

Brigid Gallagher '12

Please provide your biographical information.

I grew up in Haverford and attended Archbishop Carroll High School. I transferred to WCU after one year at Shippensburg University when I realized how much I missed home. I chose WCU because of the town, proximity to home, and the overwhelming welcome I received from everyone that I had contact with throughout the application process. I received my Bachelors of Fine Arts in Graphic Design with a minor in Psychology.

What made you go into Fine Arts in Graphic Design and Psychology?

I chose my direction in graphic design to further my art and picked up my Psychology minor in junior year with the intention of receiving my master's degree in Art Therapy and Counseling which I am currently completing at Drexel University.

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

Executive Director of the Philadelphia Veterans House, which is a non-profit housing facility for homeless veterans and their families, located in West Philadelphia.

What is a typical day like at work?

A typical day involves everything from casework with individuals for healthcare, education, employment support, receiving military benefits and counseling in regards to the various needs that each of them face during their service and time being homeless.

You recently won the Rose of Tralee Competition. Can you share more about the competition?

The Rose of Tralee is an international Irish festival celebrating the culture and the accomplishments of young Irish women in the global sphere. Ireland's greatest export is people and this festival offers an opportunity to connect the Irish diaspora by bringing representatives from Irish communities all over the globe to Ireland to celebrate and broaden the foundation of our Irish roots.

How has winning the title of the 2016 Philadelphia Rose of Tralee impacted your life?

Being selected as the 2016 Philadelphia Rose of Tralee has been nothing short of life changing. I am honored to have been given the opportunity to represent our great city and all of the Irish immigrants that reside there. My trip to Ireland for the International Festival was my first time to Ireland and nothing short of amazing from the moment I stepped off the plane. I was surrounded by 64 incredible young women from all over the world, all of whom are all hugely accomplished in their respective fields. It was humbling to not only share this unbelievable experience with them but it truly shrunk the world with the friendships that were created. The relationships with the other International Roses are something I will have for a lifetime and the impact of the festival will never be forgotten. I could have never been prepared for the experience that I had but I will be forever grateful for the chance to be a part of something so positive and influential in the lives of all involved. Another bonus was that I was following in my older sister, Colleen's footsteps since she had been selected as the Philadelphia Rose in 2007. This was an experience that we both had individually and I was lucky enough to have her by my side in Ireland as well.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I do wedding planning on a part time basis and find a lot of enjoyment in running, creating art and cooking desserts.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

In five years, I hope to be married with children and continuing my work in the non-profit realm. I have a passion for our military veterans and would love to continue working in pursuit of providing them the care and support that they need.

What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

Don't ever give up. You will learn your most valuable lessons from your mistakes and difficulties so long as you stick to your goals. The path may go astray from your original plan but nothing will keep you from reaching the destination except yourself. You may feel that you cannot make enough of a difference to influence change but I assure you, everyone can make a difference in another person's life.

How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

WCU has been the foundation for everything I have accomplished in the last 7 years. I worked on campus at Sykes and ran for the WCU track team, both of which have given me friendships that I still have today. I still live in West Chester and have remained involved with the alumni association and campus events because it truly feels like home and the family that I have made there continues to grow each year.

What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments (both personally and professionally)?

I would consider my greatest accomplishment professionally to being the Executive Director of a non-profit and both the lives I have impacted through my work and the impact that the veterans have had on my life. Personally, I would consider my Philadelphia Rose title to be my greatest accomplishment. Having been represented in an international arena for such an empowering festival is truly once in a lifetime and something I believe will carry with me throughout my life.

What's your favorite memory from when you were a student at WCU?

My favorite memory as a student at WCU was a little expansive in that it was probably my time working in Sykes. I could not have asked for a better staff to work with and everything from Sykes After Dark, to ACUI conferences and team building summer orientations, it made being away at college feel just like home.