



Michaela Murray-Nolan '98 Makes Children's Aspirations Her Priority

By Michaela Murray-Nolan



Kids Corporation Executive Director
Michaela Murray-

My life is all about believing in impossible dreams. I run Kids Corporation, one of Newark's oldest and largest non-profits for children, so "impossible" is a word I hear constantly. It's impossible to make a dent in such a big city. It's impossible to solve the childhood healthcare crisis. It's impossible to compete with the lure of gangs.

It's impossible to teach an illiterate seventh-grade student to read. It's impossible to expect my students will go to college. It's impossible to get most New Jerseyans interested in Newark.

Kids Corporation's mission is to improve the lives of Newark children through programs and services that bolster academic skills, promote healthy development, and stimulate a love of learning. Founded in 1971, our goal is to increase children's readiness for school, academic success, and personal growth. We operate summer and after-school educational programs and provide books, clothing, healthcare, school supplies, and field trips to over 4,500 children ages 5 to 12 at over 60 Newark schools, community, and faith-based partner programs each year.

In the midst of running an organization of such impossibly lofty goals, I schedule time to visit one of our school programs almost every day. I love to spend time with some of our 4,500 students, who are filled with hopes and dreams and plans, because no one has told them that they

are supposed to be doomed. They do not yet know that because they were born in Newark, and not eight miles away in Short Hills, they are not expected to go to college, have a career, and make something important of themselves.

So, my kids will pile onto my lap for story time, or ask me to proofread their high school application essays, or ask me to explain long division. Along the way, I learn who wants to be a lawyer, an author, a cop, or a baker—and, in their innocent excitement, I see nothing but endless possibilities. They need real education, proper healthcare, and supportive role models, but they have beautiful dreams that can and deserve to be fulfilled.

*"There is no use trying," said Alice.
"One cannot believe impossible things."*

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour each day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast!"

- Lewis Carroll

Through twists of fate and fortune, I find myself in the most exciting and rewarding job I can imagine: responsible for educating thousands of children and keeping them healthy, overseeing a six million dollar capital campaign at Kids Camp, and forging new partnerships that will bring some of my brightest students to Pingry in the next few years. The

training that I received during my five years at Pingry helps me every day. Al Romano's and Trisha Wheeler's acting classes get me through speeches in front of hundreds; Tom Keating's and Dean Sluyter's writing lessons come in handy for 50-page grant proposals; John Raby's history classes help me tell a great story.

It is precisely the high quality of my Pingry education that elucidates for me the very poor quality of schooling in Newark. Every one of my students deserves the educational opportunities I was given, and my impossible dream is that, by spending my life in Newark, we can progress a little closer toward eradicating this disparity.