

Transcript

ViE - Young Scholars Parent Interview_mixdown

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00:00:43 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Hi, my name is Kennedy Rev. I'm the program director for the Hank and Billy Super Aaron Young Scholars from a research institute. I am so happy to be sitting down with Miss Dixon today, whose son was a part of the program. Would you like to formally introduce yourself?

00:00:59 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

Hello, I'm Carissa Dixon. I am a Duke employee through the School of Medicine, but I'm also a proud parent of a graduate of the Young Scholars program, Sam Dixon.

00:01:09 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Yay. It's exciting and happy to have you here. So can you just describe a little bit about your child's experience in the program?

00:01:18 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

Yes. So Sam became a member of the Young Scholars Summer Institute. I think it was a rising freshman in high school. Reluctantly, he participated in the program. He previously thought he was going to spend his summers doing sports, and mom decided that he was going to be a part of this program. He enjoyed it. It was very eye opening for him. The things that he learned were very different than things that he had been exposed to in the past in a formal, structured

program. I remember the one day we went home in the afternoon and we tuned into a radio show where they talked about the wealth gap and on the radio, and he said, wait, doctor Darity talked about that today. So it didn't take long for him to make the connection to what he was learning to life. And so, and he's grown from that moment to now, and it's been a wonderful process.

00:02:17 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So I love to hear that he enjoyed just hearing some of the guest speakers and connecting what he was learning to this real life application. What are some other aspects that he enjoyed about the program?

00:02:29 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I think he enjoyed the research and having the freedom to pick a topic that was relevant to him. I think his first project, he focused on police brutality, and he came up with the idea that he thought that the police officers should live in the communities where they serve. He talked to people who worked in Durham police, the police department. So just, I think being able to find a topic that was relevant to his life and having the freedom to explore that and finding ways to present that in a structured way, I think empowered him to be an advocate for himself, to be an advocate for things that matter for our community and for his age group has been phenomenal to see the growth in him.

00:03:16 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So I know that you suggested that he applied to the program instead of doing sports. How did you hear about the program and what motivated you to want him to apply?

00:03:27 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I heard about it through a co worker and also a friend whose son had participated in the program. And once I saw the curriculum, I knew it was something that he needed. I remember when the first couple of sessions he attended, he asked me why he was a part of it, because he was always going to go into technology. And he said, I'm not going to major in political science, and I don't want to be a lawyer. Why am I here? But he realized quickly that the importance of being in this program was because he's a young black boy who's living in America and that the information that he learned in this program had nothing to do with his college major or his profession, but it was essential to have this information to live here.

00:04:09 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

What are some specific skills that you think Sam improved upon or gained during the program?

00:04:16 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I think being a critical thinker and being able to express himself in a way that is acceptable, non-threatening. As he grew up, unfortunately, he started to see realities of some of the things that he learned in the program. And especially when I consider his interactions with friends or people who didn't go through the program, who often were frustrated by things that were going on in the world, they didn't know how to express themselves or to really delve into the details about the, you know, the core background of how things operate in this country, the history, the process, also about addressing things that are important, how to be an advocate, how to really get research, how to know what's going on, and to use that information to make a change. So I think, and I think he's used that not just in advocacy, but in his decisions for how he chose his career, how he plans to not just to be someone in technology, but to really make a difference in future generations. He decided he wanted to be, of course, in computer technology, but he also decided to minor in finance. His last presentation, he focused on the financial wealth gap, and he decided to combine the interest in technology with finance. And his ultimate goal is to create a digital platform that will appeal to young people in schools. He wants to educate and incorporate financial literacy in the public education system, and he wants to create that platform. So he is, as we speak, writing his final presentation for his summer internship to learn about the financial industry. He's got the technology part under his belt. So he is balancing his, his college experience to gain that knowledge in the financial industry. And I'm confident that he'll develop that platform that'll make a difference for the next generation.

00:06:11 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Wow, that's amazing. Go, Sam. But so what are some skills that you think he gained during the program that helped him ultimately in undergrad and also make his decision for undergrad as well?

00:06:27 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I think this presentation skills, he's a super confident in speaking in front of audiences. He knows how to research information and to present it in a way that others can receive it. And also being able to be clear about his goals. I think that's one of the biggest things in finding purpose in what he's doing. And school has not been difficult for him, as some of his other friends have decided they wanted to major in something, but some of them are missing the ultimate purpose of. And so it's been amazing to go from the child I used to have to wake up every day and say, go to school to now him really being self motivated because he sees the end goal and how his education will give him what he needs to make a difference.

00:07:12 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So I know that you mentioned earlier that when you and Sam were listening to a radio episode about the wealth gap, and he said, oh, Doctor Darity had mentioned this or gave us a guest lecture on that. I wanted to see what other conversations the program helped foster between your family or just also some classmates or peers in Sam's school, I think.

