

**Damian Ramsey**  
**Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound**  
**1999-2003**



My name is Damian Ramsey, and I am a graduate of the Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound Program, based at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Like most Upward Bound participants, I was a first-generation, college-bound student when I joined the Bruce Wells program. I was raised by a single mom who encouraged my younger siblings and me to do well in school, despite having dropped out after giving birth to me at fifteen. The task of raising a baby and completing her studies was too much to bear at so young an age. However, my mother always stressed the importance of getting homework done and studying for exams, and she modeled hard work, determination, and resilience in her everyday actions. Her dropping out did not lessen the value she placed on education, or limit the hope that she had in us finishing school; which in my family, meant completing high school. College was never a conversation across the dinner table. Chores, work, and responsibility, “ruled the airwaves” during supper time. Growing up, I thought nothing of it. It was as if on some subconscious level, we believed that college was beyond our scope. My prescribed life-course trajectory involved doing well in school, earning my high school diploma, and finding a job that would pay me well enough to keep a roof over my head and food in my belly.

It wasn’t until I matriculated to University Park Campus School (UPCS), and was introduced to the Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound Program, that going to college entered my consciousness. UPCS taught me that “demographics don’t define destiny;” that just because I was a person of color, raised in a low-income, single parent family, and living in a neighborhood that had come to be known for its gangs, drugs, and prostitution, did not mean that I was incapable of going to college and making something of myself. UPCS convinced me that I’d complete high school and go to college. No question!

The Bruce Wells Scholars Program made this idea more palpable, by giving me exposure to a college campus. Every Saturday during the academic year, I walked to the Clark campus to study for the SAT exam, work on drafts of my college essay, or jump on a bus, bound for one of the myriad colleges and universities in the Northeast. Every summer, I joined other program participants for 5 weeks of on-campus living, where I had the unique opportunity of residing in a college dorm, eating in a college dining hall, studying in a college library, working out in a college athletic facility, and taking academically rigorous courses in the same classrooms where college students worked toward bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and PhDs. The experience of navigating a college campus, four years before the typical college freshman, helped me develop confidence and self-assurance within the world of academia, and I became even more convicted in the idea that I’d be a college graduate one day.

That day came in the spring of 2007, when I graduated from Brown University. Shortly thereafter, I acquired a Masters in Social Work (MSW) from the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy & Practice. Although I acquired a degree in social work, I decided upon graduation from Penn, that teaching was my true calling. Today, I’m in my 4th year at KIPP Academy Lynn Charter School, where I’ve served as a 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and now 8<sup>th</sup> grade Learning Specialist, Special Education chair, Varsity Boys’ Basketball Coach, and Director of Curriculum for the KIPP Lynn Rites of Passage Program. Outside of KIPP, I have served as a mentor and chaperone with the Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound Program, and a guest lecturer with the Salem State University Upward Bound Program. My “many hats” keep me busy, but they provide me with multiple angles to reach and teach young people. The work is hard, and sometimes thankless, but I can’t imagine anything more essential and more necessary than preparing our future generation, to venture to and through college. The Bruce Wells Scholars Program made college a tangible reality for me. Today, I “pay it forward” by making college a tangible reality for others. There is no greater purpose, or more noble cause.

In the Spirit Education and Inspiration,  
Damian L. Ramsey, MSW