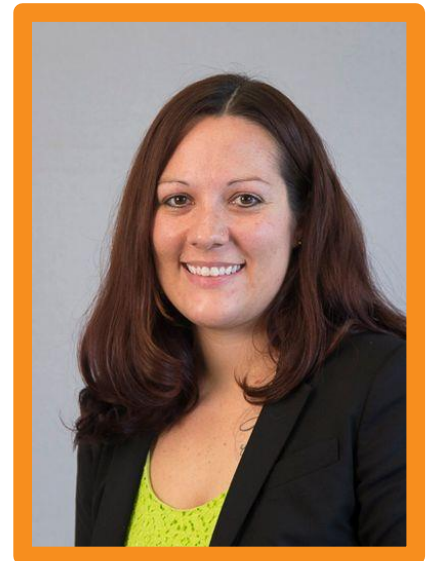




## **Cassidy Higgins, PhD, Vice President of Community Impact**

Cassidy Higgins began her nonprofit career as an Americorps member tutoring youth who were experiencing homelessness in Denver. She started the work because she wanted to help youth. But what she learned was that youth didn't need her help. They needed a collaborator, an accomplice, someone willing to listen and take their lead. Through bearing witness to their stories and experiences, she learned that when looking at social injustices like homelessness, if your solutions only pay attention to the people experiencing the injustice and not the systems and institutions that perpetuate them, then you aren't crafting your strategy in the pursuit of justice.



Being driven by this desire to learn more about how people and systems work, Cassidy went on to complete a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology. After being inspired by a class about privilege and modern social construction, Cassidy sought out a graduate program where she could learn how to dismantle systems of power, privilege, and oppression. She found a program where she obtained a Masters of Arts in Human Communication and a Doctorate in Communication Studies with a focus on Culture and Communication at the University of Denver. Her dissertation was an ethnography about high school student experiences of a curriculum called "Disrupting Privilege," which she facilitated for two classes to better understand the effect of supporting youth to engage in critical conversations about their experience of their own identities within a social system.

While Cassidy was going to school, she continued to work in the nonprofit sector gaining experience in serving youth and adults experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, and LGBTQ youth. At her most recent role before FLY, Cassidy fell in love with working with data to understand how to evaluate the impact of services and interventions. In 2014, Cassidy joined FLY, a nonprofit in the San Francisco Bay Area that partners with youth impacted by the justice systems to disrupt and dismantle the pipeline to prison, as the Mentor Program Manager. Because of her commitment to programs and data, Cassidy soon found her niche in strategy and innovation. Cassidy has held multiple leadership roles at FLY including Associate Director of Innovative Programs, Director of Innovation and Growth, and Director of Programs and Innovation. Currently, Cassidy is the Vice President of Community Impact and is a part of FLY's Executive Team.