00:07:39 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

And growing up, Sam had the benefit of having Barack Obama be the president. So I think his generation made a lot of assumptions about where we were as a country, and they considered things that were in the past to be the past. I think the more he lived and the more we saw things happen in the world with George Floyd, as he grew, he started to see how precious that time was that he grew up in, but also realized that things that were from the past were also still resonating in our country and how relevant the information that he learned in this program was important for his life going forward. And so we had conversations about how things had changed, but also how things were still the same in some ways and just how his generation could really make a difference in keeping us on the right path for the country to grow. And so I think he started to find more of a purpose in one, why it was necessary that we continued to advocate for change and did not take it for granted that this was the way it is of the world today. And that there were still forces that would challenge that growth, and they have to have a role in that process as they grow. So it's been incredible to continue to have growing conversations from the middle schooler who was reluctant to be in the program to now talking to a young adult who will be graduating from college next year, and how, as a young adult, what that information means to him. And I'm excited because I'm all about the advocacy. So now I feel like we're having grown up conversations about these topics, but I feel like he's better prepared for life. And I think that the cohort and the people that he stay in touch with, both from the program to the students, will ensure I have great hopes about our future because of the program and the students, and they're using that information daily and how they make decisions in their life.

00:09:44 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So I do remember that Sam was an intern, and so he also interned during 2020 when we were virtual because of COVID. And so I wanted to see what was his experience like, especially transitioning from a student to an intern.

00:10:01 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I first of all, thank you all for allowing him to fill that role, because I think he grew a lot in that experience and just not being someone who was receiving the information, but really, I think it's when he started to own his responsibility to give back being there as a resource for the students. I do think it was a challenging time for him to sort of live through 2020. He was a high school student, a high school senior. We were also going through issues, of course, with COVID and George Floyd and all the things that were happening. So it was interesting to watch him sort of process that and to, at the same time, try to be a motivator for the students who were going through the program. So I think he, at that time, started to see the benefit of what he had learned, but he was also grappling with the realities of using what he had learned. So it wasn't, I think, at that point, not just an academic summer camp program, but it was really life. And for him to say, okay, this is what I've learned, but now I'm also having to put these things to work, but also being able to be a resource to the students who were just starting in the program. So I think it was very beneficial.

00:11:15 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So something that I also remember was a presentation that you gave talking about how this program helped foster Sam's understanding of social equity and how it motivated him to go to A and T and receiving the cheetah white scholarship. So could you talk a little bit about that.

00:11:34 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

Absolutely. So I also remember sitting with Sam when it was time to write college applications. We were, of course, remote, and he struggled a lot because they asked, you know, they wanted the essays of why you want to do something. And so, you know, I just walked away from the computer and said, let's just talk about what you want to do and the why. And when he knew he wanted to major in technology, he knew the things that he had learned from this program. And when he talked about what he wanted to do, he didn't realize his graphic design skills were something that were a career, but he knew he wanted to make a difference in the financial wealth gap. And so we just literally sitting on our new screen porch in the middle of a pandemic, just talk through what he wanted to do in life. And I just saw his face, just the low lifted. And him being able to write a college essay was just natural because he couldn't figure out how all the things he wanted to do or the things he was interested in, how that would take him where he wanted to be. And so we started Googling who had the programs that would fit what he wanted to do. We found the program at North Carolina A and T, and they have a cheetah white, which is a full ride merit scholarship. And when he got ready to write the essay, I said, well, who are cheetah men? Who are white? Who are these people? And he started to look up the history of Henry White and learn that he was a legislator. He also was someone who started a bank. He had a lot of history. He really advocated for financial wealth gap in the 18 hundreds. And so. And I said, this man is you. You don't. You know, you can write this essay based on the experience that you have in this program. And I said, you have publications. You know, put a link in your. Your research abstract is still on the, you know, on the. On the cook center's page, so you have real application. And when they asked him why he wanted to be an applicant for this program, he was a student at JD Clement Early College High School. And they would only accept. They actually had an internal application process for the students at the school to determine who they would recommend, and they could recommend two students, and they only chose to recommend one, and that was him. So he was the one student from his high school that was recommended to the program. And then, of course, he had to apply formally again to the school. But, I mean, I knew as soon as he submitted, I knew he was going to be accepted because I didn't think so no one else has this unique experience that you have that's so aligned with the naming of the scholarship program. And he's continued down the path of Mister White. So it definitely has been a full circle moment for him. And I think that he will, you know, I think he will continue to create a legacy at North Carolina A and t that will make the Cook family proud.

00:14:31 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Yay. That's exciting and amazing just to hear about how he was able to connect his experience here at the Cook center and the Hank and Billy Seiber Aaron Young Scholars Summer Research Institute to just his future goals. So that's amazing to hear.

