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More Than Bootstraps Celebrates First-Generation Graduations and College Signing Day

PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY – May 23, 2022. On Saturday, May 21, 2022, [More Than Bootstraps](https://www.morethanbootstraps.org) (MTB), the college access and success program for first-generation students, celebrated the high school graduation of the first cohort of four high school Fellows and the college graduation of one of the college student Leaders.

The MTB Graduation Event and College Signing Day was hosted by **Passaic County Community College** and **President Steve Rose** and sponsored by **PNC Bank**. The event featured words of wisdom delivered by **Ingrid Renderos**, a Thought Leader on the First-Generation Experience.



Jennifer Angel, Marisol Coliente, Ashley Delgado, and Catherine Librado joined More Than Bootstraps as juniors in the Passaic Public Schools when the program launched in 2020. Over the last two years, they were mentored by their older Passaic peers – Leaders from Passaic currently enrolled college. With the help of these Passaic “near-peer” mentors and the More Than Bootstraps’ program, these four Fellows, now graduating seniors, gained confidence, communication, and leadership skills; researched; navigated the world of college applications, financial aid, and scholarships; and communicated their goals and ambitions with their families.

Jennifer has committed to Montclair State University, where she will study psychology. Marisol will begin her higher education career at Passaic County Community College, pursuing her passion for studio art. Ashley has matriculated at William Paterson University, where she will study criminology and criminal justice. All the students have received merit- and need-based aid to cover their full tuition costs. Catherine is still finalizing her college decision.

The celebration also featured **Rogreka Clayton**, who is celebrating her graduation from William Paterson University as an athletic training major. Reka also joined More Than Bootstraps when it first launched; she was one of the first-generation college students from Passaic who served as a Leader in the program, giving back to her community while solidifying her own success in higher education.

We are grateful to PNC for sponsoring the More Than Bootstraps 2022 graduation ceremony and helping to celebrate the success of our 2022 graduates, congratulate their families, welcome the newest students to More Than Bootstraps, and support our continuing students. “PNC’s generosity made our celebratory College Signing Day and Graduation Event truly special,” said **Audrey Fisch**, president of More Than Bootstraps.

“Higher education is both attainable and transformational for first-generation college students,” commented Fisch. “It is unreasonable, however, to ask first-generations students to face the challenges of higher education alone – to try to lift themselves by their bootstraps. Together, our high school and college graduates demonstrate the power of More Than Bootstraps and their ability to lift each other as they rise.”

Donations to More Than Bootstraps fund student stipends, educational expenses, and emergency funds for students. Interested donors should visit the MTB website: www.morethanbootstraps.org/donate.

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banking, including corporate banking, real estate finance and asset-based lending; wealth management; asset management; and global fund services.

About More Than Bootstraps

MTB is a non-profit created by educators seeking to level the playing field and remove some of the substantial barriers that first-generation college students encounter in accessing and succeeding in higher education.

The MTB strategy for creating a scalable community of success is based on three components: near-peer mentorship, stipend support for program participants, and parent engagement. More Than Bootstraps college students return to their community to guide their younger peers through the college search, application, and assimilation process. These leaders, working as a mentoring cohort, in turn strengthen their own college-going identities and improve their own chances of success in higher education.

More Than Bootstraps launched in August 2020 with our initial partner, the Passaic Public Schools. Students are selected based on their desire to attend college and their commitment to the program rather than grade point average or test scores. All students in the MTB program receive stipends, laptop computers, and access to emergency resources to help them with the many non-tuition expenses of higher education.