

From the Desk of the Executive Director



“The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.”

Steven Spielberg

Dr. Sujuan Boutté Spielberg’s words capture the essence of the work of college access professionals and the importance of caring peers and adults in the life of the students we serve. The LOSFA team has demonstrated commitment to mentoring for over 22 years. In fact, we are in our 23rd year of providing peer mentoring opportunities to and for students. For us, it’s a Labor of Love.

As many of you know, we started with peer mentoring through the **LOSFA Trailblazer Program**. We expanded into intensive mentoring with our **Aspire to Inspire Program** and we are proud to announce the debut of our **Near Peer Mentoring** and **On-site Peer Mentor/Advisor Program** this year!

The **Trailblazer Leadership Program** enhances LOSFA’s mission of Promoting and Providing College Access through student engagement and outreach, characterized by leadership, discipline, and service to students. Students selected for the Trailblazer Leadership Program have the opportunity to serve in greater capacities by participating in and promoting events at their school such as Louisiana College and Career Application Month (LCAAM), FAFSA Completion, Financial Literacy for You (FLY Tour), Leadership Summit and College Acceptance/Award Recognition Day.

Trailblazers serve as a resource to their peers regarding the financial aid process. These student leaders guide fellow classmates on college access, provide support to their professional school counselors and to LOSFA and school administrators with events at their schools. LOSFA also added an **On-site Peer Mentor/Advisor**, a high school student who serves as a peer advisor to our staff as we plan activities for schools we serve.

Aspire to Inspire is LOSFA’s mentoring program for those students who are identified as needing more guidance to reach their postsecondary goals. Students are identified by the On-Site School Coordinator or counselor at the high school. Participants, as permitted by the parent, benefit from an ongoing supportive relationship with a mentor who meets regularly with the assigned students (mentees). Typical issues addressed during mentoring meetings include academic, social, organizational or life skill development and career and industry guidance.

The **Near Peer Program** is designed to connect current high school students with current college students, who often come from similar backgrounds and statuses. Near Peers provide support to the LOSFA staff, the students and their parents at LOSFA’s outreach events. Near Peers also work to ensure that students remain on-time and on-task in their college preparation tracks. Additionally, Near Peers work with the Media Specialist to highlight students, create awareness, and provide knowledge of college access tools to students, which will further influence and impact students across the State of Louisiana.

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The Near Peer program and the Peer Mentor programs are designed to allow high school students to come into contact with dedicated and successful mentors. As these mentors provide guidance and support to the students, they embody the passion, dedication, and care that each LOSFA employee stands for. Students who are mentored realize and witness the commitment as they are encouraged and empowered to succeed and follow their dreams.

Meet the team

This year, our Near Peers will be Darius Spurlock, Frededreia Willis, Oscar McClain, Isabel Reyes, and Kenneil Tassin. Our On-site Peer Mentor/Advisor is Trey Square. Our LOSFA Media Specialist is Tiera LeBlanc. Keep reading to learn more about these extraordinary young adults and why they do what they do.

Best,
S.

Meet the Team

ISABEL REYES

My college journey started quite differently from other people. First, I was a Ragin' Cajun at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette. Next, I went on to become a Bear at Baton Rouge Community College. Now, I am a Tiger at LSU where I will be graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Marketing. For me, I have always known that I would attend college, but I realize that this is not always the case for everyone.



In fact, during my time as a cashier and fry cook at Raising Cane's, I have encountered several students who had a very different viewpoint. For them, they didn't believe that college was a possibility due to their financial circumstances. I knew otherwise. As a Near Peer with LOSFA, I used the knowledge and experience that I gained to convince those students that it was most definitely a possibility. I discussed different aspects of the college-going process like the FAFSA, college applications, and the ACT. I wanted them to transform their thoughts of "that's not for me" to thoughts of "this is for me." Months later, I was

ecstatic to learn that several of them were successfully enrolled into college.

At LOSFA, I have come to realize that many stories end just like that---with doubtful students being admitted to college. The reason behind it lies within the undeniable diligence, dedication, and passion that each LOSFA employee puts into his or her efforts to help the students of Louisiana. I feel blessed to be a part of that. For us, this is not just a job. It's our passion. Every day, we are working to transform high school students into college freshmen.