00:14:47 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I'm excited, and thank you all for the opportunity.

00:14:49 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So, part of the Erin Young Scholars Summer Research Institute is presenting their research that they worked on. And so I want to hear a little bit about Sam's evolution in presenting and just how his confidence has allowed him to excel where he is in undergrad as well.

00:15:08 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I can definitely say that his final presentation that he gave, which was focused on the financial wealth gap, has continued in college. He's a major in computer graphic design, but a minor in finance. So him wanting to create a digital platform for youth to understand what financial literacy means, he's continued that. And when he got to North Carolina A and T, he realized that they weren't focused on a lot of that, and he wanted to create a cryptocurrency club at school because they weren't really talking about that at the university, and they didn't have that platform. And so he did his homework, went and found out how to create a club, and worked through the school of Business and created that organization. And so he's working with a program on campus called exceptional males in business. And they actually host workshops on campus that introduce the students to digital currency, cryptocurrency, financial literacy. And he is one of the co founders of the organization on campus. Yay.

00:16:16 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

He's doing amazing things.

00:16:17 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

Absolutely. So he is a living legacy of this program, for sure.

00:16:22 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Would you recommend this program to any other parents? And if so, what aspects would you. What aspects would make you want to recommend the program?

00:16:34 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

This program is a Gemdez in Durham, and I think all children would benefit, but especially children of color, because I think that the motivation, the reinforcement of just teaching kids who they are and giving them the compass internally of knowing who they are and how to make a difference in this world is the most important part of the program. The curriculum content is

amazing, but I think the lasting impression that they have when they leave this program and how confident they are. And I think seeing themselves as valuable people in this society are what make the difference in their success as they grow in helping them to continue to make right decisions about their career, about organizations, and even people that they affiliate with. I think I love seeing Sam and his friends compete about who has the highest GPA or who has the best internship opportunity. And it's amazing, considering other things happening in the world, that those are the people that he chooses to be with. And I think having this experience in this program allows him to continue to build a network of people as he grows, and they will make a difference for sure.

00:17:50 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Are there any additional support or resources you think would benefit future participants and their families?

00:17:59 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I think having maybe some, once the students identify some, maybe interest areas. I know there are a lot of presenters, but maybe having corporations or people to come in and talk about work opportunities would be really beneficial, just so they can start to have that conversation before it's time to decide on an internship and just talk to people in industries, talk to people about how to make a difference, because those jobs that they want may not even exist yet. And I think it will be important for employers to hear from the youth before it's time to hire so they can start to shape the culture of their corporations to fit the new generation.

00:18:41 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

So I just have one last question. For any parents or families who are current scholars or future scholars, what advice would you give them just to support their student through the program?

00:18:55 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

I think asking questions, even though I really made sure Sam participated in this program, he was motivated to continue. And I think being a support, asking questions about how they are learning in the program and being a reinforcement to support them is most important. I don't think any student will succeed if they feel like they've been forced to stay in the program, but it won't take long. I mean, first couple of days, it's kind of like when I dropped him off at daycare. He cried a couple days, but then those became his besties in daycare. I think just, you know, being a part of this program is important. And I think letting the parents hear from the students about what is making the impact will also reinforce for them the why, and they'll get to talk about it. And I remember when Sam was coming after the program, I was still at work, so he'd catch the shuttle bus to my office and would crash in the lobby. Never made it to my office because he was so mentally tired, as if he had, you know, been outside all day practicing for football or something. But he didn't say, I don't want to go back the next day. So I knew that it was something that finally clicked with him. But we used to just start conversations about what

did you learn? And it was just fascinating to hear from their perspective how things were changing and for him to start coming and asking me questions about my life and the things that I've experienced, as opposed to me feeling like I was lecturing him. So I think that's the main thing for the parents, is to introduce your children to the program, but then learn from them and experience it through their eyes.

00:20:38 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Yay. Well, is there anything else you wanted to add or anything you just want, like any snippets or anything you wanna add before we end?

00:20:47 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

Just thank you. Thank you to the program. Thank you to the Cook family for continuing to support this program, and also Billy Aaron for continuing her support as well. And I encourage the students to give back the way they have. I mean, those folks have invested a lot for this program, and it will only continue if the, you know, if the graduates continue to make this program valuable. So that's it.

00:21:14 - Ms. Kennedy Ruff

Thank you so much for coming today. I've enjoyed talking with you and hearing how Sam has been going and doing. He sounds like he's doing a lot of great things in the community, so I'm excited to see where he continues to go. So thank you.

00:21:28 - Ms. Carissa Dixon

Me too.

00:21:37 - Announcer

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00:22:01 - Announcer

Again soon on voices in equity.