly and cheaply. Samir has since returned to teach computer science at Montgomery Blair High School, where he is working to expand access to computer science education and to sustainably diversify the county's selective STEM programs. He was named an MCPS Rising Star Teacher of 2016 by the Greenblatt Education Fund. Samir's parents came to the US from India in the early 80s with no social supports and no money, but they were educated. That made it possible for them -- though not without struggle -- to carve out a middle-class life for his family. Samir strongly believes that free, high-quality, forward-thinking public education is an indispensable tool in the work of creating real class mobility for kids, whether they were born in Bethesda, Burtonsville, Delhi, Addis or San Salvador.

Saron Alemseged

Saron Alemseged is a rising Senior at Montgomery Blair High school. Saron is involved in the Youth Advisory Committee for Montgomery County to give a voice for the students in the down county consortium. She is a WEB Dubois Honor Society member and a member of the Minority Scholars Program. Saron is a tutor in the Takoma Park area for the children who live on Maple Avenue. She also has done a lot of volunteering services for the Takoma Park recreation center. She is in a group called the Key Club which is also involved with giving back to the community. Her aspirations after high school is to go to college and become a pediatrician. Also to volunteer around the world to help children in need.

Angel Ngatchou

Angel Ngatchou is a recent graduate of Montgomery Blair High School. She is an active member in the community who volunteers at Washington Adventist Hospital and the Takoma Park Recreation Center. She is also a volunteer tutor through the African Immigrant Refugees Foundation and online. Angel is physically active and is a dancer/stepper. She spoils herself once a month with delicious food. She aspires to go to college to study physical science in order to become a physician's assistant, then a medical doctor. In her spare time, Angel enjoys reading and listening to music while she meditates.

Gregory Clark

Gregory Clark is the Director of Recreation for the City of Takoma Park. He has worked in Parks and Recreation for 22 years. Prior to working with Takoma Park, Gregory served as the Youth Coordinator for the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County. Gregory was employed with that agency for 12 years and

held several positions including Park Ranger, Assistant and Director of Langley Park Community Center, Director of Glassmanor Community Center, and Area Specialist for Central Area Operations. Gregory is an active member of several distinguished professional organizations to include the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA), and the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA). Gregory, a native Washingtonian, received his early education in the Washington DC public school system graduating with honors from Theodore Roosevelt High School. Gregory continued his education on a full athletic scholarship graduating from Virginia State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Administration. Realizing the importance of education and having a great thirst for leadership, Gregory decided to pursue a Master of Science in Administration with a concentration in Public Administration degree from Central Michigan University.

Karen MacPherson

Karen MacPherson has been the Children's & Youth Services Manager for the Takoma Park Library since 2006, after a 30 year career as a newspaper reporter. At the Library, Karen has worked to expand the number of youth programs, which now include a weekly Spanish Circle Time, and several monthly programs: French Circle Time; Caldecott Club; Comics Jam; LEGO Club; Kids Art; and Bedtime Stories. Karen has created partnerships with local preschools and public schools, and the Library presents a regular and extensive series of programs for preschoolers and elementary school students. For teens, Karen instituted several Student Service Learning opportunities, such as book reviewing and shelving. Karen served on the 2016 Caldecott Medal and 2012 Sibert Medal committees, and recently was elected to a three-year term on the Board of Directors of the Association for Library Service to Children, the children's division of the American Library Association. Karen has lived in Takoma Park for nearly 30 years with her husband Peter and their two children.

Lynn Sobolov

Lynn Sobolov has worked as an educator and out-of-school time systems builder for the past 29 years. Sobolov has developed and implemented 21st Century Community Learning Center programs in West Virginia and Maryland and served as a national Afterschool Ambassador for the Afterschool Alliance. In her current role as Director of Education and Youth Development for the Montgomery County Collaboration Council, she oversees the Youth Program Quality Intervention system, leads the Career Pathways for Youth Development Professionals initiative and conducts professional development workshops for practitioners.