FREDEDREIA WILLIS



Lake Providence was once labeled as "the most unequal place in America" by CNN. The level of income inequality of Lake Providence is the highest of all parishes or counties in the United States of America. Growing up in the town, I was never really exposed to discussions about college at home or in the

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classroom. In fact, discussions about college were not introduced until I had the opportunity to be a part of a program known as Louisiana Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs or Louisiana GEAR UP. In Louisiana GEAR UP, not only was I exposed to talks about college, but I was also able to meet new people, experience new cultures, and even prepare for college.

It was also during the Louisiana GEAR UP program that I met Timenee Thomas, the LOSFA coordinator for my region of the state. She visited our class and talked about college with so much excitement and passion that my interest was sparked. She could relate to us, and eventually, I was inspired and motivated to do something that most people in Lake Providence don't get to do--- attend college.

Now, I am a senior at Louisiana Tech University, and I will be graduating with a major in Journalism and a minor in English. My journey with LOSFA, however, did not end when I attended college. In fact, I will be serving as a Near Peer this year. As a Near Peer, I get to support students by guiding them through the process of getting enrolled into college. Additionally, I will serve as a familiar face and role model to students who have yet to witness the success that is possible. I want those students to realize that it is possible to attend college, regardless of their backgrounds.

DARIUS SPURLOCK



"When you've worked hard, and walked through that doorway of opportunity, you do not slam it shut behind you. You reach back and you give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed," Michelle Obama conveyed to the

room of student leaders at the 2015 Beating the Odds Summit. I was one of those student leaders, and I felt so inspired by her words. They were powerful, and they ignited fresh determination to help students by "giving them the same chances" that helped me succeed.

I was just a high school senior myself, but I had accomplished great things like maintain a high GPA and stay in the top ten percent of my graduating class. In addition to that, I was accepted into LSU, and I would be studying in the chemistry department. I didn't, however, do it all by myself. Rather, there was a caring team of individuals at LOSFA that helped me stay on track from seventh grade to senior year. They "reached back" and provided me with the resources and knowledge that I needed in order to successfully enroll and transition into college.

Now, I have the opportunity to do the same as a Near Peer mentor with LOSFA. As a Near Peer, I provide support to students in all stages of the college access process--- applications, financial aid, campus visits, cross-curricular activities, and social media. It's truly my way of "reaching back and giving other folks the same chances that helped me succeed" like Michelle Obama inspired me to do during the summit.

OSCAR MCCLAIN



very nervous because I did not know what to expect

In 2014, I decided to run for a state officer position within a program entitled Louisiana Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, or Louisiana GEAR UP. When I was notified that I won the election, I was so excited. At the same time, I was

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from the LOSFA staff. My nervousness, however, soon faded as I started to get to know them. During the program, the staff motivated me to take leadership in brainstorming some great college preparation ideas. I then presented those to Louisiana students at the annual Explorer's Club Conference and Leadership Conference.

Overall, my experience as a state officer was amazing, largely due in part to the efforts of the LOSFA staff. They cared for me as if they had known me for my entire life. Their reach in my life, however, did not end there. The staff at LOSFA continued to look out for me, and I realized that I could count on them for anything. In fact, I believe that LOSFA played an enormous role in shaping me into the driven and motivated student that I am today.

Now, as a college student, I am having a blast. I have learned so much through Louisiana GEAR UP, and it has gotten me far. I am currently a high-achieving sophomore at Southern University and A&M College, and I aspire to work at a research lab after graduation. In addition to that, I want to work with LOSFA, so that I may help students the way LOSFA helped me. For me, helping and leading others is something I love to do because it is my "labor of love."

TREY SQUARE

A student once told me that she had not seen many black males aspiring to get an education, so it was inspiring for her to see me. Her words remained with me to this day. I am aspiring to get an education, and I will soon become the first male Square to graduate from high school. It is a

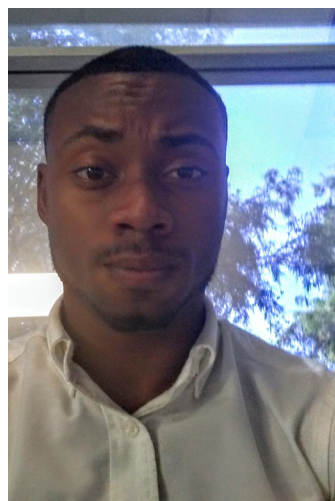


great milestone for my family and me. However, it will not end there because I will also go on to graduate from college, surpassing yet another milestone. For me, these two milestones were never questioned in my household, as my mother was a school teacher.

