

Charisse's Journey



My journey into self-discovery began with the birth of my youngest son, Oliver. He provided me (up close and personal) with what it means to raise a child who is at risk in multiple areas. There were moments of complete devastation and heartbreak yet somehow, I knew I was being groomed to be the mother he would need to survive.

Serving as principal of Premier Academy in Joliet IL., a Regional Safe School designed to provide alternative education for at-risk middle and high school students from Grundy, Kendall, and Will Counties in Illinois. was a professional milestone. Under my leadership, an average 83% of students transitioned back to their home schools with grade-level or above credits and a renewed desire to continue their education. I felt compelled to share my knowledge and experience to help and encourage other educators and parents.

My book, *At-Risk Students: Transforming Student Behavior*, published by Rowman & Littlefield, details the warning signs of disturbing behaviors, which are often overlooked by educators and/or misdiagnosed by mental health professionals. I shared my up close and personal case study detailing the time lined events of parenting an at-risk child and its devastating culmination. Today, we train on Risk and Protective Factors, Mental Health Intervention, and Game-based Learning debuting in 2024. Each training uses the SEL framework to guide participants toward academic, personal, and social success.

I no longer use the term “at-risk” because every student has a combination of risk and protective factors among their friends, in their homes, schools and neighborhoods. Risk factors are the hurdles that hinder success and protective factors are shields. According to author Ivory A. Toldson, “these factors can help or hurt academic potential. Students who live in poverty, or have been assigned to special education, or have a history of trauma, or who are English learners, may or may not be “at risk” depending on their respective protective factors.” Today, I refer to all students as “students”.

We created *Jump Anywhere in the World (JAITW)*, a seven-series mobile video game that teaches students conflict resolution along with social skills. Each game is set in one of the seven continents, engaging players in a captivating, action-filled journey of adventure and survival. Players will battle mystical wildlife while helping the characters work through their personal hurdles and challenges. Players will also be rewarded within the game for making positive lifestyle choices through teaching SEL skills. JAITW is currently in development and is expected to launch in 2024.

My journey's greatest triumph remains being the mother of my two sons, Robert, and Oliver, three grandsons, Elijah, Landon, Avery, and one (and only) granddaughter, Layla.