

## Scholars to benefit from Heartland Career Initiative

Earlier this year, AKSARBEN Foundation, Avenue Scholars Foundation, and Metropolitan Community College collaborated to launch the Heartland Career Initiative — a bold program designed to “prepare young men and women of hope and need for high-demand, financially sustaining vocational/technical careers in the Omaha area.”

Benefits to students include:

- **Comprehensive, Individualized Support**

– Avenue Scholars Foundation Career Coaches provide students with individualized academic, career development, and life skills support from a student’s junior year of high school, into and through postsecondary education/training, and into a career. MCC College Success Navigators assist students with college-related needs, such as course enrollment and financial aid coordination.

- **Business Collaboration** – Avenue Scholars Foundation’s business outreach team engages area businesses to provide career exploration, preparation and placement opportunities for participating students.

**“To produce well-prepared young adults for high-demand vocational/technical careers in the Omaha area through the collaborative efforts of the AKSARBEN Foundation, Avenue Scholars Foundation, and Metropolitan Community College.**

*Mission Statement  
Heartland Career Initiative*

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The AKSARBEN Foundation contributes to these opportunities by affording access to the network of Heartland business leaders who comprise its membership, as does Metropolitan Community College through its fundamental connection to business and industry.

- **Scholarship Assistance**

– The AKSARBEN Foundation and Metropolitan Community College partner together in funding the AKSARBEN-MCC Career Scholarship. Scholarship recipients receive up to \$8,000 to continue their education/training at MCC. To date, 644 scholarships valued at \$5,152,000 have been awarded to students from

across Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

Avenue Scholars Foundation is focusing on establishing more partnerships with businesses willing to provide career exploration, preparation, and placement opportunities for students. Any businesses interested in hosting career exploration events, participating in mock interviews and job fairs, or providing job shadowing, internships, or part-time and full-time job opportunities are encouraged to contact Avenue Scholars Foundation.

## CAREER COACHES

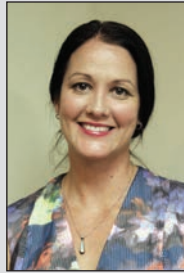


**Ana Lopez Shalla**  
Business Outreach Team

**Duties:** “I work on the ASF Business Outreach team to develop and sustain ensured career opportunities for Avenue Scholars students.”

**Education:** BA, Double major in English and Theology, Boston College; MA, Education, Harvard University  
**Previous Work Experience:** English instructor as a Fulbright Scholar in Nicosia, Cyprus; Analyst in law and government consulting; Technology skills training program at Northeastern University.

**On Working at ASF:** I am excited to work at the nexus of the powerful partnership between Avenue Scholars and AKSARBEN toward their shared goals of workforce development and alleviating poverty. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I look forward to working alongside the Business Outreach Team to herald and grow this model.



**Allison Goff**  
Career Coach  
Omaha South

**Duties:** Prepare students for high skill/ high demand careers

**Education:** BA, Elementary Education; MA, Curriculum & Instruction, Reading Specialist Endorsement

**Previous Work Experience:** Elementary instructor, Gretna Public Schools, 2005-2014; Reading Teacher, Metro Community College, 2014-2017

**On Working at ASF:** When I first heard about Avenue Scholars and the results they were producing, I knew I wanted to be a part of this organization. I am looking forward to working with my students and their families at South.



**Jason Boyd**  
Career Coach  
Omaha Benson

**Duties:** Prepare students for high skill/ high demand careers

**Education:** BA in Sociology, Doane College; MA in Public Administration, Bellevue University

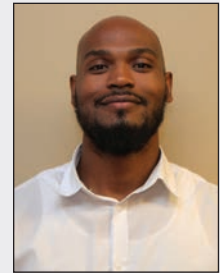
**Previous Work Experience:** Youth Facilitator, Owens Educational 2004-2006; Fire Fighter, City of Omaha 2006-2017;

**On Working at ASF:** I was attracted to Avenue Scholars Foundation because I wanted to help the youth in my community find a pathway out of poverty. The Avenue Scholars Foundation is the premier organization helping individuals find careers and trades within the Midwest. It is an honor to be a part of such a prestigious organization.

