

Reflections on Breakthrough

A Conversation with Founder,
Lois Loofbourrow



Lois Loofbourrow, *Founding Co-Director of the original Breakthrough program in 1978, has returned to the Breakthrough family in a new role as Program Consultant for the national office. An excellent opportunity to keep Breakthrough on track with our mission, we recently sat down with Lois to get her perspective on the program's history, mission and vision.*

What is Breakthrough's founding story?

Breakthrough was founded in 1978 as Summerbridge by San Francisco University High School. The impetus behind the program was to help University High School be a school of the city, not one merely in the city.

Since the beginning, the program has served motivated yet under-supported middle school students from public schools with the goal of ensuring that each student has the confidence and academic skills to thrive at rigorous college preparatory high schools.

The magic of the Students Teaching Students model was discovered quite serendipitously when our English Teacher was out for several days due to an injury and we turned her classes over to three high school aged teacher assistants. The students admired, respected and connected with their young teachers in a way that encouraged us to change the model to Students Teaching Students, starting the second summer of the program.

What impact did Breakthrough have on your life and career?

Most of us never have a chance for a job that mirrors our values and beliefs; this was given to me and is something that has seen me through the wonderful and tough times in my life. My head has always been filled with the stories of the students and staff with whom I have had the privilege to work. The students especially gave me an intimate view of racism and classism. In my life, I don't think I have met such honorable individuals; all gave back to the program more than they received. I learned that giving to others is the only way to have a truly enriched life.

What has changed and what has stayed the same about the program?

Not much has changed, especially when I focus on the mission of the work. Laura Pochop and the national staff are very committed to the original mission of the program. The local site directors I've met are very clear that they expect their students to enter and thrive in an academic secondary school, and enter a strong university. One site even names its classes for the year they are expected to graduate from college. This is brilliant.

I see the exceptional work Miami and Austin are doing, for example, and so admire these site's Directors – John Flickinger and Jessica D'Arcy – for their long-term commitment to the work and to program excellence. When I was in Santa Fe this summer, I saw a new site

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Breaking Bread for Breakthrough Success



Breakthrough's third annual Breaking Bread for Breakthrough event on October 11th was a resounding success and, to date, we have raised more than \$310,000 to support the work of Breakthrough and more than \$12,000 towards launching a new site in Washington, D.C.

Marian Wright Edelman, our keynote speaker and renowned children's advocate, spoke on the importance of Breakthrough:

“(Breakthrough) not only gives young middle school students a new vision of what they can become and an alternative to the schools and the streets that are afflicted with poverty – it is also a good feeder ground for new teachers. We need new teachers. I'm very glad that my son was a Breakthrough teacher in the program in New Haven in 1993. He's a principal today in an inner city charter school and he speaks very fondly of his Breakthrough experience because he felt that it was a program with rigorous requirements and a real respect for young teachers.”

~Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund



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To submit story ideas or for questions about *Celebration*, contact us at: celebration@breakthroughcollaborative.org

A Story by Alumni Tomás Boatwright

“In my 5th year teaching, my hope is to inspire my students to go to college just like my Breakthrough teachers inspired me when I was a student.”



- Student and Teacher, Breakthrough’s site in Sacramento
- First in his family to go to college

Hmong people make up less than one percent of the total world’s population. This statistic gives evidence that the culture is rare and unfamiliar to many. But not to the city of Sacramento, which happens to have a large population of Hmong people. Growing up in Sacramento, I lived amongst many Hmong people; I, however, was utterly unaware of that fact. Breakthrough initially introduced me to the amazing culture.

I remember the end of my first summer at Breakthrough and the “Celebration event” specifically for its cultural awareness. There were students wearing their traditional clothing. I was fascinated with the vibrant colors of the Hmong outfits. Hot pink, neon green, orange and gold were arranged in intricate skirt patterns. And they had a story—a story that I could relate to, although being from almost another world. It’s safe to say that after my formal introduction to the Hmong culture during Breakthrough, I am obsessed. After my graduation from Breakthrough, when I had free time during the summer, I would spend hours online or at the library researching the Hmong people.

The Hmong people are a small Asian minority that does not have their own country. Originally slaves in China, they were forced to flee or be exterminated. Now, they live in various other lands, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Laos, France, Australia, and select states in the United States. Without their own country, they have been forced to keep their culture intact at all costs, so all traditions have been passed on by word of mouth. Because of this, they did not have a written language until the 1980s.

Everything that I learned about the Hmong culture, I loved. I loved their language, songs, and the struggles they faced. I loved that I could totally relate to someone that was ethnically, culturally and physically different from me. I grew up a biracial child—unable to relate to my friends, celebrities, even family members. Many Hmong people come to the United States unable to relate, because they have a culture that is in multiple ways foreign to American culture. In many ways, I found my personal identity through learning about others.

Being a Breakthrough teacher, I then had many Hmong students. I was able to learn several phrases and words. Breakthrough gave me the opportunity to become more culturally aware. This is a gift that is not valued enough in education today, where academics are limited to a traditional canon.

