



Issaquah High Staff Profile

Karen Stevens

Issaquah High College and Career Specialist

Did you grow up around Issaquah or the surrounding area? If not, where did you grow up and did that help shape the person you are today?

I was born in Berkeley, California and lived in 6 states (CA, CO, MT, GA, NC, WA) and attended 13 different schools all by 8th grade. My father was a psychiatrist and my mother a social worker. I believe these experiences helped me learn to embrace change.

What's your educational background? Where did you go to school? How do you use your educational experience in your day to day life?

I received a B.A. degree in Biology from Pacific Lutheran University and Graduate Certificate in Adaptive Leadership from Saybrook University/Leadership Eastside. I try to use what I learned about Adaptive Leadership everyday by having courageous conversations on topics that I would otherwise avoid and remembering that it is important to get other people's perspectives.

What was your job/career before coming to work at Issaquah?

Most of my career has been in higher education finance. I worked at the University of Puget Sound as the Assistant Director of Financial Aid. I was the Vice President of Account Support and Technical Sales for Sallie Mae's West Region Sales Team; my team supported the financial aid offices of all the colleges/universities west of the Mississippi. My job prior to IHS, was at College Success Foundation where I was recruited by my previous supervisor to assist with launching the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship program, after which I became the Process Improvement Manager, working across departments to improve processes by tracking individual, department, and the organization's outcomes.





If you had a prior job/career, how did that job/career make you become a better staffer at Issaquah High?

I believe my experience has made me a better at my job because even though it has been years since I was responsible for needs analysis from the FAFSA, I still remember most of the basics for filling out the form and the financial aid available, and how it is awarded. My experience in project management and leading distributed teams has made working from home during the pandemic easier in many ways. I have systems set up to stay on target and I am reaching out to my former Financial Aid Colleagues for resources I can tap into. I am constantly looking for ways to improve processes. For example, IHS College & Career Center maintains job listings, volunteer listings, scholarships, etc. that is shared with Skyline and Liberty. This reduces duplication of effort, so College & Career Specialists all can have more time helping students.

Tell us about your position at Issaquah High. Any highlights?

One of my favorite experiences and projects is Senior Exit Interviews. The goal is to get over 600 seniors interviewed by 20-30 volunteers within 2 days. Things never go as planned and we must adapt and improvise. Ironically, when the process gets backed up I am afforded valuable free time with the students, because it provides the opportunity to learn more about their goals and plans while they are waiting for their turn to be interviewed.

How many years have you worked at Issaquah High?

It will be 5 years as of January 2021.

Are you a club mentor or sport coach and if so, what are the best parts of being a mentor/coach for that club/sport?

Unfortunately, no. The last few years, my free time has been devoted to raising my daughter, who graduating this year from Liberty and taking care of my mother who has Alzheimer's. I am hoping to have more time next year, now that my daughter will be attending the University of Washington – Seattle.

Is (was) volunteering part of your life? If so, tell us about your volunteering experiences and what you love about them?

I was on the Issaquah Schools Foundation's Board for five years and co-chaired the "All in for Kids" campaign for one year. I was a Voice Mentor for one year prior to coming to IHS. I loved being a Voice Mentor and having a positive impact on a student's life by helping remove roadblocks.

What do you like to do outside of school?

I am passionate about elder care and working with our local representatives and my former Leadership Eastside classmates advocating for positive change. I love photography and spending time at our cabin in Eastern WA.

Is there anything else special about you that you would like to share?

In 2006, I was stricken with what doctors believe was viral meningitis that resulted in an injury to my brain. I experienced a sudden transition from a high bandwidth, successful businesswoman to someone with a disability that directly affected brain function and I had to relearn skills that I previously excelled at prior to this event. As I struggled to relearn tools such as MS Excel, MS Project, MS SharePoint, I did not realize at the time that those struggles were helping me create new pathways for learning. What took me 5 hours to accomplish in the early days of my recovery, now takes 5 minutes. It took years of hard work, but with determination I was able to surpass my previous level of cognitive capacity, an accomplishment that I am very proud of. This experience gave me the ability to relate at some level to the challenges faced by people with a disability.