

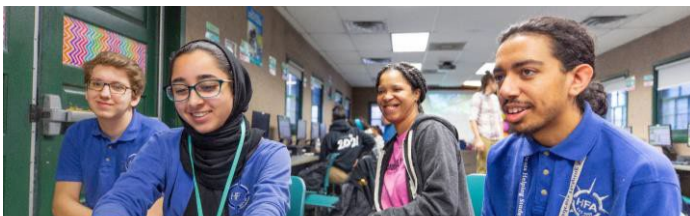


Bridging the opportunity gap

Brandy Foster didn't let lack of opportunities limit her dreams. One internship and hours of self-education later, Foster is a developer at Detroit Labs and volunteers in a TEALS class, where she encourages and inspires students to consider a career in technology.

Brandy Foster's love for her hometown, Detroit, runs deep. "It's gritty. It's deep in your veins," she says. And although she appreciates the connectedness of her community, she can't help but notice the opportunity gap, especially among students who take on adult-like responsibilities to care for their families.

"Our children in the D are being deprived of opportunity," she says. "They're capable, brilliant, creative, driven. Just imagine how creative you have to be just to exist in an environment that has written you off." She knows firsthand that creativity can lead you down nontraditional career paths—and help you succeed in the technology industry.



"The more lives I touch, the more ripples I make in the pond. I'm passionate about investing in particularly underserved and underrepresented kids in the tech industry, to show them they have opportunities."

Foster started college to earn a degree in education but dropped out: She says that caring for her baby, whom she had at 19, dealing with a diagnosis of lupus and racking up student loans turned out to be too much for her to continue. She began working on billing and medical coding at a physical therapist's office, and the software they used was buggy. She got curious, and a few searches on the internet made her realize that coding—something she'd only seen on TV represented by white male hackers—could solve the headaches of the busted software she used daily.

She didn't stop there. Foster landed an internship and worked daily to hone her technology skills. She is now an Android developer at Detroit Labs, and she volunteers in a TEALS class at Henry Ford Academy in Detroit. She sees the different facets of her identity—black, female, Detroit-born, single mom—all as ways to encourage students who might not have considered a career in technology otherwise.

"It's taken me years to get to the point of walking into anyplace with my whole self, my whole identity. Showing up as a professional in the CS classroom—that I have this career, I get paid for this—helps eliminate biases and discrimination we're all still mired in," Foster says.

Learn more about TEALS (Technology, Education, and Learning Support) Program and how you can inspire students to pursue a career in technology—virtually or in person at Microsoft.com/TEALS