

# RAY'S BEACON



*"Every family living in health and hope with a supportive community."*

Fall Newsletter 2018

## Please Welcome Michelle Hankinson!

### Our New Executive Director Joins RAYS

On behalf of the RAYS Board of Directors, we are pleased to announce that Michelle Hankinson has been named the Executive Director of Renton Area Youth and Family Services.

Michelle has over 20 years of experience working in non-profit management and is very passionate about making a positive difference for those without a strong voice and for marginalized populations. Her most recent role has been working as the Director of Homeless Services for Nexus Youth and Families. Prior to this she worked in therapeutic foster care programming, juvenile justice reform and diversion, and early childhood education.

Michelle is a Renton resident and community member. She attended Concordia University in Montreal and received her degree in Sociology.

*"I feel very honored and blessed to have been given the opportunity to serve as RAYS' Executive Director and am very committed to the mission. I look forward to meeting all of the RAYS' community very soon," shared Michelle.*



**Michelle Hankinson, Executive Director**

## Light The Way with RAYS

### Annual Fundraising Event - October 20, 2018

The theme song of the night would have been "*Can you feel the love tonight*". There was so much love and joy in the room at the second annual light the way with RAYS event on Saturday, October 20<sup>th</sup>.

It started with the honoring of our founding Director, June Leonard - 16 family members and close friends attended to accept our award recognizing June's contribution to RAYS in the 1970's and 80's. Her husband, Tom Leonard, received the award in her honor and spoke about June's passion to help kids and families at RAYS and all children in the Renton community. June served on the Renton School Board and was a Washington State Representative. June's son Patrick told a story about the numerous times June would call home telling them to clean the house because a young person was coming to stay with them. With 9 kids of their own, June and Tom would work on the logistics of adding an additional guest. "Ok, you move over to room with your brother and you are going to move over there" and so on until there was a welcoming spot for the newcomer. June's legacy of being an advocate and meeting families where they are continues at RAYS today.



**RAYS Amazing Staff**

Guests enjoyed food and wine pairings from Melrose Grill and Vino and had fun bidding on our auction items such as Seahawks, Sounders, and Mariners autographed items, a day at Emerald Downs with access to the winner's circle and 2 night stay at Lake Sutherland. Special thanks to our sponsors, our emcee Toyia Taylor, and Former State Representative Marcie Maxwell for introducing the Leonard family.

**Thank you to everyone who attended and helped us reach our goal of raising \$50,000!**

If you would like to donate to help us serve children, youth and families, you can do that [here](#).

## Skyway's Hidden Jewel

### Dimmitt Middle School is something special

"Raise your right hand and repeat after me," Ms. Bonham says standing up from her desk looking directly in the eyes of the potential middle school students that stand around her. "I promise that I will be the very best Lakeridge Orca that I can be for the rest of the school year." The students repeat like an echo through the hallway. "Now, raise your left hand," Ms. Bonham continues with the same balance of hopefulness and directness that has served her well throughout her time at Dimmitt Middle School. "I am now officially a junior Dimmitt Viking. Go Vikings!" The shouts of the students surprise me and a warm breath of honor begins to rise up from my belly to my spine.

Through the eyes of the beautifully diverse crowd of students I can see the anxiousness and anticipation for that first day of school as they stand in front of the two women that peacefully control the attendance office, Ms. Bonham and Ms. Larson.

The sight of this initiation leaves me in awe of the hidden jewels that I witness every time I am in this building. This concept "hidden jewel" comes from the perception I had of this school before I arrived and the truth I soon discovered. "That is where all the bad kids go.", "Your work is going to be cut out for you," are a few of the many pieces of advice I received when discussing my new place of employment.

Although I am not direct staff at the school and serve through my organization, Youth and Family Services, I am a familiar face to the students and staff. During my time here, I saw that outside opinions of Dimmitt have shaped the perception and narrative of the school. It's only until you experience this place of diversity, commitment, humanity, relationships, burnout, history and ultimately the, "Beautiful Struggle" will you see the true narrative that shapes all of our experiences in that building.

Ms. Margaret Bonham and Ms. Jeanne Larson are two woman of many hats that sit in the attendance office as the second line of defense to the front door. They are the first line of defense when it comes to kids, parents and guardians. They are usually the first to buffer all types of situations. These two are the smiling faces that my team encounters right before we connect with the young people. They let us know the ins and outs of everything that is going with the youth we serve. They prepare us for the battles that our youth face day in and day out, whether they are internal or external.

Ms. Bonham and Ms. Larson have worked in the building for a combination of 41 years and the majority of that time together is spent playing off of one another's strengths and constantly reminding each other why they show up every day... especially in the midst of the most challenging times. ***They work in perfect tandem, like the parents that we all wish we had growing up.*** They serve as a unit, a great point guard and center combination (Basketball reference), the Yin and Yang of the attendance office.

The kids don't have a chance when it comes to breaking down the fortress that these two women have built; they have seen all the tactics, all the game plans and together they are always ready. These two women having the historical context, veteran experience and being Skyway residents gives them a greater understanding of what makes Dimmitt Middle school what it is today.

This understanding is rooted in being at Dimmitt since its reopening. They were there when it was known as a "dumping ground." The name produced during a period in time when Dimmitt Middle school had been closed by the school district to save money. Between McKnight and Dimmitt, Dimmitt received the short end of the stick simply because the school did not have a sidewalk. So it was closed and eventually reopened to teachers whom were new hires and so called "disgruntled employees". It was not only viewed as a dumping of staff but programs such as ELL ( English Language Learners). Lastly, Dimmitt served as a landing spot for kids whom had exhausted all forms of intervention with the current schools they were enrolled. Both Ms. Bonham and Ms. Larson stayed put through all the changes, always watching, always trying to understand.



