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Office of University
Communications

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Kailey Ellis '13 Develops Community Partnerships to offer Transitional Programs

In her psychology classes, Kailey Ellis '13 enjoyed learning about people and their behaviors, information that is relevant to her career. But the most life-changing lesson she received at Gardner-Webb University came from a music professor. Ellis majored in psychology and decided to minor in music and religion because she enjoyed the core classes. “Dr. Paul Etter taught my concert choir class and he had such an impact on my life, which I don’t think he even knows,” Ellis reflected. “He taught me to walk with integrity and to always let my faith guide who I am no matter what career path I take, even if I wasn’t a music major. I learned about myself and my talents.”

Kailey Ellis

Ellis follows Etter’s role model in her job as the director of operations for Lily Pad Haven Inc. in Charlotte, N.C., a non-profit organization that provides housing and services for survivors of human trafficking. Sometimes she shares his words of affirmation with the individuals she’s helping and other times she takes the advice to heart. “On days when I feel frustrated in the difficult work I do, I use that same encouragement to keep going and not to give up,” she related.

A native of Wantagh, N.Y., Ellis initially hadn’t planned to come to Gardner-Webb, because her brother had attended there and she wanted to be her own person. Her mother insisted she visit, and Ellis immediately felt welcome on campus and decided to enroll. She was enriched by the people she met in college, and participating in concert choir gave her an opportunity to travel to cities she hadn’t been to before. “Some of my best and lifelong friends are people that I met at Gardner-Webb,” she affirmed. “I wouldn’t trade these individuals for anything in the world and they’ve shaped me into who I am today.”

Kailey Ellis at commencement

Confident and outgoing, Ellis coordinates all of the program elements for the services Lily Pad Haven Inc. offers its residents. “I find gaps in our services and go out into the community and develop partnerships to fill those gaps,” she explained. “I also develop relationships with the individuals who stay with us and make sure their stay here is the best it can be.”

She builds rapport by using problem-solving skills she learned in her classes at Gardner-Webb. “I was challenged in my classes to think outside of my normal perspective. I became a better problem solver and was able to understand where people were coming from,” she assessed. “It also allowed me to

Kailey Ellis and colleagues

Kailey Ellis poses with members of various community organizations who are dedicated to fighting social injustices in the community.

Ellis took the position at Lily Pad Haven Inc. because of her passion to work with at-risk, exploited women. As she has learned more about human trafficking, she is dedicated to advocating for survivors. “In the next five years, I see myself at Lily Pad Haven Inc. in a position where I’m overseeing even more safe house locations and services,” she expounded. “In addition, I’m walking alongside position and policy makers to really ensure that effective change comes to the human trafficking community.”