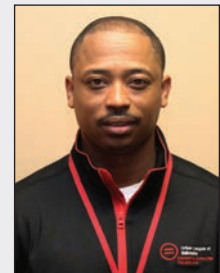
## HIGH SCHOOL GUEST TEACHERS



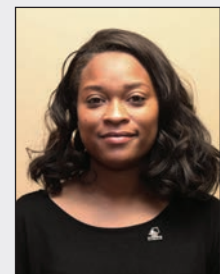
**Leah Anderson**



**Fred Starks**



**Tyrone Marshall**



**Davion McNair**

**NOT PICTURED:**  
Brandy Broadway  
Rodney Miller

## NAVIGATORS



**Amy Rector**  
College Success Navigator  
MCC

**Duties:** Ensuring students' classes and program of study match their career goal; Assisting with and teaching students how to register for classes and how to access resources at MCC; Monitoring and meeting with students about their progress; Assisting students with the financial aid process

**Education:** BS in Secondary English Education and MA in English, University of Nebraska at Omaha

**Previous Work Experience:** English instructor at Westside and Ralston High School; High School Career Coach for three years at ASF

**On Working with ASF:** I am really excited to work with Avenue Scholars students and staff again! I am also looking forward to working with students at the college level to help them successfully pursue their career goals.



**Raquel Henderson**  
College Success Navigator  
MCC

**Duties:** Ensuring students' classes and program of study match their career goal; Assisting with and teaching students how to register for classes and how to access resources at MCC; Monitoring and meeting with students about their progress; Assisting students with the financial aid process

**Education:** Bachelor's Degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in Criminology & Criminal Justice

**Previous Work Experience:** Mentor for youth in Juvenile Justice, Omaha

**On Working with ASF:** I was attracted to apply for this position because I wanted to continue to have an impact on the lives of young adults. I am very passionate about helping others succeed and follow their dreams. What I look forward to most is being a part of something that is bigger than me, bigger than Metro, bigger than Avenue Scholars — and that is the success of our students.



**Adam Williams**  
College Success Navigator  
MCC

**Duties:** Ensuring students' classes and program of study match their career goal; Assisting with and teaching students how to register for classes and how to access resources at MCC; Monitoring and meeting with students about their progress; Assisting students with the financial aid process

**Education:** BA in Digital Media, CSU Sacramento; MA and PhD in Media Studies/Communications, UT Austin

**Previous Work Experience:** Director of Mpowered (Community programming focused on youth media literacy and skill development), Academic & Life Mentor at UT Austin; Program Coordinator for the DuBois Mentoring Program at CSU Sacramento)

**On Working with ASF:** Working with Scholars to overcome academic barriers and life challenges is what attracted me to become a College Success Navigator with Metropolitan Community College.



# Desire to ‘help people’ drives career focus

For Jan Benitez, a 2010 Ralston graduate, his career path decisions have “always come down to helping people.”

It may be that modern social empathy that is driving Benitez to “pay forward” all the support, the motivation and the inspiration he’s received from family and community. His new job, as Teen Alumni Specialist for Completely Kids, appears to be a perfect fit.

“I oversee the teen employment program,” Benitez said. “I help recruit alumni, now as high school students, to be part of our programs — at elementary and middle school levels. I also provide some one-on-one mentoring.”

Additionally, Benitez facilitates workshops for the high school alumni that focus on job-readiness skills and emotional behavior skills.

Benitez says the hard work ethic modeled by his parents, who immigrated to the United States from Honduras when he was 9 years old, fuels his drive to succeed.

“They have always worked hard, pushing through all the obstacles here in America, to make a good life for their family,” he said. “The support I got from people in the community and my family has let me be myself. It came down to me putting everything to work.”

