



# WORKING MIRACLES IN WARD 8

*Thanks to scholarships, graduate students in the National Catholic School of Social Service are fighting poverty in one of Washington, D.C.'s poorest wards.*

By Anne Klockenkemper

**J**oseph Garnett lives in Washington, D.C.'s Ward 8, and grew up there. At that time, he said there weren't many programs in place to help the community, and a lot of his friends dropped out of school.

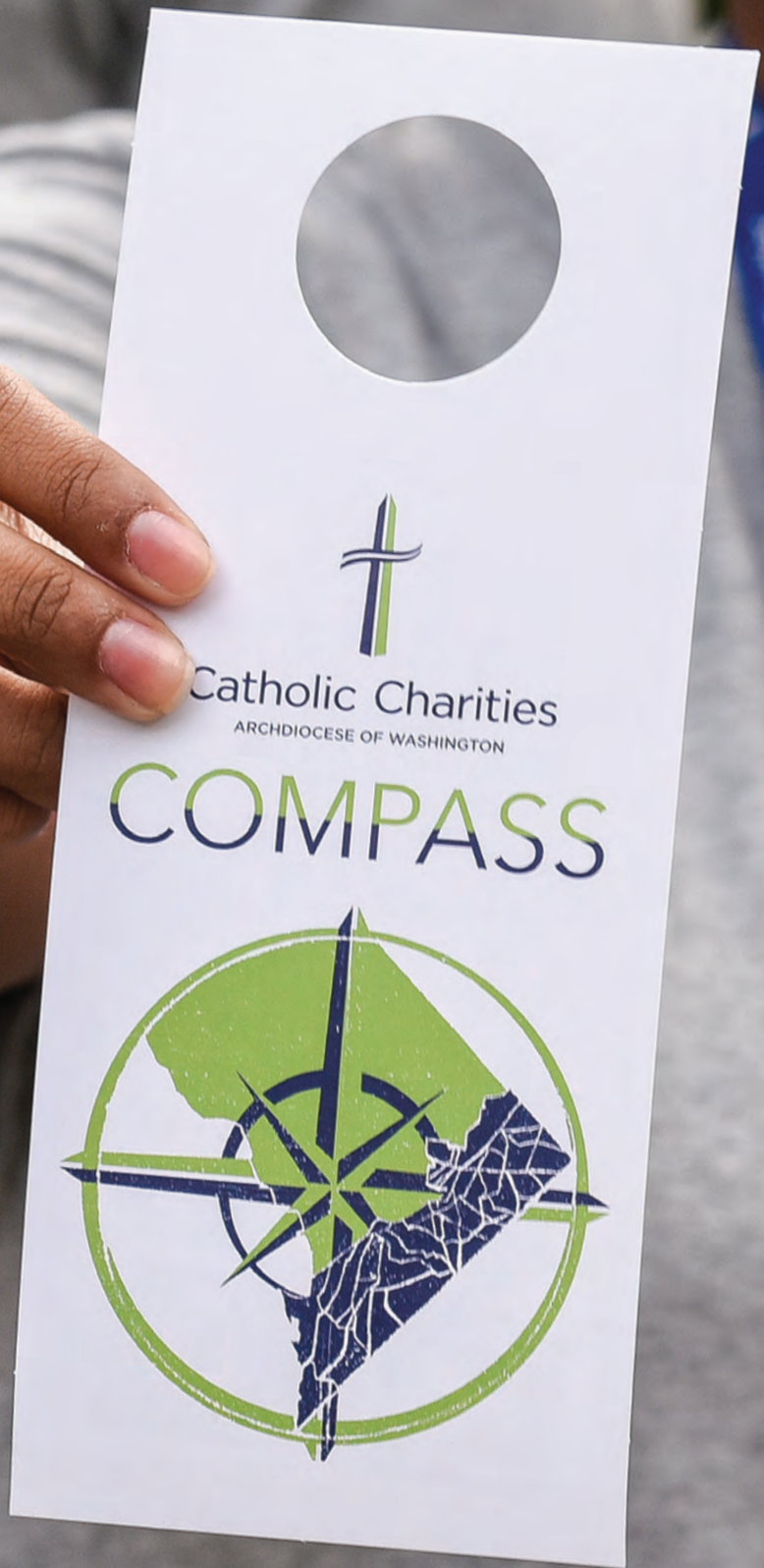
After completing his bachelor's degree in journalism at Ball State University, Garnett worked for the YMCA as an assistant camp director. A former second-grade interventionist, he "always had a passion for working with youth."

