

## To&Through Student Stories



### South Chicago

South Chicago is a predominantly Black (70%), lakefront neighborhood located on the far southeast side of Chicago right along the Illinois/Indiana border. Latine residents make up an additional 23% of the population. Youth make up a significant part of the population and most children attend public schools.

The South Chicago Quality of Life Plan envisions revitalizing vacant land, improving parks and transportation, and restoring the natural environment as a way to address longstanding issues of disinvestment of community spaces and air, water, and soil pollution.

Learn more:

[Quality of Life Plan - CLARETIAN ASSOCIATES - BUILDING COMMUNITY IN SOUTH CHICAGO](#)

[Claretian Associates](#)

[To&Through Community Tool](#)

### Meet Ky'Nya

Ky'Nya is a rising 10th grader at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. College Prep (King College Prep). She was born and raised in South Chicago, surrounded by her family. "I grew up in a very supportive environment. A lot of cousins, a lot of kids around. My childhood was pretty fun. I used to always visit my grandma's house just with everybody, surrounded by all family members. Just very loving and supportive." Her family instilled a confidence in her that nothing can stop her from

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accomplishing her dreams. Her aim is to go to college and become a travel nurse with a specialization in pediatrics.

### Relationship with South Chicago

Ky’Nya ‘s favorite place in South Chicago is [Claretian Associates](#)—a community-based organization serving the neighborhood. She became involved with the organization through a paid summer program that introduced her to local businesses and community-based organizations. Previously, she would only travel within the neighborhood to visit her sister. Now, “I’m so much more familiar with here, around my community because we went on those walks to see [local businesses and organizations], to talk to them, to get the inside on how they feel about the community,” she said.

Some of these neighborhood organizations came to Claritian to speak with her and her peers in the program. Their words made Ky’Nya feel like her community had her back. She explains, “They want our path in life to be great. They don’t want us to go through nothing they went through. They shared some of their life experiences and about what they went through when they was our ages. And how they just want us to have a good life. Nothing involved, no violence, nothing happening to us. So that just shows that they’re a very good advocate for us. I didn’t even know that. I didn’t even know we had adults and other people caring about us and caring about our safety. Of course people care about me, but it’s people that I don’t know that actually care about me.”

### “Peaceful Neighborhood. Peaceful Everything.”

Ky’Nya’s vision for South Chicago is a “peaceful neighborhood, peaceful everything.” She learned about an organization in her neighborhood that facilitates restorative justice practices, including peace circles, and sees lots of benefits in these kinds of approaches. They could help community members “get everything off their chest so they just won’t be feeling like—walking around so angry or always have an attitude”. This would help people “live freely”. Additionally, she wants more spaces for people to come together to discuss their vision for the neighborhood and work towards that goal.

Ky’Nya also recognizes that there is so much more to South Chicago than violence. Too many people do not see past that label due to personal experiences or others’ experiences. She questions this logic.

“You only seen some events. You only seen something that happened and you going based off that? You think everybody like that? No. You can’t just judge somebody based off what ‘this other person’ went through or what ‘they’ went through or what happened to ‘them’.

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She explains that it is normal for people to have “good days and bad days” but it is unfair to define her neighborhood based on the latter. “When y'all going to praise us for the positive things?...When are y'all gonna give us a round of applause for that?” she says. She explains it is unfair for people to make a judgement about her based on a stereotype.

### Middle School Memories

“That was the best years of my life to be honest.” Ky’Nya said. The bond she had with teachers and staff was rooted in mutual recognition and appreciation for one another. “They accepted me for who I was and they appreciated me. They appreciate all the small things I did like when the class is talking and I'm not, they see me,” she said.

In sixth grade her class did not have a teacher which impacted her grades. The school counselor pulled her aside and said, ‘This isn’t the Ky’Nya I remember’. That moment was a turning point for her, and she began to focus on her studies. Reflecting on that moment Ky’Nya says, “Even when she did say that, she still supported me throughout all my decisions, everything...I want to thank her for that because yeah, she's been with me my whole life. She's seen me grow and yes, I did get back on my square.”

### COVID-19: Remote Learning

Ky’Nya attended Avalon Park Elementary School when COVID-19 first hit. Remote learning was difficult for her. “I was very sleepy and you know since I'm at home and I'm in my bed, I got free opportunity to lay down...[Or] I'd join late because I woke up late”

She realizes that she thrives attending school in person. She can really engage with the lesson, teachers, and her peers.

### High School

Currently, Ky’Nya is a rising 10th grader at King College Prep. She is a self-starter with hopes to be valedictorian as she was in eighth grade.

There was a transition period when she first started high school. She had to get used to taking seven classes a day. This was stressful as classes were “back to back to back,” and it did not give her an opportunity to study for her next class. Additionally, she found the days long, which impacted her energy levels.

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Ky’Nya explains that even if she did not know what she was doing, she learned to adapt. “I just told myself ‘if you want to be valedictorian when you graduate from high school, then you have to get ready’...I just told myself, ‘yeah, just come on. No games. We in high school.’”

She has acted with discernment when making friends. She remembers in eighth grade when some older students came by to give advice to her class. They stated, “you might not be friends with the same people you first started being friends with.” With this advice in mind, she took her time building her circle. “I didn’t really have no bad experience because I chose my friends wisely and I chose who I wanted to be in my crowd wisely.” She urges incoming ninth graders to be intentional about who is going to be on their support team.

## Post-Secondary: Dreams and Concerns

Ky’Nya wants to attend a college that is far away enough that she gets to be around “new scenery” but also close enough that her family can come quickly during emergencies. Picking the right post-secondary institution for her is a stressful topic.

“What if I’m not accepted like I am down here? I’m worried about prejudice and stuff. Nothing too major cause I can really hold my ground but at the same time it gets overwhelming and there’s only so much a person can take,” she explains. With time, she hopes she can find the right institution that will support her and her career goals.

Ky’Nya’s primary dream is to become a travel nurse who focuses on pediatric medicine. She recognizes that the medical field can be stressful and has come up with back up plans as a result. She has considered acting, as she has created skits in the past, and becoming a nail tech since she has the supplies at home. However she is still solidifying her career goals. “All I want in life is to be successful,” she explains.

## Ky’Nya’s Hopes for the Field

- **Community members seek restorative justice practices to address community safety.** Ky’Nya’s vision for South Chicago includes peace circles to support individuals through conflict and more spaces for community members to discuss their vision for the neighborhood.
- **Young people are impacted by stereotypes about their neighborhood.** Ky’Nya questions the stereotypes people outside the neighborhood have about South Chicago and her neighbors. People’s personal experiences are not a reason to write off the neighborhood as “bad”. She wonders when her community will be recognized for its accomplishments.

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- **Community members should actively share their support to the young people in their lives.** Ky’Nya felt the most support from her neighborhood when directly hearing from community leaders about how much they cared about youth. She was surprised that adults she had never met were so supportive of her and other youth.
- **In the college exploration process, young people are looking for a place that prioritizes them and their identity.** Growing up in a predominantly Black community, attending schools taught primarily by Black teachers and where most of her peers are Black, Ky’Nya worries about facing prejudice at a post-secondary institution. As she considers colleges, she is prioritizing attending an institution that supports her as Black college student.