

Children and Youth Studies Student Alumni Spotlight



Pascale Gay '13 On the Road to Self-Discovery

By Loretta Chin May 4, 2016

The most rewarding part of pursuing clinical social work is working collectively with disparate families, helping children to thrive in the outside world, prescribing measures to treat and prevent mental illness, and attending to emotional and other behavioral disturbances while also conquering obstacles on the way to achieving goals.

~ Pascale Gay

Pascale Gay, 34, graduated from Brooklyn College in 2013 with a bachelor of arts in Children and Youth Studies (Cum Laude) and a special senior award for academic excellence in her major. She has been accepted to Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Services Master of Social Work program for the fall 2016 semester. The journey that led her to the Children and Youth Studies program and her eventual acceptance to Fordham was filled with many stops and turns along the way. Each change in her path was an opportunity for self-discovery and a step closer to a clearer vision of her future aspirations.

Gay graduated with a retail/merchandising degree from Kingsborough Community College in 2009, but she felt unsatisfied and unfulfilled with her choice of study. She decided to pursue a major in Theater at Brooklyn College, but it still did not feel like it was the right fit for her either. "I was searching for something soul-satisfying," Gay said as she described how she explored the Brooklyn College website and discovered the Children and Youth Studies program. As she carefully browsed the different course offerings, the Human Rights of Children, Child Abuse and Neglect, Children in Crisis, and Children and the Law courses immediately caught her eye because they related to her own personal background.

As a daughter of Haitian immigrants, Gay felt she was raised in a challenging household because of cultural values that condoned corporal punishment of children. As an immigrant single mother of a nine-year-old son, she faced many of her own challenges, but did not want to use that as an excuse to pass her family's parenting style onto her own child.

"I gained more than I expected when I enrolled in the classes," Gay said. "The Children and Youth Studies major changed my entire life." Gay described how the courses helped her improve her relationship and interactions with her son in a way that enabled her to give him the childhood she didn't

have—where communication replaced corporal punishment. “Because of what I learned, he has a voice in his own home,” she said.

Another life-changing instance happened when she chose to read the book, *Finding Fish*, by Antwone Q. Fisher and Mim E. Rivas, for her final paper in the Child Abuse and Neglect class. She identified with the male protagonist whose childhood mirrored hers. “As a youth, he did not understand the plethora of aggression that consumed him,” she said. “He used his tribulations as a source of strength to become a brand new person.” Gay identified with the way fatherhood had changed the character in the book just as motherhood had changed her. Through the reading, Gay said that she gained a better understanding of her son, other children and their behaviors. She also had a better understanding of herself and her behaviors as a child, as well as of her family and their challenges.

Gay also realized that she wanted to take a stand and commit to making a positive and memorable difference in the lives of abused and neglected children. Before completing the final chapter of *Finding Fish*, she decided that she wanted to become a social worker in order to help children and their families make better decisions to preserve the family unit.

Gay is now a social worker at a private agency contracted by the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) whose aim is to reunify families in foster care. In addition to caring for her son, she juggles a caseload of 12 children. “To say ‘it’s hard,’ is an understatement,” she said as she described the unrealistic expectations of the position due to the high number of cases that make the job both emotional and stressful. Yet she knows that she is changing lives and making a difference so she stays with it for now.

Prior to case planning, Gay was a public programs supervisor and educator at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan (CMOM). In fact Gay started as a public programs intern at CMOM in fall 2012 through the Internship in Applied Children Studies class with Elise Goldberg. Ms. Goldberg evaluated her for placement and recognized early on that Gay showed an affinity for the arts and a desire to work creatively.

After her experience as a social worker in child welfare, Gay realized that her interests were more aligned with an expanded version of her earlier work. She would like to continue as a social worker, but she now envisions herself as one who serves a wider community and interests.

In addition to all she does, Gay still finds the time to volunteer with the Adopt- a-Senior organization once a month. Gay helps to distribute birthday and holiday gifts to the seniors at the Riverside nursing home. She describes the volunteer experience as fulfilling and therapeutic.

When asked to describe her current career interest and goals, one can clearly see how her past experiences have contributed to what she had to say:

Someday, I would like to organize an arts program to foster creativity and enable children to express their emotions. Incorporating the art element in engaging exercises can help potential clients achieve treatment goals. As a professional social worker I intend to achieve my goals by coordinating and facilitating activities to enhance the individual’s quality of life, and galvanizing social change in the community in order to improve social conditions for minorities, the poor, the ill, children and the elderly.

Gay’s acceptance to the Master of Social Work program at Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Services will be the next stop on her journey. She applied for the part time 4-year plan of study with knowledge gained from her experiences and insights that have helped shape her plans for the future.