Dimmitt Staff & RAYS Youth Life Coaches

Renton Area

***They have a special type of understanding between student and authority that is hard to come by, especially when there are so many barriers that these students face.***

Our youth face the most significant of barriers. Barriers such as representation, relevant curriculum and resources. Barriers that can have lifelong effects. In my opinion, it is important that staff, administration and organizations that serve the students represent the racial diversity that fills the Dimmitt halls every morning. If the youth can't see a reflection of themselves in the authority that surrounds them then they feel insignificant and only see themselves through media and television or not being represented at all.

When speaking of representation at Dimmitt I picture the smooth Detroit swag of the 18-year Safety Officer Mr. Robert Banks, controlling the halls like a veteran quarterback controls his offensive line. Reminding me of the uncle of the family that holds all the experiences, wisdom and stories of his past adventures of exploring the world. One that you would never think to disrespect; if you find it in yourself to cross him you understand everything you would lose out on. Mr. Banks "tell it like it is" attitude represents to the young people home, relatability and a representation of a successful black male role model in communities that unfortunately don't have as many black men positively represented.

Another barrier our youth face is the absence of dynamic and relevant curriculum that Mr. Banks passionately advocates and speaks for on behalf of the young people. This is a problem that he can't directly change but one that he observes and believes is a factor in why so many young people are in and out of class connecting with him for comfort or forcing him to do a part of his job that he doesn't necessarily enjoy, reprimanding his young people.

Mr. Banks describes the trend of education at Dimmitt and furthermore the education system as, "the old curriculum that I used in my teens" and with "that being 30 or 40 years ago" it's old and outdated. In order for our students to be prepared for the STEM culture that overtakes Seattle and is something could possibly be a pipeline to a different life other than what is provided in an economically challenged community like Skyway, education has to be interesting and accessible.

Lastly when we speak of barriers, what I believe is most pertinent to the staff and students is resources or the lack of resources. Dimmitt houses at least eight organizations, including RAYS that are directly involved with the students. This is a testament to the school having come a long way since its days of being known as the "dumping ground," but there is still more work to be done.

Mr. Eugene Smith a seasoned, versatile and wise 15-year counselor who will be retired by next school year speaks to the barrier of resources from a neutral and factual point of view because of his dedication to understanding the school system and community as a whole. Mr. Smith states "I think the district cares about us and they give us equal FTE (Full time employers) according to our number of students, but the case can be made that a school that is economically challenged and as diverse could need more in order to reach the levels of the other schools in the district. We don't necessarily get that more." Mr. Smith often refers to the 1950's public school education model that he believes still effects our young people that fill the classrooms in 2018. He says "It was designed to produce a student who could read at a basic level, a good enough level to work in a factory." When asked does he believe it has changed he states, "It hasn't changed enough."



**RAYS UP Youth Life Coaches**

But even with so many shortcomings and challenges the constant is the ever-present statement of why these Guardian staff members of Dimmitt Middle school have dedicated their lives to the success of these students is that they "stay because of the kids."

They have found this constant rhythm of grounding themselves in order to bring their best selves, they have found purpose in their work, they have supported one another through the ups and downs, they have invested themselves in the lives of these kids and they have stayed long enough to see the fruits of their labor and sacrifice. These staff members have found the jewel that is hidden from the eyes of the ones who have formulated these narratives around the students, the school and the area.

**(Continued on back page)**

## Skyway's Hidden Jewel cont.

These jewels are uncovered through time, trust and understanding. Ms. Bonham with a proud glimmer in her eye looks at me and begins to share a heartwarming story with me. There was a family at Dimmitt and a particular young man, a Native American young man that stole her heart and throughout time made a connection. He had dealt with a lot of issues and every time he would get into trouble he would look at Ms. Bonham and say, "You really hate me, don't you?" Without hesitation, she would always stay true to her care for him by calmly saying, "No I don't hate you, I'm disappointed but I don't hate you."

The family moved to Arizona and eventually made their way back to Washington showing up to the familiarity of Dimmitt Middle school. The young man unfortunately was still dealing with the same problems as before. When the family showed up to the school, Ms. Bonham asked about the young man. The mom said, "He's in the car." Ms. Bonham went to the car and in her hand, she had a rosary. She looked into his eyes and said, "You hold on to this and believe and everything will be ok." She left not knowing if their paths would cross again, then one morning in her email she saw that the young man was highlighted in the Renton School District newsletter congratulating all the outstanding seniors. She will be attending his graduation at Albert Talley High School.

**-Troy Landrum**



Troy Landrum is an Indianapolis, IN native that has been living and working in Renton and South Seattle for four years. He has served as a Youth Life Coach for Renton Area Youth and Family Services (RAYS) working in youth development work at Renton High School and Dimmitt Middle School. Troy is passionate about helping young people reach their potential. He recently discovered a new passion for writing and is completing his first book.

To learn more about the RAYS UP Team, visit our blog at [RAYS.org](http://RAYS.org)

**We cannot hold a  
torch to light  
another's path  
without  
brightening  
our own.**



### Our mission

RAYS provides high-quality, integrated behavioral healthcare and prevention services to children, youth and families, to restore hope for a healthier future.

**"They have found purpose in their work, they have supported one another through the ups and downs, they have invested themselves in the lives of these kids and they have stayed long enough to see the fruits of their labor and sacrifice."**

### Who We Are

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RAYS is a 501(c) (3) charitable organization.