

# Ingram Scholar Alumni Spotlight



**CHRISTEN SOTTOLANO**, Class of 2009

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**DEGREES**

BA, Sociology (Minor in Theatre), Vanderbilt University

**CURRENT LOCATION**

San Francisco, CA

**CURRENT EMPLOYER**

Stanford University Graduate School of Education

**CURRENT OCCUPATION**

Senior Associate Director of Development

**DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER PATH**

I was fortunate to discover a career in fundraising at the age of 22. My exploration of the role of philanthropy in connection to social impact and change was influenced in large part because of the Ingram family's involvement with the program as well as the experiences I had with nonprofits (local and global) during the summer projects I pursued during my time as a

scholar. Working to raise money for Opportunity Vanderbilt scholarships early on in my career, and now working on behalf of the Graduate School of Education at Stanford have aligned and deepened my interests in advancing access and equity in education through the development work that I do. Especially now at the GSE, it is a privilege to work with donors committed to improving lives through learning – whether that be through fellowships for teacher candidates, research funding to better understand interventions for kids with learning differences, or funding to support implementation research to help advance policy around ethnic studies courses – I am honored to learn about what drives the donors I work with to help us pursue more equitable, accessible and effective learning for all. All of this is not to say there aren't times when I also question my career. That absolutely happens! And I think is an important part of keeping myself accountable to the integrity I hope to maintain in my work. Especially in the past few months, it has been important to unpack, learn about and question the ways in which donor-centric fundraising (with a largely white donor base) can contribute to a lack of diversity, voices and perspective in critical conversations about education policy and practice. I continue to grapple with the ways in which fundraising (and my own practices in fundraising) have been complicit in upholding institutionalized racism. As grateful and gratified as I am to have found a career that resonates so deeply, it is not perfect. And recognizing and addressing those imperfections strikes me as part of my professional evolution and growth.

### **HOW DID THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM PREPARE YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE DOING TODAY?**

The program helped me learn and reflect deeply on what community-centric social impact and change really means and looks like in action. In that spirit, the program also taught me how to be a critical friend in support of advancing missions I believe in.

### **IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM IN THREE WORDS WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

Committed, Privileged, Connected

### **WHAT DOES THE INGRAM SCHOLAR COMMUNITY MEAN TO YOU?**

The Ingram Scholar Community means deep friendships, inspiring thought leaders, and a community of support that continues to help me grow personally and professionally. Every day.

### **BEST INGRAM SCHOLAR MEMORY**

This is hard because there are many! Honestly one of my very favorites will always be the tradition of singing holiday carols with Mrs. Ingram at her home, cozy by the fire, every year. Those moments truly made the Ingram Scholarship Community feel like a family.

### **WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR CURRENT SCHOLARS WHO WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR INGRAM SCHOLAR EXPERIENCE?**

Listen and learn from each other and the communities you're partnering with and at the same time, listen and learn about the ways your instincts, perspective and passions are transforming. Even when unexpected or sometimes frustrating, every shift will offer greater clarity about the path you're supposed to be on. Don't worry too much about changing course!