THE RIPPLE

OMAHA STREET SCHOOL ALUMNI STORIES - LASTING IMPACT

INAUGURAL ISSUE



One changed life changes more than one life.

Inside:

An honest conversation with an OSS graduate

Real People. Brighter Tomorrows. A Wider Ripple.

Welcome to THE RIPPLE

Stories of Life Beyond Omaha Street School.



One of the questions I am asked most often is, "What happens to your students after they graduate?"

It is a fair question. But perhaps there is an even better one: **What does success look like for an Omaha Street School graduate?**

For years, society has measured high school success primarily through academic markers—graduation, GPA, test scores, college enrollment and degrees.

Those things matter. But they don't tell the whole story.

We rely on these markers because they are easy to measure. A GPA is a number. A test score fits neatly on a report card. A diploma is something you can count, a box to check off. That kind of simplicity is useful, but it is not the same as truth.

The things that matter most in a young person's life rarely fit on a scorecard. Character. Resilience. The courage to ask for help. A sense of purpose. These can't be filled in on a test, so they're easy to overlook, even though they may say more about a graduate's future than any transcript ever could.

Linda Reimer

Executive Director

At Omaha Street School, we want to ask a bigger question:

What does it mean for an OSS graduate to be successfully launched into adulthood?

Imagine a student who graduates with a 2.3 GPA. By traditional measures, that number may not turn many heads.

But now imagine that same student earns state certification as a CNA. She gets a job and shows up every day. A year later, she is still working. She pays her bills. She has healthy relationships. She knows how to ask for help. She gives back to others. And perhaps most importantly, she has something she may not have had when she first walked through our doors: Hope for her future.

This is why we created The Ripple. Graduation isn't the end of an Omaha Street School story.

It's where the ripple begins.

P.S. Check out our new website for The Ripple Magazine at therippleoss.com.

WHERE THE RIPPLE BEGINS

Before there can be a ripple, something must touch the water. At Omaha Street School (OSS) that beginning is often a relationship - a teacher who refuses to give up, a mentor who keeps showing up, or the first experience of being truly known.

ONE STUDENT KNOWN. SEEN. BELIEVED IN.

THE FOUNDATION OSS HELPS BUILD

OSS cannot remove every obstacle a student will face. We can provide something solid beneath them when life becomes uncertain.



1. **BELONGING**
   Someone knows my name, notices when I am missing and expects me to return.
2. **BELIEF**
   Someone sees more in me than my past, my mistakes or my circumstances.
3. **EDUCATION**
   I can finish something important and discover that I am capable of learning.
4. **SKILLS**
   I can work, contribute, solve problems and begin providing for myself.
5. **HOPE & PURPOSE**
   My life matters beyond me, and my future can still be different.

Graduation does not complete the ripple. It releases it.

What begins at OSS continues through work, relationships, family and service.

Featured Story

JAXON

"I Knew I Could Finish. I Just Didn't Know How."

A conversation between Linda Reimer and Omaha Street School alumnus Jaxon

Jaxon arrived at Omaha Street School knowing one thing for certain: he was going to graduate. What he didn't know was how.



His freshman year had unfolded during the uncertainty of the pandemic. After health concerns led his mother to choose remote learning, Jaxon began falling behind. He stopped turning in assignments and was eventually dropped from the district.

For nearly six months, he stayed home.

"I was just drowning in my thoughts," he remembers.

Then one of his mother's clients told her about Omaha Street School. An interview was arranged, and Jaxon found his way through the doors.

The transition was not easy. He admits that during his first years at OSS, he was easily pulled toward drama. He liked to instigate, irritate and aggravate. He was also carrying mental and emotional struggles from home.

But something slowly began to change.

The small environment, the relationships with teachers and the expectations that once felt restrictive began to make sense, Jaxon came to understand that OSS was asking something of him because the adults around him believed he could do it.

"If you come here closed-minded, you think everyone is a jerk." he says candidly. "You think the phone rule is stupid. You think the rules about cussing are stupid. You wonder why we are reading the Bible."

Then he adds an insight that could only come from someone who has lived it:

"You might be downgrading on privileges, but you're upgrading on success and focus."

The lessons Jaxon carried away from OSS reached far beyond academics.

"I failed some classes, then redid them and tried again. It was a life lesson."

Someone Who Showed Up

Jaxon credits his mother as his greatest supporter. But another person also entered his life and helped him understand what it meant to become a man: Trent Wallace of YouTurn, an organization that works with youth in North Omaha.

Jaxon first met Trent through a previous job. When their work paths separated, they remained in contact. Later, Trent invited Jaxon to participate in YouTurn's mentoring program.