For my senior project, I decided to create a documentary of the role of women in the Hmong culture. Had it not been for Breakthrough, I would not have been able to celebrate the beauty of a foreign culture. What’s amazing about Breakthrough is that the program functions as an academic resource. But it is continually exposing its students to multiple forms of education, and not just the three R’s. I thank Breakthrough for educating me about the world and about the importance of acceptance, curiosity and awareness. We do not get the fullest from education by learning alone, rather, we must learn from each other.

- Tomás Boatwright, Junior, Occidental College

Alumni Profile: Meredith Osborn

Student, Teacher, Office Intern and Admissions Committee Member, Breakthrough's original site in San Francisco

Law Clerk, Federal Judge, San Francisco



What is your history with Breakthrough?

I remember applying to Breakthrough as a sixth grader at Horace Mann Middle School in San Francisco. I was so excited when I was accepted! After two great years as a

student, I returned to Breakthrough's site in San Francisco as a teacher in the summer of 1995. I taught again in 1997, after working in the national office in the summer of 1996. During high school, I was a member of the admissions committee too! And of course, during those years my family had out-of-town Breakthrough teachers staying in our home. Having my role models living right down the hall is something I'll never forget.

What impact did Breakthrough have on your life and career?

Breakthrough helped keep me enthusiastic about learning during middle school, when school was most uninspiring. Meeting teachers from universities around the country opened my eyes to what the future might have in store for me. When I became a teacher myself, I was inspired by my students. But I was also struck by the

systemic inequalities and inequities in America. Seeing the challenges my students faced made me passionate about becoming a public interest lawyer.

What are you doing now?

After graduating from Harvard College, AB 2002 and University of Edinburgh, MSc 2003, I recently graduated from Harvard Law School (JD 2006) and am currently working as a law clerk for a federal judge in my hometown of San Francisco.

Why is Breakthrough important to you?

The experiences I had at Breakthrough have immeasurably shaped the person I have become. I can't separate the summers I was a teacher from those when I was a student - both were foundational to my education and to my vision of the world.

Welcome Lydia Johnson, Director of Development

Director of Development Scott MacLeod is now a high school English teacher. (Breakthrough really does create great teachers!) Though we are all so sad to see him go, we're delighted to announce that this summer we hired a seasoned and very savvy development professional to fill his shoes.

Lydia Johnson has 15 years professional experience in marketing and development. Most recently, as a senior development officer for the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, a national organization based in San Francisco, she developed an enthusiasm for expanding educational opportunities for underserved communities. She first

learned of Breakthrough as a donor services officer for the San Francisco Foundation. Lydia has raised resources and managed marketing campaigns for such organizations as the United Way of the Bay Area, San Francisco Food Bank, and Hispanics in Philanthropy.

In another life, Lydia worked as a copywriter and public relations professional for an award winning advertising agency in Nevada. Lydia served on the steering committee for the American Marketing Association 2006 West Coast Non-Profit Conference Committee and is a member of AFP and APRA. When not at Breakthrough, Lydia visits museums, libraries, nature trails and plenty of playgrounds with her son Mateo and husband Ed.



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that mirrored many qualities I would want to see in a new site, including engaged students and teachers, relevant curricula, and an enthusiasm for learning.

What are you doing now?

I've returned to Breakthrough in the role of Program Consultant - which is a fulfillment of a dream. It energizes me and I feel younger than I have in years. And, of course, like most 65 year-olds, I still obsess about what I want to do when I grow up. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I now have the luxury of time to think about myself. I'd like to continue to work on my Spanish, sublet an apartment in Manhattan, and help out Breakthrough in any way I can.



Join the Movement to Support Educational Equity

Movement: a series of actions and events taking place over a period of time and working to foster a principle or policy.



Your contribution is tax-deductible. Breakthrough is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Please consider a gift to Breakthrough and become part of the movement to change the lives of young people. Your gift will provide general support to Breakthrough, helping us to expand our services and grow so that we can reach more deserving kids.

You can also support the recruitment, training and retention of our outstanding student-teachers through the Teacher Excellence Fund. Half of the money from the Teacher Excellence Fund goes directly to returning teachers as salary enhancements, to help attract these experienced teachers, many of whom are on financial aid.

For more information on investment opportunities, please contact Lydia Johnson, ljohnson@breakthroughcollaborative.org or go to: www.breakthroughcollaborative.org/contribute.

Breakthrough Students Tho Bui and Brian Chantrupon Receive Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Prestigious Young Scholar Awards



Tho Bui presents about the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to Breakthrough Saint Paul's prospective college students at a mock college fair last summer.

Several years ago, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation started the Young Scholars Program to help talented middle school students with need reach their dreams over their lifetimes. Recognizing that Breakthrough students are ideally suited for this opportunity, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and Breakthrough formed a pipeline partnership to guide our students through the process.

