
Alumni Donor Spotlight: A Conversation with Narin Sinuon

Narin Sinuon, a member of Project LEARN's Board of Directors, has been planting roots in his community for as long as he can remember. Born and raised in the Highlands, Narin attended the Morey Elementary and the Daley Middle Schools growing up. After graduating from Lowell High School in 2002, he went on to complete his undergraduate degree in informational technology (IT) at UMass Lowell. Since then, Narin has advanced his lifelong interest in tech and helping others. Today, he



holds a senior-level IT position at Lexia Learning, a software company that develops virtual literacy programs for school-aged children. He currently lives in the lower Highlands with his spouse and his two daughters, ages 6 & 2.

As a Lowell High student, Narin was a member of the International Language and Science Clubs and was a player on the junior varsity volleyball team. From serving as an active volunteer in local organizations, such as Project LEARN, and previously UTEC and the Angkor Dance Troupe, Narin has made it a part of his personal mission to support the community that he grew up in.

In this month's Alumni Spotlight Interview, we sat down with Narin to talk about his commitment to giving back to the one place he calls home: the Lowell community.

Project LEARN: Can you tell us a bit about your background growing up and living in Lowell?

Narin: I was actually born and raised in Lowell, and I like to joke that I've never left. I went to C.W. Morey Elementary School, Daley Middle School, and then Lowell High School (LHS). After I graduated from LHS, I went to UMass Lowell, transferred to Middlesex Community College (MCC) for a little bit, then went back to UMass Lowell. So I've been in Lowell all my life, and all of my educational experiences have been in Lowell, too.

Project LEARN: Were you involved in any sports, clubs, or after-school activities while you were an LHS student?

Narin: Yeah! I was on the JV volleyball team for about two and a half years, and I participated in the International Language Club and the Science Club. I also was a part of the Upward Bound program, or TRIO, through MCC.

Project LEARN: What path did you pursue after graduating from LHS?

Narin: My path after LHS was kind of exploratory. I started out as an electrical engineering major at UMass Lowell, but I found it a little bit boring. I couldn't really sit behind the computer all day—I needed something a little bit more hands-on. I took a year off and I decided to go into computer science, but that path wasn't very hands-on either. So I left that behind and decided to try out business administration -- and then the recession hit. So, I stopped my studies for a while and went straight to work in the manufacturing field.

After that, I decided it was time to get serious. I've always been someone who enjoys technology, and so I thought, "What could be better than IT?" I didn't realize it at the time, but IT was such a vast field with so many different sections. I settled on one that was more hands-on, where I could work with computers all day. In the IT field, every day is different. If two people come to you with the same issue, it may not always require the same solution. It keeps me on my toes. On top of that, in my position, I get to meet many new people.

Every new hire that we have, I'm the first face they see when they join the team, other than the hiring manager.

Project LEARN: What is something that LHS taught you?

Narin: Well, I'm pretty sure LHS is one of the largest high schools in the state, and it's so diverse, too. When I was there, I think we had around 4,000 students. Growing up in Lowell, you don't really realize that you have it good with diversity. The students come from all different sorts of ethnic backgrounds and cultures, and I feel like I



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Snowdaes, Brew'd Awakening, and Nibbana Cafe are Narin's favorite places to grab a bite in Lowell.

learned a lot from them. When you're out in the real world, you meet a lot of people from different backgrounds, and I think interacting with students at LHS gave me the experience to prepare for that. So, I think that's one of the great things about going to LHS, at least for me.

Project LEARN: Since graduating, you've kept close ties with the Lowell community. What made you want to stay close to home?

Narin: I feel like this is going to be a little bit of a loaded answer, considering my experiences with older folks in Lowell and the Lowell school system. One thing I always keep on hearing is "Lowell doesn't have much," and "In order to succeed and get a proper education, you need to leave Lowell and never come back."

Hearing that from the older generations in this city, I can't help but want to tell them, "If you think there's a problem, why don't you try to fix it? There are going to be younger generations that are gonna be growing up here and going through the school system. Why not try to make it a better place for them?" That's something that's always stuck with me. So, I decided to stay in Lowell after graduating high school and give back to the younger generations.

When I was going through the school system, there weren't a lot of education programs or opportunities outside LHS. So, when I found out about nonprofits like Project LEARN, I wanted to be a part of their mission. I wanted to do everything I could to highlight the new opportunities for teens to learn and gain new skills. I was a part of UTEC for a little bit, where we jump-started a computer repair program and an A+ certification program. In an age where everything is all about technology, I thought that these kinds of programs would provide great opportunities for teens to get experience and learn new skills.

Project LEARN: How did you first hear about Project LEARN?

Narin: I had a friend who approached me and invited me to join a new board with her and I thought it sounded interesting. She described it as a rather hands-on position, and I really enjoy putting in the man-hours to help an organization grow. She also said it was the first iteration of the Board, and it was for an educational nonprofit that supports and works in tandem with Lowell Public Schools. That piqued my interest even more, as I've always believed in helping out students and the younger generations as they grow. So, that fit right in with my personal mission. It was just a short 15-minute conversation, but I was in.

Project LEARN: In addition to Project LEARN, you've been involved with other organizations in the city, such as Angkor Dance Troupe (ADT). Could you tell us about ADT and your involvement with them?

Narin: I got involved with Angkor Dance Troupe because I believed in their mission of preserving Cambodian arts culture, specifically dance. Before that, however, I did have some prior experience with them. When I was at Daley Middle School, we had a New Year's celebration, and ADT came out and taught students one of the dances that you could sign up to do at the celebration. I got to learn the Coconut Dance!

Growing up, I've always been friends with people in the Angkor Dance Troupe. Throughout high school, two or three of my closest friends were a part of the organization, so I've always been associated with the group in one way or another. So when I was invited to join the board of directors and help create a new path forward for them, I happily accepted.

Project LEARN: Could you tell us a little bit about your life today?

Narin: I do have a family now. I'm married, and I have two kids—two girls. One of them is in Lowell Public Schools. She's a first-grader. And then I have a highly active two-year-old. She'll be turning three in a couple of months. No pets, though. I do want either a dog or a cat but now's not the right time.

Project LEARN: What is it like being a Lowell parent?

Narin: It makes me want to get more involved. As a parent looking from the outside in, you always feel like there are improvements that could be made. I even thought about joining the PTO. When I was younger, I always hated the PTOs. Sort of an anti-authority thing. But now I see it differently. I might like to join them and help make the school a better place.

Project LEARN: What advice would you give to current students and alums who want to give back to their community?

Narin: If you can donate your time and effort, that is one of the greatest things that you can do for the community. There's always a person or organization in need of your help.



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