

Tiffany Johnson

City of Charlotte, Mayor's Mentoring Alliance & Out of School Time Program Manager

AGE: 26

WHERE WERE YOU BORN? Charlotte, North Carolina

HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN CHARLOTTE AREA? 26 years, so basically my whole life. I still count my college days in Raleigh, because Charlotte is always home and I was here holidays and summers. ☺

TELL US A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOU? I am proud to be a Charlotte native as both of my parents moved here to attend Johnson C. Smith University back in the day, and decided to raise a family here, which consisted of my brother Joseph and me. My parents, who have both passed away, instilled in me as a child the value of education and service to my community. Especially my mother, who formerly taught at Quail Hollow Junior High School aka Quail Hollow Middle School, which I later attended. I graduated from E. E. Waddell High School in 2011 with honors, then went on to graduate from North Carolina State University (NCSU) in 2015 where I earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in Political Science with a concentration in Law & Justice and Communication with a concentration in Mass Media.

In college, I knew that I had a passion for communication, sports, and public service, and after graduation when it was tough to find a full-time job due to my limited social capital, I increased my volunteerism while looking for a career start. Then, I realized that all the organizations of which I volunteered had full-time staff members who were leading the charge. It was like a light bulb went off in my head, and in 2016 I began my career at United Way of Central Carolinas as their Campaign and Engagement Coordinator, which supported the donors relations team during their campaign to raise \$28.3 million dollars to assist our local community, mainly through grants to non-profits. I later transitioned to my role as an Account Specialist with Girl Scouts, Hornets' Nest Council (GSHNC) where I connected over 2,500 girls and adult volunteers to the opportunity to lead with courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place. While at GSHNC, I worked to ensure that financial barriers did not determine the level of opportunity for our girls, and helped to start Troop 3037 at Sterling Elementary School where this troop's primary activities were sponsored. This hit close to home, because if I currently had a baby girl, then this would be the school where she would attend, and I have the belief that it is important to enhance our communities as they are to make them better for the next generation.

Currently, I serve as the Mayor's Mentoring Alliance (MMA) & Out of School Time (OST) Specialist for the City of Charlotte where I manage the City's mentoring initiative and a grant of approximately \$1 million which funds afterschool programs for youth who come from low to moderate income households. Mentorship is extremely important to me as no one can reach their goals on their own, and while mentoring is a reciprocal relationship, a mentor not only helps to offer guidance and support but also helps to instill hope in the mentee. Hope, in my opinion, is the driver of life and what keeps us going each day. Growing up in Charlotte, I know the limits of social capital and how hope can be lost in the tale of two Charlotte's. The positive side of the coin is that there really are many adults who want to assist our youth through mentorship to positively enhance the trajectory of their mentees lives, and MMA serves as the connecting force to make that happen. MMA provides free mentoring training to current and prospect mentors, trainings to mentoring agency representatives which strengthens their community impact, networking sessions for mentors and prospective mentors to meet, learn from each other and get connected to mentoring programs that need mentors and an awards ceremony each January, which highlights our selfless mentors, and so much more. While OST currently funds six non-profits which allows for youth to not only have a safe place to attend after school while their families are working, but also provides various opportunities based on the program attended. Youth get exposure through college tours, public speaking, arts and photography, music education, cooking classes, and enhance their education through tutoring in reading, and workshops in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and so much more. These programs also work to ensure the services they offer are not a continuation of the school day, and support the whole family through family advocates and parent resource centers. My career is only a portion of who I am, but I have learned that I like for my career to reflect the things most important to my heart, which is service to my community and creating environments for people to believe in their abilities. Overall, I work hard to keep a positive attitude, and am driven by my goals. My primary goals in life are to remain healthy and happy, and in doing so I strive to keep people in my circle who are positive and also want to get the most out of life.

DURING YOUR TIME VOLUNTEERING FOR A COMMUNITY ACTIVITY OR PROJECT, WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT? This is a short, but hard question. I often call myself a professional volunteer as my vacation time at work typically goes towards me assisting foundations and non-profits, but I think I have found a moment. Since 2016, I have volunteered with Achievements Unlimited Basketball School, founded by Fred Whitfield, Charlotte Hornets President & Vice Chairman. Throughout the week at camp each year, kids 8-18 years old are taught basketball fundamentals in addition to anti-drug education, where they are required to make a grade of 100 on their vocabulary words test to play in the All-Star Game. They also hear from celebrity speakers (current and former National Basketball Association (NBA) players, NBA Executives, and ESPN Analysts) and business professionals, followed by a question and answer session. My most memorable moment is seeing hope instilled in the youth and their parents. I am not sure if this sounds cliché, but there is something incredibly special in watching a child study hard to ace their test to not only make themselves proud, but to not let down their teammates, while also hearing from local leaders like Novant Health leader, Jesse Cureton, who grew up in Charlotte and shared details about his life story that resonated with them and professed that they are also able to become successful business professionals. The saying people will be what they see is rooted in truth, and their eyes lit up when learning about the skills and drive that it takes to be a businessman or businesswoman as that career has more longevity than playing sports, which the kids grasped. From talking with a parent of a camper who was brought tears as she reflected over how her son was normally shy, but he grew during camp, and came home each day telling her about the stories of the friends he made. The intersection of sports and community warms my heart, and through this week each year, there are moments that define my “why,” which pushes me to continue to want to give back each day.

IN YOUR OPINION, HOW DO YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY? PLEASE BE AS DETAILED AS YOU CAN.

