

IN THE COMMUNITY

DAWN COLLINS, 2ND LIEUTENANT RICHARD W. COLLINS, III FOUNDATION

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN PARTICIPANT

Dawn Collins enrolled in the Professional Leadership Program for Women with one goal: to learn how to be the most effective leader that she could be for the work she does in her son's honor.

Collins' path to leadership began with a heartbreaking tragedy. In May 2017, her son, Richard Collins, III, a promising senior preparing to graduate from Bowie State University, was about to become a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

All of those plans shattered on May 20, 2017. Collins and his friends were waiting for an Uber on the campus of the University of Maryland, when a white stranger emerged from a wooded area and fatally attacked him—the only black student present—with a pocketknife.

Collins and her husband, Richard Collins, Jr., were devastated. But their sorrow fueled them to take action. Together, they advocated for hate crime reform. In March 2020, the Maryland General Assembly enacted the Second Lt. Richard Collins III Law, which broadened the definition of what constitutes a hate crime.

Further, the couple founded the 2nd Lieutenant Richard W. Collins, III Foundation, which seeks to invest in the education and empowerment of promising young Americans who've proven themselves to be outstanding citizens and are committed to working toward a hate-free, more just society for all. Currently, the Foundation lives out this mission through mentorship programs and strategic partnerships. The Foundation also supports other aspiring servicemembers through ROTC scholarships, which has awarded scholarships to more than 290 men and women who have gone on to become military officers. Further, she and her husband were appointed by President Biden to the role of Uniters Against Hate and remains a tireless advocate for a just and hate-free world.

"The Institute helped me know how to use my voice," says Collins. "I still battle a voice inside that tries to tell me all the things that I'm not. I'm from New York originally, so I can only describe it as this: the Institute gave me chutzpah! They told me: 'stand up, get your thoughts together, and speak your truth!' The Institute gave me methodology for how to speak without apologizing and in a way that people will listen."

Dawn Collins' training from the Institute enabled her to dive into a role she never expected to have—equipped to lead, serve, and carry on the indelible legacy of her beloved son.

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