When I ask what Trent taught him, Jaxon struggles to narrow it down.

"A lot," he finally says. "Self-discipline. Development. He got me into the Bible. He helped me start documenting things every day and keeping track of my life."

His voice changes. Then he stops speaking. For the first time in our conversation, words fail him. His eyes fill with tears as he thinks about the man who consistently showed up, listened, challenged him and allowed him to call whenever he needed someone.

We sit quietly for a moment.

"He changed my life," Jaxon says.

There are some relationships too important to explain neatly. Trent became more than a mentor. He became the steady male influence Jaxon had been missing—someone whose own story helped Jaxon see his struggles, and himself, differently.

As I watch Jaxon gather himself, I tell him what I believe: someday, he will become that person for someone else. You cannot receive that kind of investment and keep it entirely to yourself.

Eventually, it becomes a ripple.

After the Diploma

Graduation did not make everything easy. Jaxon originally planned to take a gap year, find a job, save money and then begin college. But finding steady employment was more difficult than he expected. Too much unstructured time slowly pulled him backward.

"I slipped into a lot of boredom," he says. "I started drinking more frequently. My personality was starting to go back to being lazy and not wanting to do anything. I was mad constantly."

Mostly, he realizes now, he was angry with himself.

"I felt like I wasn't doing anything."

But that was not the end of his story.

Jaxon found his footing again. He says he has not had a drink since last September. Today, he works in the floor-display loading warehouse at Nebraska Furniture Mart, frequently putting in close to full-time hours.

He also takes two classes each semester at Metropolitan Community College.

At work, Jaxon has begun to recognize leadership qualities in himself. When managers are occupied elsewhere, he steps up to guide newer employees and help oversee the warehouse.

Sometimes the affirmation comes from unexpected places. Customers have approached him to say they noticed how well he was leading his team.

"That makes me feel proud of myself," he says.

Leadership, he is learning, does not depend upon having a title. It can begin when someone sees what needs to be done and quietly accepts responsibility for doing it.

A Future Worth Investing In

Jaxon hopes to transfer to the University of Nebraska at Omaha and study political science. His ambitions are not small.

"I want to be on the City Council," he says. "And then mayor."

He knows some people may laugh. He knows no one can guarantee where that path will lead. But the young man who once sat at home wondering how he would finish high school now imagines himself helping lead a city.

Why not Jaxon? Before our conversation ends, I ask what he would say to the donors who make Omaha Street School possible.

"I would thank them for providing," he says. "A lot of kids don't understand that people don't have to do that. They do it because they see something in our future."

He points to the vocational opportunities that give students practical skills they can use after graduation. When Jaxon attended OSS, those opportunities were just beginning. Today, students can explore construction, culinary arts, welding and nursing.

To Jaxon, that is an investment—not merely in a program, but in a young person's future.

Finally, I ask what he would tell a current OSS student who feels discouraged, hopeless or frustrated with the school.

"Keep focused," he says. "The more you sit there and complain and don't do your work, the more you set yourself back."

Jaxon's journey has not followed a straight line. There were setbacks, difficult lessons and seasons when the future felt uncertain. But the young man sitting across from me today is working, attending college, practicing leadership and imagining a future in public service.

He always knew he could finish. Omaha Street School helped him begin discovering how.

LISTEN IN

Three graduates. Three paths. A wider ripple.

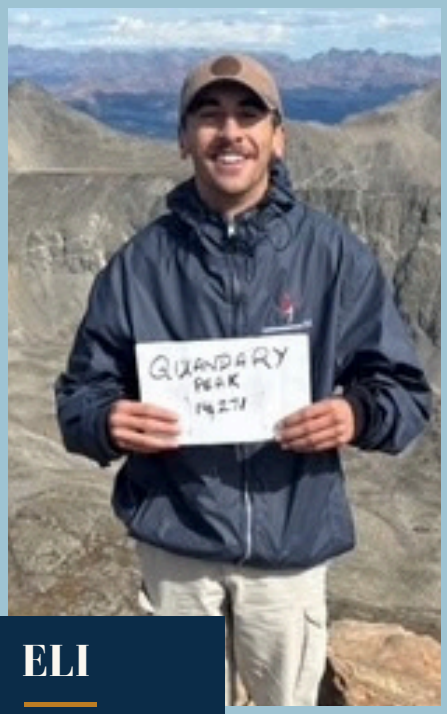
In their own words



AJOURH



RACHEL



ELI

DIFFERENT BEGINNINGS

Eli was falling behind in school. Rachel arrived with little confidence in herself. For Ajourh, a large school meant anxiety.