I contribute to the community through my advocacy for youth and volunteer service. I cannot stress enough how much I appreciate and encourage mentorship. Every youth, every adult for that matter, deserves someone in their corner who works in partnership with the mentee to maximize their human potential. Mentoring can also work to increase social capital as I believe we should all be afforded access to opportunity, and should not be shunned away due to lack of connections. My work with the Mayor’s Mentoring Alliance & Out of School Time Program supports both mentorship and social capital and affirms my passion and hope for my community. Volunteerism is huge for me and when afforded the opportunity, I enjoy taking time to assist strong programs and events and that support youth. I have supported the Charlotte Hoops Challenge, Select 60 Showcase, Dereck Whittenburg Foundation for Education, Achievements Unlimited Basketball School, YWCA Central Carolinas Summer Picnic Celebration, and the General Shelton Leadership Challenge. While the majority of my time is spent towards supporting my community, I greatly look forward to becoming more involved than I already am as time progresses.

PLEASE LET US KNOW ANY AWARDS OR RECOGNITIONS YOU’VE RECEIVED IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER:

As I am an emerging leader, I have not received awards for my professional career, but I believe in myself, abilities, and potential and feel this could be my first award. ☺

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES OR INTEREST?

I love to watch movies and read books, but recently I have discovered a new hobby as a few months ago I decided to embark on the journey of creating a blog. Since April, I have purchased my domain name and created a logo, and I plan to launch my website very soon. The mission statement of my blog is to motivate and empower women to be their true authentic selves, while knowing perfection isn’t realistic, and perseverance is the best characteristic.

In college, I often wrote papers about self-esteem in girls as it related to weight and perception of stereotypes, and through my blog I will share my story as an imperfect millennial motivated to navigate life in hopes that other girls, women, or whomever decides to read my content, will realize imperfection makes us unique and it is okay to be you!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE QUOTE THAT YOU STAND BY?

“There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done, there are thousands to prophesy failure, there are thousands to point out to you one by one, the dangers that wait to assail you. But just buckle in with a bit of a grin, Just take off your coat and go to it; Just start to sing as you tackle the thing that “cannot be done,” and you’ll do it.” – Edgar Albert Guest

This is from the poem, It Couldn’t Be Done, and my father used to say it all the time when I was younger, and encouraged me to memorize the words. I would recite the poem whenever there was a task that had me feeling defeated.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5 YEARS? 10 YEARS?

Happy and healthy. Those two things will always outweigh my career aspirations as I don't want to have a thriving career, while being miserable and sacrificing my health. In 5 years, I hope to have earned a Master's Degree. I have been looking into obtaining a Master's of Communication in Digital Strategy. I love the art of storytelling, and engaging with an audience through various mediums, and feel that another degree will allow for me to strengthen those skills. I still have not crossed off the possibility of going to law school as it was my main goal when I was a child, and I am still intrigued by the field. I hope to have made a stronger impact in my community. I know that I have just barely scratched the surface of what I have to offer this city and this world. I want to leave behind a legacy of smiles. It would be nice to have people hear my name and know that I'm dedicated to improving the lives of youth in my hometown. In 10 years, I hope to keep glowing and growing while still maintaining happiness and health. It is hard to pinpoint exactly where I will be, because life is unpredictable, but I hope that I will have tied in my love of sports and community relations. Perhaps, I could be married with a few kids, because by this time I would be 36 years old. Although, my mom had me at 41, so I know it is possible to be educated with a great career, a husband, and have kids later in life.

CAN YOU SHARE ONE THING THAT IS ON YOUR BUCKET LIST?

I would like to travel more! By more I mean anywhere by plane, because I have only been on a plane once and that was in middle school. The world is huge, and while I love Charlotte, I also want to expand my horizons and learn more about different cultures and lifestyles.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU USED YOUR PASSPORT?

I would have to say never, which is in part to me having this complex where I question whether planes in the sky are really normal. I understand science, but the thought of flying and being in the sky for hours still slightly scares me.

WHAT IS A FUN FACT ABOUT YOURSELF THAT NO ONE KNOWS?

I am pretty open, but a story many people do not know is that when I was in second grade, I believe, I got stitches under my left eye because I was excited to read a book and told my brother that I could race him in reading and finish first. He did not really care, but I was still so excited that I ran back to the room to finish the chapter and fell and hit my face on the edge of a wooden chair. The scar is definitely my beauty mark! I find this to be a fun fact, because it really was not that serious. Ha-ha 😊

WHO IS YOUR HERO?

My mom, Constance Williams Johnson. My mother and I were close, I called her every day while I was in college, and we could talk for the longest. I always felt safe and protected around my mom, and I knew she would always have my back. When my father passed away, my brother was in his junior year of college, and I was a senior in high school. My mom continued to put us both through college, on her own. There is no limit to a mother's love. When I wanted to take a statistics class at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte during the summer prior to my senior year of college, I still did not have a license. My mother took off work early at 4:00 p.m. every day that I had class, and drove me across Charlotte to class, then waited at a Harris Teeter with a lounge area each day, for 3 hours, until the class ended. I will never know a kinder spirit. I wrote her a check for gas money, but I found the check years later that she never cashed. She would often say, I just want you to graduate. Go to your destiny. I made an A out of the class, and graduated magna cum laude from NCSU, because of the strength of my mother's love. I owe everything thing to her, and hope that I continue to make her proud each day.

WHAT WAS THE LAST BOOK YOU READ?

Destiny: Step Into Your Purpose by T. D. Jakes

WHAT WAS THE LAST MOVIE YOU SAW?

Avengers: End Game

WHAT WAS THE LAST CONCERT YOU SAW?

Tamia at The Fillmore Charlotte