

Speaker Bios

Azim Khamisa

Azim Noordin Khamisa – an author, activist and inspirational speaker – was born in Kenya, Africa and had early training in mathematics, economics and international finance. A successful international investment banker with over 35 years experience, he has conducted business in Africa, Middle East, Europe and Asia. A man always on the go, taking action for societal transformation, he is presently the Chairman, CEO and Founder of the Tariq Khamisa Foundation (TKF) and Founder and National Director of the Constant And Never Ending Improvement (CANEI) program.

Committing his life to halting the continuing cycle of violence among the youth, Azim became a social activist after his 20-year-old son Tariq was senselessly murdered while delivering pizzas in January 1995 by Tony Hicks, a 14-year-old gang member. Out of unspeakable grief and despair, Khamisa was inspired to transform his loss through the miraculous power of forgiveness. Believing that there were “victims at both ends of the gun,” Azim forgave Tony and founded the Tariq Khamisa Foundation to break the cycle of youth violence by saving lives, teaching peace and planting seeds of hope in their future. A month after establishing the foundation, Azim invited Ples Felix, Tony’s grandfather and guardian, to join him. Together, since November 1995, the two have brought their story and message through TKF’s Violence Impact Forums. The duo has reached a half a million elementary and middle school children live and over 20 million via video programs, guiding the youth to choose a peacemaker’s life of non-violence and forgiveness.

Because of his powerful story and message, Azim is a highly regarded and respected leader and a sought after speaker nationally and internationally. Having given 400 keynote address speeches all over the world – including an audience of 300,000 at the “Stand for Children” rally in Washington D.C. in 1996 – Azim has received more than 60 regional, national and international awards.

Ples Felix

Ples Felix was a retired Green Beret, working in community development and raising his grandson Tony, trying hard to keep him safe and away from bad influences. But on one horrible night, Tony, in the company of older gang members, shot and killed a pizza delivery driver. It was a moment that changed many lives.

The delivery driver was Tariq Khamisa, a 20-year-old student in San Diego. His grieving father, Azim Khamisa, seeking to find meaning in unfathomable loss, started the Tariq Khamisa Foundation to address youth violence through education, mentorship and community service. And he invited Felix to join him -- because "there was a victim on both ends of that gun." Since 1995, Felix has co-led the Tariq Khamisa Foundation, developing mentorship programs that keep at-risk kids in school and on the right track.

Robert Winfield, M.D.

Robert Winfield is the Division Chief of Acute Care Surgery, Trauma, & Surgical Critical Care and Director of Trauma Research at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois, where he was an accomplished long-distance runner, and the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, where he earned Alpha Omega Alpha honors as a junior medical student. He completed his general surgery training as well as a two-year NIH-sponsored research fellowship at the University of Florida, during which time he won several research awards. He trained in trauma and surgical critical care at the University of California in San Diego, and subsequently received faculty research awards from the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma and the American College of Surgeons.

In addition to his ongoing research efforts, Dr. Winfield has been awarded grants to convene multidisciplinary teams focused on addressing the relationships between structural inequality and interpersonal violence. His longstanding mission is to deliver optimal and compassionate care to injured patients, and to advance the field of trauma surgery to determine what is optimal and how best to deliver it.

Outside of the hospital, Dr. Winfield is fortunate to have a remarkable wife and four wonderful children, all of whom bring him great joy and fill him with pride.

Rev. David McDaniel

David started serving as the Senior Pastor of Holmeswood in 2016. Before that time, he was the Pastor of Younger Adults at Holmeswood and also a chaplain at Children's Mercy Hospital. He is married to Erin, who is a pediatrician with the group Pediatric Associates located both on the Plaza and in Lee's Summit. David is a native of Alabama, where he earned A.B.A. in psychology from the University of Alabama and a M.Div. from Truett Seminary at Baylor University. He has also completed a Chaplain Residency with four units of CPE at Baptist Health in Little Rock. He enjoys cheering on the Crimson Tide, attending various sporting events (he says if you invite him to a game, he will go and wear your team's colors...as long as it's not Auburn or Tennessee orange), and firing up the grill for a good cookout. David loves being in a church that asks more questions of faith than they give answers, embraces diversity of all types, and takes seriously the intersection of faith and everyday life.

Sgt. Johnita Harris

Sergeant Johnita Harris is the Sergeant of the Gang Intelligence Squad with the Kansas City Missouri Police Department. Sergeant Harris began her career in Law Enforcement with the Kansas City Missouri Police Department in 2005. After graduating the Kansas City Regional Police Academy, she started in Patrol at South Patrol Division. Later she transitioned to the Crime Free Unit until her promotion to the rank of Sergeant in 2014. After attaining the rank of Sergeant, she transferred to Metro Patrol Division. There she supervised three squads until transferred to the Investigations Bureau. There she managed

the Byrne Grant Unit, Violent Crimes Community Outreach and currently acts as the Gang Intelligence Supervisor.

Sergeant Harris has actively served on various committees. In 2016 Sergeant Harris was appointed the Point of Contact for the Violence Reduction Network while the city was a Diagnostic Site with the Department of Justice. She currently serves as the Chair of the Intelligence Committee and resides on the Implementation and Messaging Committees. Sergeant Harris is a Co-Chair on Violence Free KC, A Milestone Center Board member, and the acting liaison to AIM4PEACE. She was also a participant in the promotion of the Empowered Women's Pageant.

Sergeant Harris received her Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice from Grantham University. She has received specialized training and numerous awards for her hard work and dedication.