Different beginnings.

A familiar question: Is there more ahead for me?

SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING

At OSS, each found someone willing to believe in them. For Rachel, a breakthrough in math challenged an old belief about what she could do.

“I was actually smart and I could do this.”

— **RACHEL**

“OSS sculpted me into the person I wanted to be.”

— ELI

LEARNING TO STEP FORWARD

Ajourh found confidence in public speaking.

Rachel returned for her GAP-U internship while pregnant with her son Micah.

After graduation, Eli chose a different path, supported by work, faith and new friendships.

WHERE LIFE IS TAKING THEM

Eli is preparing to join the Army as a turbine mechanic.

Rachel has completed her CNA certification and is building an independent life with her son.

Ajourh plans to study meteorology while helping his mother financially.

SOMETHING TO PASS ALONG

“Keep pushing. It’s going to be hard, there’s going to be some bumpy roads, but you can definitely get over it.”

— AJOURH

Read the full interview here with our three alumni.

That is a ripple worth following.

THE LONG ROAD TO ADULTHOOD

At Omaha Street School, graduation matters deeply. It represents persistence, courage and a young person finishing something that once may have seemed impossible. But a diploma does not instantly create a stable adult life. It provides the foundation on which that life can be built.

RESEARCH SHOWS...

44%*

of adults ages 25-29 say they are completely financially independent

67%*

of adults ages 30-34 say theyare completely financially independent

53%*

of lower-income young adults say they were well prepared for independence

THE DATA TELL A LARGER STORY

The transition to adulthood has become longer and less predictable for young people across America. Census research shows that the pathways are now more varied than they were a generation ago. Work, independent housing, marriage and parenting no longer arrive in one common order - or on one common timetable.

Pew Research Center found that fewer than half of adults ages 25 to 29 describe themselves as completely financially independent. Among young adults from lower-income families, only 53% say their parents prepared them well for independence, compared with 73% of middle-income and 85% of upper-income young adults.

WHY OSS STILL MATTERS YEARS LATER

OSS graduates are making this same difficult transition, often while carrying additional weight: trauma, disrupted education, fragile support systems and little financial margin for error. Their road may include job changes, setbacks, unhealthy relationships or periods when progress is hard to see. Our experience following alumni suggests that, for some, finding stable footing can take up to eight years. That is an OSS observation, not a deadline or a national rule.

That is why OSS cannot measure its value only by the day a student crosses the graduation stage.

The school has helped establish the essentials: belief, belonging, trusted relationships, work habits, practical skills and hope. Those foundations do not remove every obstacle. They give a young adult something solid to return to while continuing to grow.

The question is not simply, 'How quickly did they arrive?'

It is, 'Did the foundation hold while they found their way?'

At OSS, some graduates may need years - not months - to build a stable, increasingly self-sustaining life.

***Sources:** Pew Research Center, Parents, Young Adult Children and the Transition to Adulthood (2024); U.S. Census Bureau, Changes in Milestones of Adulthood (2025). The 'up to eight years' observation reflects Omaha Street School's experience with alumni; it is not presented as a universal national benchmark.

THE ONES WHO SAW IT BEGIN

Two longtime leaders remember what shaped OSS - and what its graduates carried forward. Before career pathways, expanded programs and years of alumni stories, the foundation was already there: know students, believe in them and stay long enough to see what they could become.

JOHN PARSONS

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THROUGH 2008



HE REMEMBERS RESOLVE

John thinks first of Evalinda, who arrived reading at a first-grade level. Lori Parsons sat with her in the library, teaching her to read with Dr. Seuss books. By senior year, she had reached grade-level literacy and graduated. She later ran a daycare, worked as a school para and raised her family well.

To John, the diploma mattered. But the deeper achievement was personal pride: I wanted to do this, and I did it. The word he uses for OSS graduates is resolute.

CHARLES WILSON

DEAN OF STUDENTS AND CHAPLAIN, 2003-2022



HE REMEMBERS PERSEVERANCE

Charles remembers a young student who arrived at fourteen and pregnant. She did not finish at OSS, but the relationship continued. Years later, she earned a bachelor's degree from Arizona Christian University, entered ministry and began working toward a master's degree.

He also remembers graduates who endured accidents, loss and difficult family circumstances, yet kept moving forward. What showed up later was perseverance - and faith that remained when life became hard.

ORDINARY MOMENTS. LASTING MEANING.

John remembers staff and students eating lunch together every day, and an early museum trip where OSS students pushed elderly residents in wheelchairs, laughed with them and cared for them. Charles remembers a difficult morning in chapel that ended with seven students committing their lives to Christ - and the entire atmosphere changing.

