

Like most people my age, I have been exposed to the accomplishments of leaders ranging from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who paved the way for African Americans like myself, and Oprah Winfrey, who gave women the opportunity to be seen as powerful moguls in society. So naturally, my entire life has been consistently built upon the dream of somehow transforming the world. How I would go about doing so, however, was the absolute largest mystery of my whole childhood. Yet somehow, even as early as Kindergarten, I knew that I wanted to positively impact others' lives in a way that was beneficial to their future. Then, "changing the world" and "making an impact" was as simple as sharing my cookie during snack time or aiding a classmate in the "over, under" technique of lacing a shoe. Understandably, my view of the world has tremendously changed due to more experiences exceeding the complexity level required for coloring within the lines of fictional characters. However, even then, the goal was still as bland as it was when it was first conceived: change someone's life, make a difference. The enormity of effort, time, and sacrifice required for pursuing such a goal was completely foreign to my thinking. After reflecting upon the predecessor of leaders before me, I began to wonder would any cause be worth such a compromise. It was not until recently that I truly discovered a cause that I was actually passionate about: a cause that I would without doubt, fight to the finish, no matter the sacrifice.

The cause was the lack of emphasis placed on education and its importance in improving our futures. It infuriated me to know that most of the individuals who label an education "unimportant" or "worthless" are the very individuals who will need the fundamentals of an education to thrive in society. "My name is Danielle Gore," I thought, "If anyone can do something about this, I know I can. Even if I don't make the grand impact I've been dreaming about, making a small knock in someone's psyche to wake them up about their future is enough for me." Finally, I had figured out a more concise, deliberate approach for how I wanted to impact the world – or at least – my community. To make a difference, I am taking steps to start my own mentoring program with my high school's neighboring Elementary/ Jr. High School, entitled, "The Missing Key." This title was chosen because so many kids want more for themselves and hope to prosper in life, yet they lack the courage and support to do so. The title, "The Missing Key," basically explains that my program could be their "missing key" to get them through the door of success. The title was great! However, to my bewilderment, a good title did not necessarily guarantee a great program.

After getting my thoughts in ink, I realized that while ideas look really great in your head, and stories told about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. seem riveting and inspiring, dreams and reality are on two completely different spectrums. I began to wonder whether I was truly ready to commit to such a responsibility. As a high school senior, was I really willing to possibly sacrifice time spent with friends for the company of kids? Did I really think that they would care anything about my point of view or perspective? Lastly, and most importantly, I asked myself was I confident that I was the best person for this job. Could I seriously be dedicated to the cause? After much consideration, I realized the only questions I should have asked myself were, "Does every child in your community understand the benefits of an education?", "Do they each have support at home encouraging them to learn?", and "Do you care?" My answer to the last question, and the one that truly mattered, was "Yes."

I have made the commitment to set out and accomplish the goal of founding *The Missing Key*. I may possibly be setting myself up for failure. Perhaps the kids I work with will care nothing about receiving an education, and all my hours of hard work will have been for nothing. Nevertheless, I would much rather fail with a try rather than fail by doing nothing at all. Doubts

may come around every corner, the kids may recoil from my ideas, and my own self confidence may wither away, but I am aware that these are just a few of the many sacrifices I am willing to make to prove that positive attention and support makes a significant difference in the way young people view themselves and their education.

Honestly, we are all aware that the majority of the students who do not apply themselves academically are from neighborhoods that resemble my own. But most of us fail to understand why this is our reality. What is an education to a person who statistics, due to their upbringing and low economical standings, has already labeled a possible failure? What difference does reading a book make when you're born in an environment that hinders you from thinking that any other lifestyle or form of thinking exists? The notion "this is all you see, therefore, this is all you know," proves itself to be all too true. How do you encourage yourself after realizing that where you are from could possibly limit where you will go? This is the harsh reality for nearly every child in my neighborhood. Unknowingly, these kids are burdened with the responsibility of having to work doubly hard to prove themselves worthy of what they don't have (but want). I want to see the youth of the Douglass Community succeed in life, graduate from college, and make something of themselves. I am done with watching low expectations mold the futures for these students. I will be satisfied when those children can honestly believe that with hard work, confidence, and a good education, they can be just as powerful and successful as any other leader who broke down the same barriers they now face. If I can achieve that through hours of hard work along with several weeks of planning and preparation, I have no doubt in saying that missing out on a few fun weekends during senior year will be worth it.

I know accomplishments like these take a lot of time, but these kids are worth convincing that they matter to someone. *The Missing Key* will go against normality by accepting the "smart" kids as well as those individuals who do not have a G.P.A. to boast about. Our society is prone to casting the young people who do not fit into the *advanced* or *honors* categories to the side. Yet, they need the most guidance. The moment that we become accustomed to taking a laissez-faire approach towards *any* child's education is the moment failure becomes predictable.

Therefore, the "so-called" sacrifices are mere requirements that come with the territory of me accomplishing a dream that I have had all of my life: to make a difference. Even if I have to face everyone's skepticism and predictions of failure head-on, I will do so. In my opinion, despite consequences, any attempt towards accomplishing an honorable goal, is an attempt that deserves respect. I respect and stand by my decision to go up against the task of bringing intelligence back into style for the kids of my generation and those who came after us. I will withstand the hardships. I will accept the sacrifices. I **will** make a difference.