So when an opportunity came to attend graduate school at the National Catholic School of Social Service (NCSSS) on a full scholarship, he eagerly applied.

Now, Garnett is impacting his fellow Ward 8 residents as part of the Pope Francis Scholars Compass Program, a philanthropic partnership between NCSSS and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington (CCADW).

Thanks to partial, \$60,000 scholarships provided to the University through CCADW and University stipends, Garnett and eight other graduate interns — now in their second year — are returning the investment, working to build on undeveloped strengths in the Ward 8 community. A second monetary gift to the University from The Clark-Winchole Foundation funded three additional scholarships, creating a second cohort that started in August.

NCSSS graduate students Karen Jones, Joseph Garnett, Ornella Hegbe, and Haley Drier take their services door-to-door in Ward 8.



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“It’s a beautiful program,” said Roslynn Scott-Adams, director of field education and professional development at NCSSS. “I think one of the benefits to the University is that this improves our relationship to the community. And some students were considering not coming here because of the cost, even though they lived in D.C. But part of the mission of our school is that all are welcome. This really speaks to that.”

After completing the two-year Master of Social Work program, the students are guaranteed jobs with Catholic Charities for three years.

Interns in the Compass Program meet with clients — referred to as members or partners — in “pop-up” locations outside Metro stops, at libraries, in the waiting room of the Department of Employment Services, or via FaceTime — wherever the person is going to be, said Catholic Charities Social Worker and Compass Program Manager Regena Humphries, who supervises the students.

“We want it to be easy,” she said, for Ward 8 residents to have access to social workers and “be self-motivated to make changes in their lives.”

Ward 8 is the southernmost ward in the District. The 8.7 square-mile area is home to more than 83,000, nearly 37% of whom live below the poverty line, according to CensusReporter.org.

Rev. John Enzler, president and CEO of CCADW, envisioned the Compass model as a service where social workers partner with individuals to make a real difference instead of just “Band-Aiding” clients in crisis. The partnership with Catholic University was established after CCADW determined there was a significant need for social workers in underserved Ward 8, and involves developing ways that residents themselves help effect positive change in their communities.

“The strength is already in the community,” Humphries said. “We just have to tap into what’s already existing. We can’t assume there’s nothing there. There’s absolutely something there.”

Aileen Worrell, NCSSS director of admissions and financial aid, agreed that the perception of a lack of strength in Ward 8 is somewhat skewed “if you just take what you know about Ward 8 from the evening news. It’s not true at all. It’s a unique perspective the students are getting.”

**CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE IN NEED**

Though the initial goals of the program included acquiring a building in Ward 8, that hasn’t transpired. Scott-Adams said that has had unforeseen benefits.

“When you remove the idea of an institution, you’re forced to go directly to the people and meet them where they are,” she said.

Worrell added that, often, there can be a stigma associated with going to an agency. The pop-up format eliminates that.

“They’re going to the client, but they still have to establish a good, professional relationship,” Scott-Adams continued, which is where their classroom training comes into play. “The coursework helps you explain why you do what you do, and how to work with people based on their situation. It’s different from being a volunteer. The classroom work gives information that the interns bring into their field experience.”

“I have two of the interns in my advanced field seminar, and when they talk about their work, people want to hear about it.”

The students are based in a room in the Catholic Charities building on Lawrence St., N.E., a short walk from campus. Vision boards and inspirational quotes from Elie Wiesel, Maya Angelou, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., and Pope Francis line the walls.

The interns regularly encounter residents struggling with food shortage, housing problems, nutrition, budgeting, and unemployment. In addition to their classes, they spend two to three days a week interning. Each meets with about three regular Compass partners and participates in community outreach events at least twice a month.

