

UNSTOPPABLE

Alumni Profile: Danielle Torain '10

By Chris Quirk

POWERHOUSE, DYNAMO, FORCE OF nature. These are some of the words that come to mind as you listen to Danielle Torain '10 talk about her work and her ambitions.

Torain has dedicated her career to public service and took the helm as executive director of the Open Society Institute (OSI)-Baltimore in January. The Open Society Institute is part of Open Society Foundations' global network of philanthropic institutions dedicated to advancing equality and justice. Its sole field office in the United States, the Baltimore office focuses on the root causes of drug addiction, an over-reliance on incarceration, and obstacles that impede youth in succeeding in and out of the classroom.

"At OSI, we leverage and really maximize what resources we have to catalyze change," Torain says. "That might mean building community infrastructure, partnering with local agencies to think about how to fortify their capacities, driving public and private resources to local communities, supporting the work of local grassroots leaders and social entrepreneurs, and facilitating dialog to get folks thinking about strategy and plans for action together."

Torain's interest in studying law came from her desire to sharpen her effectiveness in the public service sector with a keener understanding of institutional mechanisms. "I was very curious about how those macro frameworks impact the day-to-day lives and experiences of people. A mentor recommended law school because it would give me a clearer picture of that, and of the connections between systems. Over time, I've also found and appreciated that my legal education additionally equipped me with the analytical and technical skills needed to deconstruct and reconstruct policies, systems and institutions in my day-to-day work. This grew into my current passion for and focus on building and resourcing a more sustainable infrastructure for positive change in Baltimore and other places like it."



The Baltimore native credits some of the unique facets of Maryland Carey Law with preparing her for the practical challenges of her professional career. "At one point I was working with the Baltimore Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice on innovative court models and community-based alternatives to youth detention and incarceration. I had learned about that at Maryland Carey Law already, which was kind of a unique area to cover in law school at the time," she says. "In addition, I attended the Evening Program, as I was working full time, and that added a layer of depth to my education in ways I could not have imagined beforehand. Although it was not always easy for me, as a working student, I was applying things I was learning every day in a very real way."

During and after law school, Torain built an impressive resume reflecting her deep dedication to public service. Besides working in the mayor's office in multiple capacities, she was senior director of strategy and development at the Center for Urban Families, an executive at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a senior consultant for Frontline Solutions, a social justice-oriented firm, and founder and principal of her own boutique consulting practice, before signing on to lead OSI-Baltimore. All before the age of 40.

Her talent at balancing the pragmatic and the holistic is part of what makes Torain an effective leader. "I've always found myself in this role of connecting people and connecting worlds and seeing things from a macro perspective, but understanding how to roll up my sleeves and dive in to help people to make those connections to enact change," says Torain. "I think that comes from a belief that it's not just what we're trying to achieve, but it's how we're achieving it, and who we achieve it with, that is so important, and often transformative." ■