

Alumni Spotlight: Kelli Panara receives Fulbright Scholarship

St. Mary's School Alumna Kelli Panara was recently named a U.S. Fulbright Scholar!

She is currently completing a master's degree at SUNY Geneseo in reading and literacy and plans to participate in the Fulbright Program's 2017-18 English Teaching Assistant (ETA) program in the Netherlands.

In catching up with Kelli, she shares some of her experiences and achievements since St. Mary's School.

What has been your educational path since St. Mary's School?

Since my time at St. Mary's School, I ventured to Canandaigua Academy. During my senior year of high school, I participated in the 3-1-1 program through Finger Lakes Community College. I transferred to SUNY Geneseo in the spring of freshman year and immediately began pursuing a bachelor's degree in the Science of Education. During my time at Geneseo, I had two student teaching placements, in Avon, N.Y. and Bloomfield, N.Y. Upon graduating from Geneseo, I received certification in Childhood and Special Education (1-6).

I remained at Geneseo to pursue my Master's Degree in Reading and Literacy. Currently, I am a Graduate Assistant for the college and considered the lead teacher for the L.I.V.E.S. Program. This is a transition program for students ages 21 and older with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

What are your professional goals and what has led you to these pursuits?

My goal is to be a teacher that spreads the philosophy that a student who learns differently is not a student who cannot learn. As a result of my student teaching placements and my current position my goals for the future have changed. I now do not have an ideal classroom or grade level or place. The only goal I am sure of is that I want to teach and I want to keep learning.

What impact has St. Mary's School had on your life?

At St. Mary's School, everyone knew my name. This "everyone" included every teacher, principal, maintenance staff, secretary, coach, pastor and peer. These individuals knew not only me, but also my many siblings, parents and grandparents. They knew who I was both inside and outside of the classroom and held me accountable for any task that I was given.

St. Mary's School always was and always will remain a place I feel at home with a family that loves and cares about me. It will always be the place that gave me my two lifelong friends. The impact that St. Mary's School had on me is something that I aspire to continue with all of the future students that I interact with. I want every student I meet in the future to feel the way that St. Mary's School made me feel: safe, loved and accountable.

Do you have a favorite St. Mary's School memory?

Mrs. Mercandetti was my teacher for three years. I had her in preschool for two years and then for kindergarten. When I graduated from kindergarten, I gave her a butterfly pin to show her how grateful I was to her. When I graduated St. Mary's School in eighth grade, she wore the pin to my graduation.

St. Mary's School would love to hear about all the wonderful things our alumni are doing. If you know an alumnus who should be profiled, please email St. Mary's School at smcdcs@dor.org.

