



Transcript: Student Continuum Speakers

Ryan Carty, Class of 2025: My goal in life is to become a filmmaker. With the rise of Covid-19, I believed the time at home would give me an opportunity to create. I yearned for a project that I controlled, with decisions I chose intentionally, such as different angles or where to make the right cuts. A unique project, made by me.

Grace Nkrumah, Class of 2024: In January 2013, electricity was shut off at my home in Cape Verde. While I imagined classmates studying in a lap of luxury, I would study with a flashlight and candles. Due to that, I felt alienated and embarrassed. However, I had this internal motivation: studying and hard work were the only things I could do to change reality. So I said to myself, “Grace, you have no excuse not to fight for your future”.

Laura E. Saint Victor, Class of 2023: On that fateful day, in January 2010, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti changing everyone’s lives including mine. Because of the devastation, my mom decided to move me and my sister to the United States. At the time, I was heartbroken about leaving the only home I’ve ever known. Little did I know that this move would help me find my path.

Koyabi M. Nbiba, Class of 2020: During Summer Institute, we worked on our personal stories for the purpose of crafting exceptional elevator pitches. Recounting a story of a robbery that I had experienced as a child liberated me. I realized, If I could succinctly tell my story, then I might begin to set myself free.

Anisha Lall, Class of 2019: Global thinker. American Indo-Caribbean. Film maven. Evolutionary empath. These are a few of my identities. Regardless of what yours consists of, your existence is powerful. Everyone’s struggles and triumphs are stories worth telling and listening to.

Ryan Carty: Thanks to guidance from Stephanie at OppNet, I was accepted into an exciting summer opportunity: a filmmaking class at Syracuse University. My first week of class was perplexing. I believed that my classmates had prior skills, high-end cameras. I was a student from the ends of the city, got nothing but my Samsung phone and little optimism. How could I stand out?

Grace Nkrumah: Moving to the United States led to new obstacles but also new opportunities. Initially I could not speak English fluently at all. To improve my speaking skills, I went to after school tutoring and found opportunities to communicate. I knew that I could not allow self-doubt to take over anymore.

Laura E. Saint Victor: When I was 9 years old, my best friend's mother was diagnosed with lung cancer, which sparked my interest in oncology. Although I wasn't able to help her throughout her illness, I could become a surgical oncologist to help others.

Koyabi M. Nbiba: After Summer Institute, I left to continue my education at a boarding school. I pounced on the invitation to return to The Opportunity Network. There, I found an organization committed to helping students master their story. I realized the ways in which my global identity is important to my current and future goals. I also now feel inclined to bring my full self to the places I enter.

Anisha Lall: My love for storytelling deepened in college where I took up leadership roles -- one being elected a senator in student government. As a senator, I would be the bullhorn that amplifies students' voices. This passion was tested when five peers and I sat in a room trying to figure out how to get the word out about the fraud our student body president engaged in.

Ryan Carty: What I saw in my film were limitations, but my professor, he saw opportunities. I was baffled at first, but realized he was right. The imperfections of my camera and shaking hands were art. This camera was not held by a flashy director. I was the one directing the story. No one else.

Grace Nkrumah: Through my experiences as an OppNet Fellow, I've become the powerful woman that I am today. I obtained a full scholarship to the Smith STEM pre-college program last year, where I learnt about microbiology. Inspired by my time at Smith, I also conducted a solo research project at my high school. My experiences have taught me that life can be like steel, it can crush me, be unbendable, but I can never let it break me.

Laura E. Saint Victor: Last summer, I gained an internship at St John's Episcopal Hospital. By using the networking skills I learned at OppNet, I was able to receive a future shadowing opportunity with an oncologist. During my first year of college, I began prepping for medical school. I continued shadowing the oncologist and started searching for volunteer opportunities. After graduating from college, I plan on attending medical school at NYU.

Koyabi M. Nbiba: A first generation college graduate, I am now writing a new chapter to my story. I recently began my career at a Fortune 500 company where I am product development analyst. While I have earned my spot in the spaces I occupy I recognize the immense support.

Anisha Lall: Through OppNet's support, I realized even if the six of us were the only ones standing, there's power in being the echoes of that bullhorn. It was in this process I learned it's crucial to hang on to the strength that allows you to tear down barriers. To take every stone people throw at you and build an empire with it.

Ryan Carty: My name is Ryan Carty, high school senior, OppNet class of 2025, and I want to become a filmmaker.

Grace Nkrumah: My name is Grace Nkrumah, I am a rising freshman at the University of Rochester, and I am a living testimony to overcoming self-doubt.

Laura E. Saint Victor: My name is Laura Saint-Victor and I am a rising sophomore at CUNY College of Staten Island. Though I started as a little girl from a small country who didn't know what she wanted to be in life, I am now a young adult who knows her purpose and is on the journey of fulfilling it.

Koyabi M. Nbiba: My name is Koyabi Nbiba and I am a graduate of the Bates class of 2020, and as I continue to shape my story, I vow to help others to do the same.

Anisha Lall: My name is Anisha Lall, I am a college graduate, a visionary leader, and when I become a producer and actress, I hope to be a conduit of your stories.

