

Biography-Susie Kay

Founder & President, The Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund

Susie Kay is the Founder and President of Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund (HDSF).

In 1996 Kay, who taught 12th-grade American government from 1990 to 2003 at H.D. Woodson in Northeast D.C., started HDSF after becoming increasingly frustrated by the fact that so many of her talented, hard-working students were unable to enroll in college due to a lack of financial resources and familial support.

Kay planned what she thought would be a one-day, 3-on-3 charity basketball tournament. Kay envisioned the tournament as a vehicle that would introduce her students, many of whom came from economically challenging backgrounds, with the region's business and political communities. Kay also envisioned the tournament serving as a way to raise money for academic college scholarships. That one-day tournament, arranged on the fly back in 1996 raised \$3,000 that Kay distributed in the form of scholarships to her students. Since that first charity tournament Kay has developed HDSF into a yearlong organization that uses a number of programs to increase the educational opportunities of District students.

HDSF is a non-profit organization that works to enrich the lives of high school students and adult volunteers through a comprehensive Empowerment Program. The Empowerment Program strives to foster personal relationships between students from Washington D.C. public high schools and adult volunteers while providing educational and career opportunities and an attempt at social and economic reconciliation.

The HDSF Empowerment Program includes five key areas that act as building blocks that serve to prepare our students for academic and career success in addition to building bridges of trust and understanding between underserved teenagers and working professionals.

Bridging the Divide

Fewer than 55 percent of freshmen who enter Washington, D.C. public high schools earn a diploma, and only about one-third of those who do graduate high school go on to pursue post-secondary education. The Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund serves youth in Washington's more resource challenged schools, where the college entry rate is even lower. These schools serve primarily African-American youth from low-income families, who face numerous obstacles and have limited support systems.

More than three-quarters are eligible for free or reduced school lunch. School counselors are overextended and cannot provide individualized attention. Students who perform high academically are an exception. Many lower performing students are bright, but simply have never considered that they might have the option of higher education or professional success and therefore have little incentive to work hard.



Susie Kay founded HDSF in 1996 while working as an American Government teacher at H.D. Woodson High School in Washington, D.C. Susie, who taught at Woodson from 1990 to 2003, recognized a need to ensure students, who have worked hard amidst social, economic, and racial disparities, get the opportunity to excel in college and in the workforce. She enlisted the help of friends, colleagues, and community and corporate leaders and students and organized a charity basketball tournament in 1996 that raised \$3,000 for academic college scholarships. HDSF scholarships are part of the solution but they are not the sole reason behind the organization sending 1,000 students to college and into the workforce. Mentorship between the students and DC-area professionals from diverse backgrounds and cultures, college and career preparation play an equally important role in the development of HDSF students.

HDSF's Five Steps to Success

Mentoring: Unlike traditional mentorship, HDSF's effort benefits both student and adult. During the beginning of each school year HDSF pairs about 80 teenagers with college-educated mentors. These adults help guide them through the sometimes overwhelming college application process.

While the students gain a number of tangible benefits from having a mentor, often the adult volunteers find their lives enriched as a result of their relationship with an HDSF student.

Standardized Test Preparation: Through HDSF's partnership with The Princeton Review, each year a number of students enrolled in our Empowerment Program are selected to attend a six-week SAT preparation course donated by The Princeton Review. HDSF students who've completed the program typically improve their overall SAT scores. For many of our students scoring higher on their SAT exam directly impacts which colleges and universities they're accepted to.

Career Preparation: HDSF helps high school students and alumni develop resumes and search for and apply to internships and job opportunities.

HDSF also conduct mock interviews to help students become comfortable with the job application process. Students are also connected with adults working in various professions. These volunteers are able to answer questions and offer advice to our students.

Academic Scholarships: Each year HDSF awards academic scholarships to graduating high school seniors and alumni who are currently enrolled in college. The amount of each academic scholarship awarded varies, based on individual need. The average award, however, is around \$1,896. Students use their HDSF academic scholarships in addition to other outside financial aide, to help pay for their education. Since 1996 HDSF has awarded an average of 138 new and renewal scholarships per year. Scholars from the 2007-2009 graduating class are enrolled at 40 different colleges and universities across the country.



Alumni Network: Each school year HDSF enrolls about 80 new seniors from Washington, D.C. public schools in our Empowerment Program. After graduating from high school these students become official alumni. HDSF alumni range in ages from 17 to 30 and are employed in various career fields. HDSF alumni are always connected to HDSF, and its vast network that includes fellow alumni, adult volunteers, corporate sponsors and community leaders. HDSF alumni serve as ambassadors and offer living proof of the organization’s core mission: to create and foster personal relationships between students from Washington, D.C. public schools and working professionals from around the region.

Kay taught 12th grade American Government at H.D. Woodson High School, an inner-city public school, east of the Anacostia River, in the District’s Ward 7. Kay, who worked on Capitol Hill prior to becoming a teacher, routinely brought elected officials, business leaders and Capitol Hill staff members to speak to her students. She authored the curriculum guide for STAR- Students Talk About Race - a resource guide used to properly educate teachers on the delicate subject of racial reconciliation and ways to break down racial barriers. The curriculum, designed for the organization People for the American Way, has been used to educate teachers in high schools across the nation.

Before deciding to pursue a teaching career Kay worked for Claudine Schneider, a former Member of Congress from Rhode Island. She also volunteered for a number of local and national Democratic campaigns. Kay has appeared on local and national television (CNN, C-SPAN) and radio outlets, speaking on a wide range of issues, from education to urban politics to socio-economic disparities.

The President’s Commission on Race honored Kay in 1999 for her work to further racial reconciliation. Kay’s testimonial on the adverse impact of decreasing the Federal budget for education was delivered by the late Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) on the Senate floor and was printed in the Congressional Record on March 12, 1996.

Kay was honored with the Myrtle Wreath award for education by Hadassah and was selected as one of the Washingtonians of the Year for 2000 by Washingtonian Magazine. In 2002, Coca-Cola selected Kay to be a bearer of the Olympic Torch as it passed through Washington, D.C. on its journey to Utah for the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Olympics. In 2002, Kay was presented with the Martin Luther King Jr., Service Award by the United Planning Organization.

In 2003, Kay was recognized by Soroptomist International as a 2003 Woman of Distinction in the area of Education. She is a graduating member of the 2002-2003 class of Leadership Washington and a member of the Washington, DC Non Profit Roundtable. American University awarded her their Distinguished Alumni of 2003 Award and the Jewish Social Service Agency of Greater Washington recognized her with the Lehrman-Pikser Award. In 2004, she served as the keynote speaker for the U.S. Department of Education’s Electronic Access Conferences, and was recognized as the “Community Activist of the Decade” by the Urban Independent Music Awards and the Citizen of the Year by Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. Washington, DC Chapters. In the



Fall of 2005, Hoop Dreams, led by Susie Kay, was recognized by the DC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE with the Community Service of the Year Award.

The City Council of The District of Columbia, on Tuesday, July 14, 2009, formally recognized the 13 years of hard work, and thousands of relationships that have been formed as a result of Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund and its Founder and President Susie Kay.

Speaking on behalf of the City Council, Chairman Vincent Gray talked about how the vision of a former Washington, D.C. public high school teacher helped 1,000 students pursue their dreams of attending college.

"What Susie Kay has done for our city is absolutely unmatched. I am delighted, on behalf of the DC Council, to honor you," said Gray during the ceremony, which was held inside the Council's chambers.

The daughter of a Navy captain, Kay grew up in Newport, Rhode Island and graduated from American University in Washington, D.C.

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