

Cambridge College and Mother Caroline Academy Partner Together for Success

By Christina Gajewski

Jane O'Connor, headmaster of Mother Caroline Academy and CC grad – M.Ed. 1990, creates opportunities for those less fortunate and provides leadership and direction to every organization she encounters. Jane is one of several thousand Cambridge College alumni who make it their life mission to change the world.

Cambridge College has influenced Jane in many ways. Jane came to Cambridge College to obtain her Master's degree in Counseling/Psychology. She took time off from teaching and decided to get her graduate degree. One of her fellow teachers, Larry, took her to an information session. She was impressed that the College offered a flexible schedule and was affordable. She was drawn to Cambridge College's mission of social justice as well.

What most impressed Jane was that her experience was not taken lightly in the classroom. The faculty and fellow classmates valued her opinion and her knowledge of public education. Jane enrolled in the counseling/psychology program, and at the time, the late 80's, the family structure was changing. She wanted to know how to counsel families and how to mentor her students. The faculty, especially John Carew, Judy Bralove, and Niti Seth, spoke to her as a peer and provided an interactive learning experience. Her ILP was cutting edge in 1990 and she was able to use it in the classroom the next term. She created a cohesive curriculum for Watertown Public Schools that would raise children's self-esteem. By using the multiple intelligence theory, Jane created six units of study that all intertwined with one another.

Cambridge College allowed Jane to take risks in her curriculum development. After being in public school education for 25 years, Jane took another risk and accepted the position of Headmaster of Mother Caroline Academy in 2004. Jane believes in social justice and Mother Caroline was a natural fit. Mother Caroline Academy is private multicultural middle school (grades 5-8) dedicated to educating young women in an academically challenging yet nurturing environment. Most of the girls are from economically disadvantaged areas around Boston and do not have access to a private school education. The girls that graduate from Mother Caroline go on to private high schools and then to college. To defray the costs of private school, Mother Caroline solicits local community leaders to sponsor each new class of young women. Mother Caroline tracks the young ladies from middle school graduation to college graduation. Mother Caroline Academy girls boast a 100% success of graduating high school in 4 years and 89% of them attend college. Similar to Cambridge College, Mother Caroline seeks to close the education opportunity gap.

Cambridge College and Mother Caroline Academy have partnered together to provide higher education to Mother Caroline Academy parents. Cheryl Goodman, a Mother Caroline Academy parent, just enrolled in Cambridge College in the undergraduate program. Jane and Sue Hazard, a Cambridge College Advisory Board Member, urged Cheryl to attend the College and become a positive role model to her daughter.

Because of Jane's involvement with Mother Caroline, she has been provided the opportunity to travel to Rwanda as an education consultant. She met with the Ministry of Education of Rwanda in February to discuss secondary teacher training and the possibility of setting up a centralized center for teacher leadership training. A principal from the Rwandan school is at Mother Caroline this semester shadowing various teachers and learning how to provide a high quality education to students. Jane will go back to Rwanda in December to provide teacher teaching and work the government to develop units of study for the school that match the national curriculum. Her Cambridge College experience allowed her to have this global experience and help aid in her social justice life mission. She truly believes as the Chancellor of Cambridge College says "that none of us knows what all of us knows."

In Jane's "spare time" she is a foster parent. Her dream is to open up a Home in Watertown where kids in the foster care system can still attend their schools when their foster parents change. She believes that kids lose their support system as small as it is by moving from city to city. She wants children to have the familiarity of school when their home life is changing. Jane would like to develop new policies for the Foster Care System with children's success at the forefront.

Jane never asks for recognition for the work she does. She is a shining example of complete selflessness. As her grandfather told her, "leave the world a better place than when you enter it." Jane has already done this! Cambridge College gave her a lasting desire to contribute to the betterment of the world. Jane O'Connor has left her lasting positive mark at the College, and the world is forever changed because of her belief in others.