Transcript: Opportunity Award Student Honoree Thenuri Poththewela

I am the proud product of immigrant parents, and at a young age, this fueled my intrigue with politics. I would watch CNN with the same fervor that I would watch my cartoons because hearing political pundits speak on immigration involved me thus, piquing my interest. When I think of the start of my activism this is likely where it began. Even in elementary school, I ran for 5th grade President talking about disparities -- in this case, broken bathroom locks in my school.

As I began high school, I wanted to become an attorney. I grasped every opportunity I could, including becoming Debate Team Captain at my high school. We competed in a competition with students from private and specialized schools. Often we were the only public school students and students of color in the room. The experience usually provoked discussion among my teammates around the importance of representation. Our perspectives were often unheard of to our peers allowing us to impact their outlook.

These experiences fueled my goal of becoming an attorney. I took classes at both New York University School of Law and Columbia Law School from freshman through junior year of high school. I competed in moot and mock trial competitions. But more importantly, I took a course in restorative justice. This inspired me and my co-founder to lobby my school's leadership for a student-led restorative justice initiative in which students would be heard by peers rather than adults, entering peace circles and choosing from a solution sheet.

The alternative -- suspension -- disproportionately affected my Black and Latinx classmates who were given longer suspension periods than their white counterparts for the same offenses. This was the first program of its kind in Staten Island public schools, and I've sought superintendents' support to implement restorative justice programs throughout the borough.

My passion for social justice issues has undoubtedly influenced my present advocacy, but at OppNet I have learned the power of representation and allyship. I was able to intern with Judge Raja Rajeswari, the first South Asian Woman to become a New York City Judge through the Sonia and Celina Sotomayor Judicial Internship Program, and met Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor who told me "to continue uplifting others through my work." Whether my OppNet mentors realized it or not they were there every step of the way as I grew into my activism. They taught me to network, allowing me to find my co-founder for the restorative justice initiative

Importantly, the representation of diverse voices in the OppNet staff and fellows community emphasized the value of representation. Representation has fueled my activism, that is why I have created an intersectional feminist club and a Restorative Justice Initiative to repress the cycles of archaic gender roles and the unjust school-to-prison pipeline.

In the fall, I will be attending Cornell University where I will take my experiences coupled with my lessons from OppNet to enact social change and promote the necessary representation. Progress cannot happen without representation; this is why I will dedicate my life to creating space for the voices of those who have not been listened to.

Transcript: Opportunity Award Student Honoree Amber Paris Montalvo

I am humble and grateful to be here, sharing this moment with my colleagues who are all working incredibly hard to persevere during these challenging times. Standing on the shoulders of the activists who have opened doors for us, mobilizing the movements they have begun, and initiating new ones is exactly what I've been designed to do. But this responsibility also comes with added weight and pressure. Sometimes I am overwhelmed with social justice fatigue, especially when it is subsided with ordinary life tribulations. By no means have I questioned if this is my lane. I am an Afro-Puerto Rican woman from New York City! We were born to be resilient! Nonetheless, the effect of the pressure cannot be ignored.

The responsibilities I am called to fulfill require compassion and patience. My role includes facilitating difficult conversations with my family about racial conflict happening in our own relationships, organizing socially responsive events for my community, and designing projects to sustain our movements. Unfortunately, I have been in an ongoing battle with anxiety for years. Which for me means that an exciting and productive day can turn into hours of worry, fear, and self-loathing, without any warning. When things are high, I anticipate the next low, which expedites the process. I noticed this pattern and how it severely affected my ability to be a successful leader.

When I first recognized that I suffer from anxiety, I told myself "take it day-by-day". I'm sure many of you have heard this before. I really committed to this in order to manage my inconsistent emotions. Especially while mourning the early end to my senior year that didn't include the expected graduation, experiencing an oversaturation of devastating news on social media, abruptly transitioning into my career, and battling my anxiety -- I had to take it day by day. If there is a lack of clarity in here [puts hand on heart], I risk being an ineffective leader, especially in our current climate.

But recently, a friend said to me "take it hour-by-hour". Everything I thought I knew about managing my anxiety, completely shifted after she said that! I was taken aback. Since March, everything and every day, has been more uncertain than ever had before. I had been trying to take on a full twenty-four hours, but even that was way too much. Why was I expecting myself to carry that much weight? It wasn't practical.

If it is indeed my purpose to challenge systems, travel the world and change the lives of the individuals I serve, then it is imperative that I give myself grace, adjust my expectations to how I respond to life inconsistency and CREATE consistency where I can. Taking it "hour-by-hour" means accepting where I am right now. Simply within a 60-minute capsule and deciding what I have the capacity for in that moment. I am still mindful of the twists and turns that can occur in my day, but I don't feed energy to anything outside of 60-minutes. I let my

emotions come, I let my emotions go. I don't try to over analyze them and make sense of them all at once. I am still discovering how to be in stillness, but I am challenging myself to bathe in high vibrations when they come.

Far too many suffer from anxiety in silence. To my fellow social justice warriors who are listening, if you can relate to anything I've shared, I hope that you discover your stillness and take it hour-by-hour, so we can continue doing the work we were designed to do.