The community has included Avenue Scholars Foundation and past employers.

“Aprille Phillips was my Talent Advisor at Ralston,” Benitez said. “She was a person I could look up to and trust. When I first started high school I did not see college as an option. Aprille helped me



Kelly Bernadt, Student Support Coordinator, and Jan Benitez, a 2010 Avenue Scholar graduate of Ralston High School, are all smiles during a photo-op, after Benitez shared news of a recent career update.

get through that [mindset] and find some solutions.”

As a Jim and Shirley Young scholarship recipient, Benitez was able to start his post-secondary education at Metro Community College.

“I was not sure what to study, but I felt it had to be something with helping people,” he said. “One of my advisors asked me if I had ever heard about social work.”

Benitez was admitted to the University of Nebraska-Omaha in the social work program and earned his Bachelor of Science in the field in May of 2015.

During his college years Benitez started doing volunteer work at Completely Kids. Then he was promoted to a support staff position. The last couple years of college he served as assistant coordina-

tor at Norris Middle School

“Working with the students there was really rewarding,” he said. “I was still learning a lot; I still am.”

Upon graduation from UNO, Benitez got a full-time job at One World Community Health Center as a social worker on the behavior health team. His duties included one-on-one

**“The support I got from people in the community and my family has let me be myself.”**

*Jan Benitez, ASF grad*

case management counseling. “I learned a lot, working there for

five months, but I found it was something I could not see myself doing long-term,” he said. “I heard of a position opening at Completely Kids, and here I am. Completely Kids is a great organization. I like the pace and the population, working with high school and college age students.”

Benitez also started a Master’s degree program in public administration at UNO, with a non-profit management focus.

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- Catie Dagle, Terrence Gillian, Carnetta Hardin, Michael Hughes, Marissa Marx, Monica Wells

### High School Coaches:

- JAMAR DORSEY**  
Director of High School Programs;
- Jason Boyd, Taleyia Broadway, Kayla Gillian, Allison Goff, Daniel Jaimes, Ashley Knott, Beth Leach, Courtland Olson

### Business Outreach

- Coordinators:** Ana Lopez Shalla, Brittani Tanhueco

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Avenue Scholars Foundation  
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Omaha, NE 68106

*“Our mission is to ensure careers for committed students of hope and need through education/ training and supportive relationships.”*

# Students explore careers at IT Bootcamp

IT Bootcamp. Sounds intense. Sounds like a rigorous day learning about career opportunities in the information technology world.

Actually, Friday, Aug. 11, was a relaxed, but focused and productive day for 32 Avenue Scholars who had the opportunity to hear from and interact with professionals from three Aksarben businesses: Blue Cross Blue Shield, EnsoCare and First National Bank.

Students learned about the IT workforce through a panel discussion, participation in group-work activities, and one-on-one discussions with IT professionals.

“The Bootcamp was a great way to unite three businesses and two non-profits to inform students of opportunities in the IT field,” said Brittani Tanhueco, ASF Business Outreach Coordinator. “Educational events such as the IT Bootcamp are crucial in ensuring Omaha is continuing to engage the future workforce in finding a career which suits them best.”

Myles listens seriously to Terry Fischer, Executive Director of Business Outreach, as she gives advice about getting the most out of the day.



**GETTING SERIOUS.** Above, Mahalia Myles takes advantage of warm sunlight on a mild day outside the Blue Cross Blue Shield office building to take a serious look at some notes before starting her day in the IT Bootcamp.



**GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS.** Top, Avenue Scholar Tim Washington enjoys a light moment with Mark Petersen of EnsoCare during a Q&A session of the IT Bootcamp. Above, Scholars mingle prior to the start of the Bootcamp.



Scholars jot down some notes as Alejandro Moldonado talks about his work as an IT service technician.



Amritha Shetty of EnsoCare engages Scholars in sharing some interesting background information about each other.