

# Gateway to Opportunity

*Alumna Extriara Gates guides young adults on a route to success*

By Adelia Henderson

**T**hey say life is a journey. While journeys can be fun, sometimes getting started is the hardest part. For some young people, Extriara Gates (MSW '11) provides the needed push that propels them forward on their lifelong path.

Gates has spent the past four years at Year Up Atlanta, a nonprofit which offers a one-year college and career readiness training program for underserved young adults.

As student services manager, Gates makes sure that the students have access to resources they may need, such as mental health services, a homeless shelter or food pantry.

She enjoys getting a front-row seat to watch the Year Up students' transform over the course of their program.

"I love to see people succeed," Gates said. "Before (this job), it was very much you see people, you've helped them, and they go and you may not see them again, whereas these people I'm here with for a year."

After earning her bachelor's in social work at Georgia State University, Gates completed her MSW at the UGA Gwinnett campus. Before Year Up Atlanta, she worked at Habitat for Humanity and the Atlanta Community Food Bank.



Melissa Bugg

Gates also does advocacy work for children of color and autism. When she's not busy impacting change at Year Up Atlanta, she is in the Georgia Leadership & Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (GaLEND) program at Georgia State University. She is also working on opening a respite and resource center for families and children with autism.

In recognition of her exceptional work, Gates was inducted into the 2019 Class of 40 under 40 by the University of Georgia Alumni Association. The program celebrates the achievements of successful UGA graduates under the age of 40.

A graduate of the Gwinnett campus program, Gates credits her experience at UGA with opening her eyes to the full scope of the social work field beyond traditional roles and occupations.

"I think most young people who come to social work have an idea of what it looks like. But having an opportunity to be around people who were not just in academia but had traveled abroad, who were doing a myriad of things, really inspired me to explore things outside of traditional social work roles," she said. "The professors really inspired me to place myself beyond what I thought I could do and be."

"I'm truly appreciative of that experience."