

# Kaleena K. Berryman – Bio

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***Kaleena K. Berryman is a social justice advocate, community organizer, author, mentor, and program director committed to the empowerment of children, parents, women, and people of color. With a commitment to leadership development, she has empowered Newark youth and parents to raise their voices and work collaboratively to create change within their schools, neighborhoods, and community.***

Born and raised in Newark, NJ, Kaleena K. Berryman graduated with honors from Arts High School in 2000 as a Television Communications major. After being awarded a Presidential Scholarship to William Paterson University, Kaleena earned a bachelor's degree in Communications in 2004, with a minor in African American and Caribbean Studies. She served as President of William Paterson's college chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and founded the first culturally responsive campus monthly publication, entitled *UMOJA*, in 2007. In January 2011, she earned a master's degree in Public Administration from Rutgers University-Newark.

Currently, Kaleena serves as the Associate Director of Student Engagement and Programming for the Newark Youth Career Pathways Program, housed within the Newark Alliance. NYCP convenes a network of youth workforce providers, schools, and industry partners to synchronize year-round supports that prepare and expose youth to in-demand career pathways. Before coming to NYCP, Kaleena served as the Director for the Abbott Leadership Institute (ALI) at Rutgers University-Newark. ALI's mission is to teach education advocacy and family engagement skills to parents, educators, community leaders, and students in Newark, NJ. ALI's Youth Media Symposium (YMS) develops youth leaders by inspiring high school students to use the power of their voices and the media to advocate for better schools. In her role at ALI, Kaleena develop critical programs such as the New-Ark Leaders of Health in partnership with Mayor Ras Baraka's Office of Youth and College Affairs, Parents as Partners in Extended Learning Time, Parents Empowered: Developing Your Family's Social and Emotional Learning Skills, Parent Outreach 101, and Ten Tips for the Empowered Parent. In 2015, Kaleena led Newark high school students through the process of planning and opening YMS College Success Centers in the city, which provide free college readiness assistance to students and families in Newark. These centers are managed by YMS graduates.

In 2013, Kaleena founded Newark Circle of Sisters (NCOS), an organization of women in the city of Newark who provide service scholarships to Newark women at all stages in their advanced education pursuits. NCOS currently has over 5,000 members on social media and 100 active members; the group is steadily growing. The NCOS Board hosts well attended events and meetings throughout the year in the spirit of sisterhood, support, celebration, service, and scholarship. Kaleena also serves on the board of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of NJ (SPANN) and Mayor Ras Baraka's National Community Schools Advisory Board.

Kaleena's most important job, however, is that of mother to Jharid Jr, born 16 weeks premature in 2012. Inspired by his early birth, five-month NICU stay, and cerebral palsy diagnosis, Kaleena is committed to spreading the importance of prematurity awareness. In 2016, Kaleena founded The Preemie Parent's Club, Inc., which provides support services to mothers and fathers whose babies are currently in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in Newark, NJ, her hometown.

As a writer of poetry and inspirational blogs, she has reached thousands of parents across the country and the world via her online preemie support network; viral poem, "On the Day You Were Born"; and blog, *Praying4MyPreemie*. In 2014, Kaleena published her first book, *Stronger than We Thought: Poetry for the Preemie Mom's Journey*, available on Amazon.