Now, as I inch closer to graduation, I am helping others reach milestones in their lives, also. I do this by mentoring other students. At my church, I serve as a youth mentor to younger students, and I am an upperclassmen mentor at my high school, Zachary High School. In addition to that, I am the newest employee of LOSFA Outreach Services.

As a student worker at LOSFA, I will continue my role as a peer mentor. The students that I will encounter, however, will be from schools across the state of Louisiana. I will get to serve as a beacon of guidance and support to them all as they aspire to reach their milestones, regardless of what that milestone will be. As I help them reach their milestones, I will be reaching yet another one of mine: making a positive impact on my peers and my overall community.

KENNEIL TASSIN



Before I entered the doors of East Saint John High School, I had been told about what LOSFA did for students. I knew that they would come to college fairs, set up tables, and talk about college. Once there, I realized that LOSFA offered much more than just information. For me, they offered comfort and a sense of belonging.

This comfort and sense of belonging came after I participated in Louisiana GEAR UP. As a participant in

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the program, I was fortunate enough to spend a week of my high school summers on actual college campuses. This time allowed me to become accustomed to the overall atmosphere and environment of a college campus. Soon after, I could envision myself as a college student, and I realized that I belonged on a college campus.

I went on to become a college student at the University of New Orleans, where I will be studying to get my degree in Business Office Administration. I truly like it here, and I would not have felt such comfort if it had not been for the work of the LOSFA staff. This work will continue in my own life, as I will be a Near Peer with LOSFA. As a Near Peer, I will be able to help other students experience the very comfort and sense of belonging at college that led to me becoming a freshman at the University of New Orleans now.

TIERA LEBLANC



During the summer of 2011, I participated in LOSFA's Trailblazer Leadership Program. When my family left, I cried as I realized that I would be three hours away from the people who cared about me. As time progressed, I knew that I was wrong. LOSFA's staff cared about me. They cared about all of us. They wanted all of us to

succeed, and it showed as they discussed financial aid information, money management, and scholarships. After the program ended, I went home feeling more motivated to chase my dreams.

Now, I am one of those caring staff members. I am now the Media Specialist at LOSFA, and I motivate students

to chase their dreams by highlighting their stories and providing them with knowledge of college access tools. As the Media Specialist, my desire is for students to feel inspired to chase their dreams, which is exactly what the LOSFA staff did for me in the program.

If you ask me why I do it, I'll respond, "I do it because I want to see students chase their dreams regardless of where they come from. It's my passion. It's my labor of love."

LOSFA to Conduct Professional School Counselor Webinars

LOSFA will conduct two one hour Webinars for Professional School Counselors.

Webinar #1 will cover program and legislative updates, program rule changes, and an overview of LOSFA's expanded outreach services.

Webinar #2 will feature a review of LOSFA administered programs, including a detailed review of TOPS requirements and eligibility processing issues.

The dates and times for the webinars are as follows:

Tues 9/27 – 9:00 a.m. – Webinar #1
 Tues 9/27 – 1:00 p.m. – Webinar #2
 Wed 9/28 – 9:00 a.m. – Webinar #2
 Wed 9/28 – 1:00 p.m. – Webinar #1

Professional School Counselors are asked to register for both webinars at www.osfa.la.gov/webinars.

Trailblazer Leadership Program

On Thursday, September 8, 2016, LOSFA conducted the first Trailblazer Leadership training for the 2016-2017 academic year at Louisiana State University - Alexandria. Trailblazers learned about what LOSFA does, Financial Aid, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Federal student Aid (FSA) ID, Louisiana College Application and Access Month (LCAAM) and TOPS. Students participated in a variety of activities to learn about the LOSFA programs.

Here is what the students said about the training:

Did you learn any new leadership skills?

Yes, but I mainly learned how to enhance and sharpen my own leadership skills. Now, I can go back to my school and help to guide my peers on their track to college.

Yes I learned a lot; I really enjoyed myself and would like to come back again.

Yes, I learned new leadership skills today.

