

## WELCOME TO BENZIE COUNTY CENTRAL SCHOOLS FEATURED FRIDAY ALUMNI.

Today, we would like to recognize Caitlin Lorenc, Class of 2005. Caitlin was kind enough to take the time to share her journey with us, and here is an inside look. “As I sit to ponder and reflect on my time at Benzie Central, there is one theme that continues to reveal itself. While a student at Benzie Central, I was never at a loss for opportunities – chances to explore other educational fields, travel throughout the state and the nation to enlarge my views and experiences, and the chance to delve deeply into the subjects I truly enjoyed! These opportunities have crafted the various positions and situations I have already experienced and those I have yet to encounter. While at Benzie Central, I participated in a variety of activities such as volleyball, Madrigal Singers, the National FFA Organization, National Honor Society, Close Up, Odyssey of the Mind, and more! There were several teachers who inspired and encouraged me the most throughout my time at Benzie Central. Beverly Brouwer, 4<sup>th</sup> grade elementary teacher at Crystal Lake Elementary, discovered my passion for creativity and imagination and introduced me to the College for Kids summer classes at Northwestern Michigan College. Katherine Wolterink, high school English and World Literature teacher, tirelessly read and edited my creative writing pieces. Jerry Block, Plant, Animal and Environmental sciences teacher as well as my FFA Advisor, nurtured my love for plants and the environment as well as emboldened my desire to cultivate leadership skills through FFA. A culmination of these opportunities and teachers through Benzie Central assisted in inciting my fervor to continue my education after graduating from Benzie Central in 2005. I graduated from Michigan State University in 2010 with a BA in English and Creative Writing. As a Spartan, I extended my experiences with FFA by becoming a Michigan FFA State Officer and was able to travel to chapters, or schools, around the state to discuss the leadership and agriculture opportunities available through the program. While at MSU, I was also able to design, maintain, and manage the Michigan 4-H Children’s Garden on campus. The highlight of my time at MSU, was participating in the Study Abroad program and living in Denmark for six months. I was also able to travel to Ghana to learn about agriculture techniques and to discuss starting an FFA program in Accra, the capitol. My thirst for experiences via traveling commenced at Benzie Central and I have continued this journey by visiting at least a dozen countries around the world, and have lived in several states throughout the last few years. After MSU, I joined AmeriCorps for two years of service: one in Washington state with the Washington Reading Corps Program, and another with the Lyndon Economic

opportunity AmeriCorps Program (formerly the Northeast Kingdom Initiative) in Vermont. At Green Mountain Farm-to-School (GMFTS) in Vermont, I was finally able to marry my interests of farming and food, with education, and creative writing. After my term of service with AmeriCorps ended, I was hired on by GMFTS to write their farm and garden based curriculum. During this year, I cemented my desire to continue my education by applying for and being accepted into a one-year intensive Master's program at Goshen College in Indiana. In 2014, I graduated with an MA in Environmental Education. Since then I have been a Nutrition Education instructor and school garden coordinator with the Michigan Nutrition Network and a lead teacher for an outdoor-based preschool in northern Michigan. Since arriving back in Benzie County, I have been lucky to continue pursuing opportunities, although now they have taken a different form. My experiences have allowed me to learn and grow so I can give back and participate in my community. Currently I work for Michigan State University Extension as a Program Instructor. I am able to help schools in northern Michigan become healthier places by making policy, system, and environmental changes through Fuel Up to Play 60. Fuel Up to Play 60, is a national program, sponsored by the National Dairy Council and the NFL, in collaboration with the USDA, that promotes healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities. I absolutely love my job and am fortunate to be an active participant in the cultural shift of making health a priority for students, teachers, staff, and administrators in our schools.

When not traveling, pursuing other educational opportunities, and meeting with schools, I also am starting a farm. Back Roots Farm, while small, is in its third year of production. Primarily focusing on root crops, the farm continues to intentionally develop and each year carries new ideas, projects, and goals! I also am a board member for the Benzie Conservation District and am thoroughly enjoying learning this new role and speaking on the merits of all the wonderful programs and initiatives the Benzie Conservation District offers our county and residents. My newest adventure entails raising a puppy – which is an experience all its own!

I am grateful for the opportunities I had at Benzie Central, the teachers who inspired and supported me in my endeavors, and the experiences I've enjoyed along the way. My advice to current and future Huskies would be to never stop seeking growth and change for that is where true learning is able to flourish!"

Caitlin, we are #OneBENZIE proud of all you have accomplished and all you continue to do. We wish you continued success and happiness. Of course, you know how Mrs. Crossman feels...like, love, and share!

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