

September 2023



Future Leaders Academy Update

Meet Future Leader Elijah and Mentor Sarah



This month, we're pleased to introduce Future Leader, Elijah Arnett, a high-achieving senior at Harding High School, in St. Paul, Minnesota, who's focused on premed as a path to a career in research medicine. **Elijah's values are stability, decisiveness, autonomy, integrity, and community.**

Elijah's mentor, Sarah Oknick, is Director of Ideation at Fluid Interiors,

a commercial interior solutions company, and a champion of the mentorship process.

"Sometimes it's hard to see in yourself what your strengths are and having a good mentor can point those things out," says Sarah. **Sarah's values are autonomy, family, health, achievement, and happiness.**

Following an in-person meeting at the Future Leaders Academy celebration in June, the pair have been meeting virtually every other week with Sarah supporting Elijah as he pursues three defined goals. "We're working on a podcast regarding community issues at

my school,” says Elijah. “We’re also working on my interpersonal communication skills, and I’m working on a journaling habit.” The podcast, *Unity*, will start recording in September when Elijah returns to Harding. “It’s designed to have student voices, and staff members and other community member voices be heard within the broader community of St. Paul” says Elijah.

“When I first got matched up with Elijah, I was listening to him speak — he’s very scientific and mathematical, and so smart — and I remember questioning, ‘How am I going to help him?’” recalls Sarah. “Then when he said one of his goals was interpersonal communication, I thought, ‘Yes! That I can help him with.’”

“I enjoy the fact that I’m working with someone who is very keen in my goals, and she’s also working on journaling,” says Elijah. His journaling habit goal prompted Sarah to jump start a dormant desire. “Journaling has always been on my list, and in the back of my mind,” says Sarah. “It’s been helpful as I tend to over analyze, so just getting things onto paper helps me see things as they are and move on from it if it’s something that’s causing anxiety, for example.” For Elijah the journaling habit offers an easier way to analyze individual ideas. “I have a lot of little spontaneous — sometimes unconventional — ideas, especially since my interest in the future is in science and mathematics, so I write proofs in my journal every day,” he says.



Elijah and Sarah signing their Mentorship Agreement, which includes their mentorship goals, during the Mentorship Kick-off Celebration on June 3, 2023

As Elijah reflected on his Future Leaders Academy training from earlier this year, he discussed resonant aspects of his experience. “The most useful parts for me would be understanding our own values, first and foremost, and then going into WDYWFY (What Do You Want For Yourself process) and the way we decide: is this more of a wish than a goal

and how we change a goal into an active process.” He also shared this personal insight. “I was surprised at how vocal I’ve become during this entire process,” says Elijah. “It’s very typical for me to be more introverted and have a lot of written ideas that I present in a paper, but the problem with the paper of course is there is a barrier to entry in that not everyone can understand certain words that I’ll use. So, learning how to communicate with my voice has definitely been a challenge that I’m surprised is going as well as it is.”

Sarah views her most important job as a mentor is to listen and from there offer guidance where it makes sense. In the case of mentoring Elijah, Sarah acknowledges a unique bonus. “Elijah is really, really smart and he’s interested in topics that I wouldn’t necessarily be exposed to in my normal day-to-day, like neuroscience, so it makes it fun to listen to him and I’m learning something in the process.”

We look forward to checking in with Elijah and Sarah later in the year and highlighting more Future Leaders and Mentors in our upcoming newsletters. Know someone who would make a great Future Leader?

Application details for the **2024-2025 Future Leaders Academy** cohort are available [here](#).