



ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT

PRESENTED BY THE PROFESSIONAL ALUMNAE COMMUNITY



Brynne Balboa '12

Passionate Nonprofit Professional

Can you share a bit about your journey from college to where you are today? How does what you studied in school inform your work today? And what inspired you to pursue your current career?

After graduating from Sacred Heart in 2012, I headed off to Susquehanna University—a small school in central PA. I started as a Marketing major until I realized it came with *a lot* of math which I quickly realized was not my thing! So, I pivoted to Early Education, thinking "how fun would it be to teach kids?!" But as I got deeper into my studies, I started to see just how unfair the education system can be—especially for kids who don't fit the "cookie cutter" mold. That lit a fire in me to seek other tangential opportunities.

After college, I joined City Year as an AmeriCorps member and spent two transformative years working with 7th and 8th graders in North Philadelphia (right off of Temple's campus). Those two years changed my life. In nearly every sense of the term. My heart opened and grew in ways I never knew possible. I witnessed so many challenges my students faced both inside and outside of the classroom, especially hunger and how it stood in the way of their ability to focus, succeed, and *thrive*. It became impossible to ignore. I was the person who always had granola bars on hand whenever there was a need. Through all of this, I knew I had to shift my focus to hunger-relief. It felt like something that was tangible and I could see direct results from the work.

That passion led me to Food Bank For New York City, where I dove into fundraising, events, and just about anything the team needed. The term "wear a lot of hats" is beyond true in the nonprofit space. My first "stint" at Food Bank ended when my husband's job brought us to Grand Rapids, Michigan. There, I kept my work going with a local children's hunger-relief nonprofit called Kids' Food Basket. I met some incredible people who are still in my life! In 2021, Food Bank reached out—and thanks to the now-virtual world (thanks, COVID-19!), I jumped at the chance to come back as one of the first Food Bank "boomerang" employees as my boss affectionately calls me. Today, I manage everything from direct marketing campaigns to our signature Gotham Ball annual fundraiser. I also have the honor of leading our Junior Board, a group of passionate young professionals dedicated to fighting hunger across NYC.

Looking back, my college experience didn't just shape what I do—it shaped *why* I do it. While I may not be in a classroom, studying education opened my eyes to the systemic barriers so many children face, and that understanding still drives me every day. Each day, the goal remains the same: to help level the playing field for children and families by ensuring they have access to fresh, healthy, and nourishing food. Because it all trickles down. A fed belly means a child can sit, focus, and ace tests in school. One meal may be a small thing, but it ripples more than we could ever know. So, here goes the fundraiser in me "go support your local food bank, hunger-relief nonprofit, or education nonprofit! Whether it's the gift of time, talent, or treasure, *it all counts.*"

What advice would you give to women aspiring to follow a similar path in the nonprofit sector?

Stay open. That's the biggest piece of advice I can give. Life is full of twists and turns, and the most meaningful opportunities often come when you least expect them. I still laugh because my college experience started with Marketing and though I shifted away from it, I ended up right back!

Also, be the person willing to raise your hand, say yes, and jump in. Even if a role or opportunity doesn't look *perfect* on paper, every experience builds your toolkit and expands your network. Sometimes the roles that stretch you the most are the ones that prepare you for what's next.

Passion and purpose are powerful forces and when you combine them with hard work and being a team player, people will notice. Find mentors, ask questions, and never underestimate the value of showing up as your true and best self! There's no one path to making a difference, but if you stay open and stay true to your values, you'll carve out a path that's uniquely yours.

How did the foundational beliefs and strengths that you learned and developed at SHA help you find your professional voice and direction?

Sacred Heart taught me two things that have stuck with me beyond graduation: be your true self, and don't be afraid to use your voice because it matters! I honestly don't think I'd be the woman I am today without those takeaways. SHA was the first place where I really felt like my voice carried weight both inside and outside of the classroom. Whether it was in class discussions or just hallway conversations, there was always space to speak up, even if not everyone agreed. And that's real life, right? Everyone brings their own perspective and learning how to share mine (and listen to others) gave me the confidence I now use every day. Sacred Heart taught me how to be an individual and honor my truest self and I am so beyond grateful for that.

Brynne Balboa is a passionate nonprofit professional whose career focuses on fundraising, marketing, and events. She has dedicated her career to supporting youth and hunger-relief organizations in cities like Philadelphia, Grand Rapids, and New York City. Brynne met her husband on the very first day of college, and today they live in Ridgewood, NJ. Last September, she gave birth to their son Carmell—affectionately known as Carmie who is the light of their lives! They also have two dogs, Ollie and Evie. In her free time, Brynne enjoys cooking, gardening, and exploring the historic charm of her neighborhood.