“They’ve had to take on a lot more than clients, given that they are helping to design the program while working on it,” Humphries said. “When they started, there was no program. They brought to us all of their creative ideas, passion, and



Compass Program interns pictured in Ward 8, from left to right: Haley Drier, Ornella Hegbe, Karen Jones, Ta-Tanisha Hawkins, Alease Morrow, Bi’Anncha Andrews, Joseline Araujo, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Joseph Garnett, Edward Baffoe-Bonnie.

excitement about being in the community — I can’t foster that.”

The diversity of the students also has an impact.

“That prompts great classroom discussion,” Scott-Adams said. “Some of the students have been working with a bachelor’s degree in social work, and already have been doing terrific things. But an M.S.W. makes a tremendous difference. It means you’re able to practice independently.”

Some of the interns, including Alease Morrow, Ornella Hegbe, Ta-Tanisha Hawkins, Haley Drier, Maureen Fitzpatrick, and Bi’Anncha Andrews, were already working in social work and wanted to continue their education.

“By starting this program, we got the opportunity to be part of the groundwork and really make an impact,” Andrews said.

After earning her bachelor’s degree, Hegbe joined AmeriCorps, working with community organizations promoting college readiness and financial wellness, and with youth in Wards 7 and 8. Fitzpatrick earned her bachelor’s degree in social work at Catholic University and worked at the Kennedy School for children with disabilities, run by Catholic Charities. Drier completed her bachelor’s in psychology at Catholic University, then spent a year in service in Ecuador.

“I saw how social workers could be the connector for people in need,” Drier said. “The idea behind Compass is that the community is

really invested. It really is a unique partnership. Not all interns get this experience.”

**STEPS OF FAITH**

Compass students often go door to door in Ward 8, asking residents about their most pressing needs and how the Compass Program can help.

Morrow related one particular door-knocking experience that had incredible results. The man who answered told her he wanted to help neighborhood children.

“He said, ‘Kids don’t have a place for creative stuff. They have to go across town and transportation and cost becomes an obstacle.’”

The man, a tap dancer, said he would love to teach local children if space was available.

“We took his information, and continued on. I saw a church across the street, and the pastor talking to another group. We had our Catholic Charities shirts on,” Morrow said. “The pastor said, ‘Catholic Charities. I want to talk to you.’ We began to share about Compass. He told us the church’s mission and vision for the community. He wanted a place for music and arts, where kids could do something more productive with their time.”

“We told him we were just talking to someone across the street who is a dancer,” she continued.

“While I hadn’t been blind to the system and the barriers, I didn’t notice the level of disconnect between the people and the systems trying to fix them.”

“Long story short, the tap dancer is now hosting classes in the community at a really reasonable rate. It was taking a step of faith to talk to them. We didn’t know the pastor. It was just taking a chance. It was just ... divine. That’s how it felt.”

The students meet many people who already know Catholic Charities by reputation.

“You can lose hope when you are dealing with a lot of poverty,” Hawkins said. Hope can be restored, she added, “when you have someone who is interested in what will make their community better.”

Drier said when people have support in working toward a goal, hope returns. She witnessed severe poverty in Ecuador, but didn’t expect to see similar needs here.

“While I hadn’t been blind to the system and the barriers, I didn’t notice the level of disconnect between the people and the systems trying to fix them,” she said. “I’ve lived in D.C. for five years, but I’d never been in Ward 8. I was really involved in service, and I thought I was really well-rounded, and I was not.”

## STUDENTS WHO STAND OUT

While the University has placed students with Catholic Charities for field work for a long time, Worrell said the Compass partnership offered a “terrific opportunity” for CCADW and NCSSS to work more closely together.

“Fortunately, we found a donor who shared that interest,” she said.

With the scholarship gift in place, in 2017 Worrell began looking for skilled candidates already accepted to the University.

“It wasn’t academics alone,” she added. “They had to have that passion. Regena and I worked together to screen them. We reached out to a number of undergraduates at the beginning, because we were afraid we wouldn’t get 10. But interest exceeded our expectations.”

They wound up screening 40 applicants. The Compass students stood out, Humphries said, because of their warmth and natural ability to connect.