The moments were simple. What they revealed was not.

WHAT MUST NEVER CHANGE

For John, it is the spiritual foundation: students need more than a diploma or a lunch; they need to know they are loved. For Charles, it is the promise that every student is accepted, belongs to a family and can return. Programs will grow. Career opportunities will expand. But the heart must remain.

They saw the beginning. Our graduates became the proof.

WHAT YOU HELPED BUILD

The stories in this magazine belong to our alumni. But they also carry the fingerprints of every person who taught, encouraged, prayed, volunteered, opened a door or gave generously. What you offered became part of the foundation they carried beyond graduation.

TEACHERS

YOU CREATED BELIEF

You helped students see that they could learn, finish and become more than their past suggested.

MENTORS

YOU CREATED BELONGING

Your consistency told a young person: You are known. You matter. You are expected back.

VOLUNTEERS

YOU MADE CARE TANGIBLE

A meal, a ride, a listening ear or time freely given showed that support can be dependable.

DONORS

YOU CREATED OPPORTUNITY

Your generosity made teachers, vocational pathways, meals, mentoring and second chances possible.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

YOU OPENED PATHWAYS

You connected learning to work and gave students a place to practice responsibility and skill.

PRAYER PARTNERS

YOU CARRIED HOPE

Your faithful prayers surrounded students and staff through setbacks, uncertainty and new beginnings.

None of these gifts ended when a student received a diploma.

You may never meet every person touched by what you gave. But these alumni stories are part of your story too.

The lessons, relationships and opportunities you helped provide are still moving outward.

KEEP THE RIPPLE MOVING

The next story is already beginning.

THIS WORK HAS ALWAYS BELONGED TO MANY.

Every story in this first issue began because someone chose to show up. A teacher stayed patient. A mentor listened. A volunteer served. A community partner opened a door. A donor made an opportunity possible. A prayer partner carried a need before God.

Together, you have helped create a place where young people are seen, known and reminded that their futures are still worth building.

But the ripple does not end at graduation. The road into adulthood can be long, and our students continue to need encouragement, relationships, opportunity and people willing to believe in what comes next.

We invite you to keep the ripple moving. Your part may be time, prayer, an introduction, a relationship or a financial gift. Every contribution matters because lasting change is never the work of one person alone.

Thank you for walking with our students - not only toward a diploma, but toward the lives they are still becoming.

"Thank you for believing that every young person's story is still being written."
- LINDA REIMER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CONTINUE THE RIPPLE

GIVE
Provide the resources that make personalized education and practical pathways possible.

VOLUNTEER
Offer your time, abilities or presence to students who need dependable adults.

MENTOR
Walk beside a young person as they practice confidence, responsibility and hope.

OPEN A DOOR
Introduce OSS to an employer, donor, partner or friend who could widen the ripple.

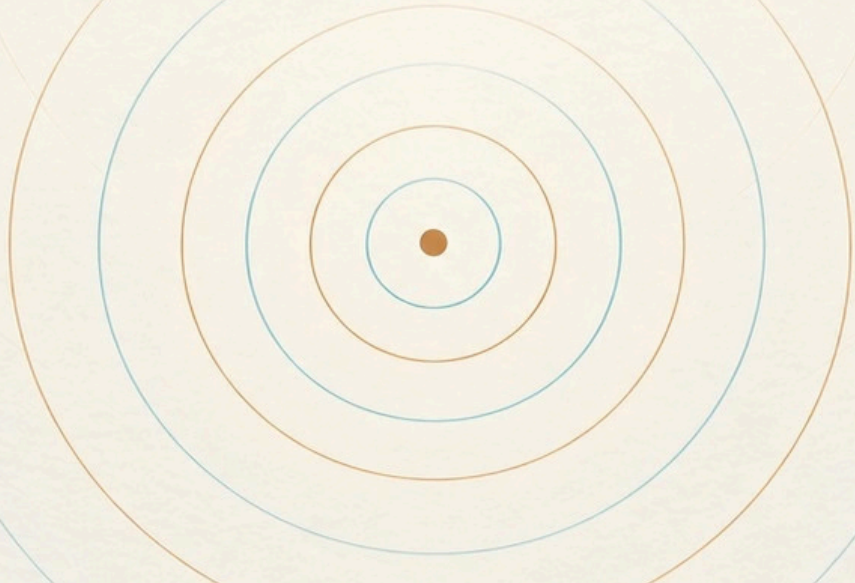
The next ripple may begin with you.

omahastreetschool.com



…at the end of the day.

We may never know
how far one changed life
will reach. We only know
the ripple has begun.



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