I learned about new ways to break the ice and get people in exciting meetings.

Communication is key.

It's healthy to get competitive.

Lead by example.

To be a leader, one must be open and accepting to the ideas of others.

Yes, I learned to communicate & educate my fellow peers more efficiently.

Yes. I learned a lot about how to be a leader in my school and other areas.

It was more of how to use these skills and help them grow. I learned and experienced the challenge of facing difficulty with others and using each other as a support system.

I learned different icebreaker activities which I can bring back to my school and organizations.

Yes, I learned how to work well with others, even complete strangers.

I learned that it is harder than it looks to direct a group of people and that you have to constantly communicate the plan.

Most definitely.



Yes, put yourself out there and communicate.

Was there a topic presented that you would like to learn more about?

I am interested in learning more about scholarship opportunities.

Yes, FAFSA.

College fit and match.

I would like to learn more about how to set up and coordinate events with schools.

Probably the scholarship & grant information & how to attain them.

Scholarships for people in different situations.

How to pay for college more in depth.

FAFSA.

Scholarship Search.

Scholarship financial aid and scholarship.

Financial aid services.

Louisiana College Application and Access Month (LCAAM).

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Trailblazer Leadership Program *(continued)*

Anything about Student Financial Aid.

Scholarships.

Probably the scholarship & grant information & how to attain them.

Scholarships.

Scholarship search.

School specific scholarships.

College applications.

Actually applying to college.

What aspects of the training were most useful for you as a Trailblazer Ambassador?

Every aspect was well informative, however, I felt that the months to come and upcoming events pertaining to financial aid will be a huge help to students like me applying for college.

The Team Building Activities and Skills.

The activity with the squares and learning how to cooperate.

The team building activities were very helpful and also the requirements for the different forms of TOPS.

The team building exercises and the staff.

Learning about FAFSA & more information about TOPS.

The fact that as an Ambassador I am able to be in contact with the LOSFA office when needed.

Learning about all the different things I need to let my peers know. Especially seniors. I need to let them know about FAFSA application date and scholarship application deadlines.

Learning how to better myself to help others

Team building

Financial aid.

Teaching me things I could go back to my school and do.

Team Building.

How to organize events for large groups of people and accept others' opinions.

The information provided.

I found the group dynamic very useful. Being able to sit down with everyone face to face and bounce ideas around was beneficial.

Group activities.

The activities we had to do, it helped to be more confident when I speak to people.

The stuff about the different diploma routes for the class of 2018 with Jumpstart was helpful.

The icebreakers.

Information. My job role.

Leadership skills and ideas for events.

Learning about financial aid.

What was your favorite part of the training?

My favorite part of the training was the team building activities because I met and worked with some awesome leaders.

Team building Activities.

The icebreaker.

My Favorite part of the training was the team building activities, they had a deeper meaning that can help sharpen my leadership abilities.

The activities which were both fun and useful.

The team building activities definitely.

The different team building games were very fun and insightful.



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Trailblazer Leadership Program *(continued)*

Getting informed about the FAFSA information and LCAAM.

The building activities.

Team building.

Ice breakers.

Getting to work with other people from other places.

The College Match information.

Carpet game by far. It required many different aspects necessary to being in a team and a leader.

The leadership activity challenge.

I enjoyed the setting of the training, being on LSUA campus.

The opportunity to come to a new place and meet new people all while learning new things about college. I also enjoyed learning how to educate others on what I learned today.

I loved the activities. They were uncomfortable at first but I gradually warmed up.

The interaction amongst my peers. It was a very fun and eye opening experience.

Ice breakers.

Team building & the campus.

Meeting the other people.

Did the Trailblazer Ambassador Leadership Training enable you to further develop your existing leadership and team skills? (Please rank 5-high, 1-low)

Average 4.45.

LOSFA's Social Media Sites



<http://www.facebook.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.twitter.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.youtube.com/LOSFA1000>



<http://instagram.com/LOSFA001>



For more information, contact the
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance:

By Phone: 800-259-5626

By E-mail: custserv@la.gov

By Mail: P.O. Box 91202, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9202

Web Address: www.osfa.la.gov

For submissions, opinions, or comments for the LOSFA LOOP,
please contact Gus Wales at Gus.Wales@la.gov.