After applying through the spring and making it through the extensive selection process, two Breakthrough eighth graders, Tho Bui of Breakthrough Saint Paul and Brian Chantrupon of the San Francisco University High School site have been named 2006

Young Scholars. This award, received by only 63 of the 700+ applicants nationwide, will provide Tho and Brian with an educational advisor, a guide who will help the students and their families develop an Individualized Learning Plan, ensuring that they can set high goals and reach them. Moreover, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation will offer Tho and Brian the funds to take advantage of whatever opportunities come up in their Individualized Learning Plans. Depending on their individual goals, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation may support them each for 15 years, up to a doctoral degree, with a potential investment of up to \$300,000 each. Tho and Brian now have the chance to achieve whatever they want to — with no financial obstacles in their way. Kudos to Tho and Brian and to Breakthrough Saint Paul and the San Francisco University High School site for nurturing them along the path to success.

Breaking Through the Odds



Laura Pochop

Executive Director

Breakthrough
Collaborative

At our recent Breaking Bread for Breakthrough dinner, I was so moved by the words of Jennifer Lopez, Breakthrough student and teacher alumni, that I asked her if I could provide a portion of her speech here in the newsletter. Lucky for all of you, she agreed:

Bam! Bam! Tires screech, women scream, children cry, windows break. Everyone drops down on the ground. A young boy grabs his sister. Their eldest brother's gang involvement has risked the lives of his family. Their parents grab the few belongings they own and pack their old, brown, spotted 1980 station wagon. They drive north. With no money, they live in their car until their father gathers enough money to rent a home. Their parents have tried their best to hide them from the drugs, gangs, and violence that infested the places they called home, a world that reminded the parents of the civil wars and corruption in El Salvador, they had fled. But what could you expect with such scarce resources?

Life in the projects was no fairy-tale. This is my life story.

In 1984, my parents fled the poverty-stricken country of El Salvador in search of a better life. They envisioned America as the land of opportunity, and an escape from their war-torn country. I attended the schools many of our Breakthrough students attend today. The schools where no one wants to teach. The schools that contain 23% emergency credentialed teachers and 96% students on the free or reduced-cost lunch program. These are the schools that root students to drop out, get pregnant and turn to gangs and drugs. I could have easily taken this route, but Breakthrough was there when I needed it the most. It provided me with a different path from what was set-up for me. Breakthrough granted me with the resources to strive for my best.

Fortunately, the children from the story, my

brother and I were granted full scholarships to Sacramento Country Day School, the most highly regarded independent private school in the Sacramento Area. Everything was so different there. We were the scholarship students that were "expected" to fail out. We would often visit the Breakthrough office on our campus to talk about the many hardships we were facing. Laura Noyes, the Breakthrough director, would motivate us and believe in us when no one else did.

Recently, I began my third year at Occidental College, where I am double majoring in Diplomacy of World Affairs and Biochemistry with a 3.89 GPA – quite a ways from my flight out of the gang-stricken communities of East LA.

My original plan for this past summer was to go to Yale to participate in a medical research program but instead, I chose to help start a Breakthrough program in San Juan Capistrano. Some of my friends asked me why I wanted to teach, especially in Orange County, and wanted to know "What's so great about Breakthrough?"

I don't claim to have all of the answers, but I can tell you what IS important to me.

Mari, Cesar, Stephanie, Alex, Nau, Fabiola, Alexi and there are plenty more. No, I hadn't met them before this summer, but still, as thousands before them, I know them. I know how much they enjoy school, how much they strive for success, how much they want to have a voice and make a difference in this world...but I also know how hard it can be to live in a world where you are simply looked at

as a statistic. As many will say I was a "special" student, one-of-a-kind, a success story. But there are so many other "special students." There are many other students who deserve the opportunity that I was granted through our program. Breakthrough didn't do my homework for me but it believed in me when many others did not. I saw my students placed in the wrong classes because of their perceived interest or even the accents in their voices. I saw them struggle to find a place in their home to do homework because they live with two other families or had crying babies in their homes.

Eight years ago, Breakthrough taught me to challenge myself, take pride in my work and value the opportunities available to me. And only eight weeks ago, I was blessed to witness the smiles and new-found confidence and enthusiasm that proved that it had worked again.

Now, as a future doctor, I understand how important it is to tell my story and do my best to help other students accomplish their goals. I know that I have a responsibility to not only myself but to the hundreds of students who look up to me. I look back to this summer and remember the excited faces of my seven Latina young ladies who strive to excel in the sciences as well and become future doctors. Without Breakthrough this summer, who knows where they would be headed? Luckily, I know exactly where some of my students are, as they channel Breakthrough's vision into success in their young lives.

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Celebration



THE NEWSLETTER OF

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Marian Wright Edelman, our keynote speaker, and Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund and Jennifer Lopez, former Breakthrough student and teacher at the third annual Breaking Bread for Breakthrough event.

"Breakthrough didn't do my homework for me but it believed in me when many others did not."

~Jennifer Lopez, Former Breakthrough student and teacher

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