

## **Tips from Liberty Nicholas, Director of College and Alumni Initiatives for CIS of South Central Texas:**

### **What CIS South Central Texas has learned over the years:**

- It is ideal to have dedicated staff who specifically engage with alumni.
- Getting students into college is the easy part! Getting them to stay in college is the hard part!
- First generation students need ongoing practical college going information and explanations of college jargon.
- Spending even 1 semester in college changes a student's view of who they are and what their life potential is.
- The ability to have access to a few hundred dollars for books, rent, matriculation and orientation fees, dorm supplies, transportation and materials can be the difference of whether a student attends college or not.
- Providing summer activities to all alumni creates a safety net.
- Providing our alumni the opportunity to become leaders in our organization and community by giving back, mentoring other CIS college and workforce students and participating in summer get-togethers encourages a sense of family.
- Multiple modes of communication are necessary to ongoing alumni engagement; text, phone conversations, face to face (individual and alumni group) and social media.
- Our alumni are our greatest asset!

### **Developing the CIS Relationship that grows into the alumni relationship:**

- It begins in elementary school! Students need to know and feel that every CIS employee loves and believes in them!
- The relationship should be with the organization not just with the Site Coordinator.
- Students should have an understanding of other CIS programs in their state including the national network.
- Students should have the opportunity to develop relationships with other CIS campuses during field trips, activities and summer programming.
- Alumni engagement begins the day of graduation.
- Alumni require multiple forms of engagement to stay connected (text, phone call, email, face to face, zoom, & social media).
- Alumni should be given several opportunities a year to connect with other alumni (leadership and networking events, service learning, volunteering at CIS events, public speaking opportunities).

### **Develop a Strategy to Capture Your CIS Seniors:**

- Build on your current alumni by adding your GRADUATING SENIORS.
- Dedicate a time to invite and excite your CIS seniors to become part of your alumni association PRIOR to graduation.
- Develop a strategy for capturing their contact information.
- Create an opportunity for your Site Coordinators to bridge the high school to alumni relationship with the affiliate.
- Talk up the National Alumni Network encouraging them to be part of this group.
- Utilize your already existing alumni to engage with younger alumni.
- Engage older alumni by giving them a platform to help you develop the strategy to capture seniors.
- Show videos of national alumni talking about their engagement with CIS – Town Halls.
- Invite alumni from nearby affiliates to come and talk with your seniors and active alumni.
- Provide an opportunity for alumni from the National Alumni Network to Zoom with your graduating seniors in a large group.

#### **Begin Where Your Alumni Are:**

- Develop a Survey Monkey to discover what forms of Social Media your alumni use most.
- Create *Alumni Only* social media pages that are in line with the forms of social media they use most.
- Seek out those alumni who are *champions* for your affiliate and invite them to be more involved.

#### **Benefits of Continued Engagement with Alumni at the Local Level:**

##### **Marketing:**

- Alumni provide potential and current partners and donors a glimpse of the long-term impact Communities In Schools has on their community.
- Alumni are who your funders want to hear from.
- Having alumni represent CIS at community events demonstrates the success of our work.
- Having alumni speak to school-level staff is a very successful way of helping them to get “THE BIG PICTURE” to understand what students are facing.

##### **The Value of Older Alumna:**

- Older alumni help new alumni feel more grounded in their college and workforce journey and provide sustainability to local alumni programming.

- Our alumni are the “*True Experts*” in what it takes to be successful in college and can provide the words and feelings that we as professionals do not have.
- Their shared CIS and life experiences build a *SAFETY NET!*

#### **Benefits of Continued Engagement:**

- Continued engagement allows us to provide support during tough times after high school when we know that most of our alumni have not experienced a change in their life or family circumstances.
- We are able to celebrate with our alumni during their life successes that would not be likely without this continued involvement and relationship.
- Having alumni come to speak to all our Site Coordinators about how CIS helped them at different developmental stages provides insight for those who may only see their students in their early years and not get to see the “end results”.
- Builds our alumni’s leadership skills by allowing them to play vital roles in their communities and within CIS.
- It allows our alumni to hone their story-telling and advocacy skills allowing them to begin the process of healing from difficult lives and traumas. Alumni must have access to training and tools to help them undertake this. As always there needs to be a Trauma-Informed approach. Alumni should write their own stories and share what is comfortable to them. We need to be very careful with these sensitive topics.
- It empowers them into change when they have the opportunity to communicate with and mobilize their peers to help the next generation.

#### **Continued Alumni Contact Allows us to Show the Economic Benefit of CIS:**

##### **Economic Benefit:**

- Alumni are the proof that our interventions work to help the most at-risk kids to become successful wage earners, responsible citizens, and leaders.

##### **Becoming Solution Focused:**

- Alumni are the *SOLUTION* to sustainable alumni programming.
- As alumni become more involved with affiliate programming they can volunteer with alumni activities, mentoring, and giving back. Alumni must be invested in, so that they do not feel exploited when there are these asks.