Becky Wiseman

Becky Wiseman, LCSW, LICSW is a Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Worker. She received her Master's in Social Work from the University of Kansas in 2001. Becky has 17 years of clinical experience, including working in the public school system as a school social worker for eight years. In her work at Children's Mercy, Becky is dedicated to the Sports Medicine Center providing support to student athletes and families with mental health concerns affecting athletes.

Nancy Oglesby

Nancy is a cat with many lives! Her motto? Never get bored! She's been a Graphic Designer at a Chicagoland studio, Special Projects Manager at G.D. Searle Pharmaceuticals, Ground Operations Manager at FedEx Express and a Marketing Consultant.

In 2009, she found herself without health insurance for the first time in 58 years! Instead of being completely stressed, Nancy decided to get healthy. That was when she found her passion: healthy food, nutrition and natural wellness, plus the desire to guide and support others on their journey to healthy living.

January 2017 saw the publication of her first book in a series on creating a healthy lifestyle, No Kale Required: Healthy Eating Ideas for the Rest of Us. It is available on Amazon and reached #2 in its category Bestseller List.

As a 2011 graduate of the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, her passion is to make healthy lifestyle changes accessible to everyone. Education is the key. She is a popular speaker, coach, does lunch & learns for businesses and organizations, is a Juice Plus+ Franchise owner, writes feature articles, and can often be found creating art in her studio ... all of which keep boredom at bay!

Jesse Beskow, my beloved grandson, was shot in the head and killed on July 25th, 2006. He was 20 years old and only in town to get a copy of his birth certificate and social security card so he could start his new job in the Wisconsin Dells. The circumstances and ensuing journey to discovering exactly what happened was an unbelievable nightmare.

Sari Kaufman

Sari Kaufman is a rising senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. She was one of the lead organizers of the Parkland March For Our Lives. After planning the march with her friend, Casey Sherman, they started a non-partisan nonprofit called Empower the People. They educate and encourage high school students to use their voices to make positive changes in their local and federal governments. Also, after experiencing gun violence first-hand, she understands that some communities have to face what she faced every day. That is why she is on the Students Demand Action National Advisory Board to continue fighting for common sense gun reform. Further, she has published multiple editorials advocating for specific gun reform legislation and to share the effects of gun violence.

She has given about 15 talks all over the country, including speaking at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Duke Sanford School of Public Policy, Everytown for Gun Safety Annual Event, and the Arthur PAGE Society conference.

Lucian Deanda

Luciana is a sophomore at Olathe East, and attending the Civic Leadership Academy. She has been part of Students Demand Action for about a year and a half. She is now a Group Leader of the Kansas City Students Demand Action chapter along with Caroline Bennet. She aspires to be a journalist.

Jennifer Levinson

Jennifer Savner Levinson, MS. Ed is a Mental Health / Suicide Awareness Education Prevention Advocate, Autism Specialist, and Challenging Behavior Coach. This includes 25 years of experience as a public educator in the Chicago Public Schools, Shawnee Mission School District, and Kansas City Kansas Public Schools.

Jennifer currently serves as the community outreach facilitator for SPEAK UP – Suicide Prevention Education Awareness for Kids United as Partners. Youth suicide has become a public health epidemic. SPEAK UP is working to provide education and awareness, bridging gaps between communities, schools and parents. Reaching more than 30,000 students increasing mental wellness literacy, decreasing the stigma attached to seeking help, and suicide awareness and prevention in the Greater Kansas City metro high

schools and communities as well as those in smaller cities and rural areas in both Kansas and Missouri.

Jennifer is a strong believer in volunteerism, and she is highly engaged in leadership roles in a number of mental health and community service organizations. She serves a board member of SASS MOKAN – Suicide Awareness Survivors Support Missouri Kansas, a Johnson County Suicide Prevention Coalition member, Kansas City Suicide Association of Prevention Programs (KC SAPP), Blue Valley Well (BV Well) member, SevenDays, Make a Ripple, Change the World volunteer, and as a previous board member for Cornerstones of Care. She is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor.

Jennifer was the recipient of the 2017 Tom Karlin Foundation Talk Listen ACT Award. She was recognized as a community member making a difference in school communities.

Most recently Jennifer was named as one of the KC Independent's 2019 Class of Rising Stars. Rising Stars are passionate about philanthropic efforts, volunteerism, and community awareness. Their leadership style is effective, creative, and impactful. Each Rising Star serves as an example to others in Kansas City and beyond.

In June 2019, Jennifer was named as one of "50 Kansans You Should Know in 2019" In Ingram's - Kansas City's Business Magazine. These 50 high achievers help define, civic, school and community life in Kansas. And this year's 50 Kansans You Should Know vary not a whit from their 400 predecessors when you assess their contributions to that quality of life.

In September 2019, Jennifer was named as a 2019 Founder's Award Finalists. The community was invited to submit nominations over the past three months. The Founder's Award Committee was looking for individuals who embody "dedication and devotion to serving individuals and families facing mental illness."

Jennifer is a suicide attempt survivor. She is persistent in working hard every day to maintain a healthy quality of life.

Anthony Butler

Anthony Butler has over 20 years of experience as an excellent educator and violence prevention specialist. He is a published author, engaging presenter, critical thinker, creative consultant, and collaborative problem solver. In 2013, Anthony founded the V."I" P. (Violence "I" Prevent) Movement, LLC. V."I" P. is a caring company that "confronts the underlying reasons for senseless violence in unique and innovative ways!" They have served dozens of schools, churches, colleges, parent groups, and caring organizations offering a wide array of life changing violence prevention, intervention, education, and consulting services. They lead authentic presentations, relevant workshops, creative events, powerful keynote speeches, poetry events, and more!