“I think it’s the sincerity and passion,” she added. “You can’t teach passion.”

Garnett appreciated the opportunity to work with an organization so focused on helping people.

“They saw something in us,” he said.

While they’re getting one of the top social work educations in the nation, Humphries added, the students all bring something different to the field work.

“One uses humor. You have to use those skills in a session and make it your own style,” she said, recalling that all the students had jitters when the program started.

Hegbe, who said she’s never learned so much in

her life, confessed to definite trepidation at first.

“I had to call people! My hand was shaking, and I was stuttering. Now I have less nerves. It’s not that different from talking to a friend,” she said. “I’ve learned a lot about myself and the community, and I feel more confident.”

Hawkins, a mother and a grandmother, said the impact of her scholarship has been life-changing, even while classes and field work keep her busier than she has ever been.

“It’s stretched me a lot,” she said.

The students have lost sleep by prioritizing class and field work, but it’s a short-term sacrifice. They’re all taking master’s coursework at NCSSS, holding down part-time jobs, interning with Compass each week, and striving for work-life balance.

“These two years are probably going to be the hardest of my life, but I can learn more from encounters and experiences. It’s worth it,” said Drier, who added she wouldn’t have been able to afford graduate school right away without the scholarship, and is grateful she will finish school debt-free. “I see a future in Compass.”

Morrow called receiving the scholarship “a privilege and an honor. Someone decided to invest in me, and they didn’t have to do that.”

Fitzpatrick looks forward to graduating. She said Compass has significantly improved her



Compass interns chat with an interested resident in October.



Photos: Anne Klockenkemper

Catholic Charities Social Worker Regena Humphries listens to a woman who stopped at the vision board event at the Francis Gregory Neighborhood Library wellness fair on September 15.

mental and spiritual health, because the work interests her so much.

“It’s all dedicated to what we will be doing,” she said. “I think we’re all ready to be done with school and in the profession full time.”

## “NAVIGATED BY YOU”

In mid-September, Compass students set up in a small conference room during a wellness fair at the Francis Gregory Neighborhood Library, where visitors could make vision boards and talk about their goals. Students also helped partners start a journal of tasks they would need to accomplish to make their dreams a reality, and offered a sign-up sheet partners could fill out so the interns could maintain a connection beyond the session.

The students in attendance that day — Hawkins, Andrews, Morrow, and Joseline Araujo, part of the second cohort — prepared the room. Most of them wore Catholic Charities T-shirts emblazoned on the back with a compass overlaid on a map of D.C., and the Compass Program’s motto, “Navigated by You.”

Morrow and Araujo crafted an example vision board, while Andrews connected with a woman interested in grant-writing classes. Her goal is to open a business to take neighborhood children on outings outside the District — kayaking in Delaware, or to the Statue of Liberty.

Andrews was impressed with the woman’s plan because “she knows what she wants already,” but just needed to be pointed in the right direction.



Interns Joseline Araujo and Alease Morrow make sample vision boards at the fair.

and how it is impacting the school, the students, and the community.

“There’s nothing that has happened in the program that has not been a benefit,” she said.

Humphries, though, is focused on training the best social workers she can.

“By next year, I will have employees,” she said, adding the foundation built by the first cohort will foster the program’s growth “at a much quicker level. They’re in the program while it’s being built. It’s a challenge. What it can become is really quite awesome.”

But they’re already affecting change in the lives of Ward 8 residents.

“We’re investing our time in their lives, and finding out what’s important to them,” Morrow said.

Garnett agreed.

“I didn’t expect people would be so willing to take any opportunity presented,” he said. “But people need steps and guidance. I always assumed growing up that they didn’t want to change. But they do want to make a difference.” **CU**

## A FIRM FOUNDATION

Compass students all have hopes for the program’s future: increased support so more graduate students have a similar learning opportunity, a building where they can meet members, and continued involvement from the Catholic University community.

NCSSS wants the program to continue as well, provided there is financial support from donors to help fund it, Worrell said. Scott-Adams wants people to know how well the program is doing,

To support the Pope Francis Scholars Compass Program at the National Catholic School of Social Service, visit [engage.catholic.edu](http://engage.catholic.edu).