

# LEADERSHIP ashtabula county LAUNCHpad

## **LEADERSHIP Ashtabula County Experiences Goat Yoga with County High School Seniors During a Day of Wellness and Resiliency Training**

ASHTABULA - Leadership Ashtabula County's LEADERSHIP LAUNCHpad program for high school seniors spent their Thursday, November 1 program day learning about their own leadership styles, solving design challenges and gaining an understanding of what it means to be resilient.

Seniors spent their morning engaged in group activities. First, they were split into groups that were secretly determined by results of a personality styles test they took as part of their orientation into the LEADERSHIP LAUNCHpad program in September. Tasked with building a 2-D representation of a house out of M&M's, students were able to witness firsthand how their different styles impacted the final result.

Before loading onto buses provided by Richmond Transportation and heading out for their day, the students were asked to group up and tackle a design challenge that would help solve a real problem at the farm they would be visiting later in the morning. Equipped

with pipe cleaners, toothpicks and marshmallows, students set about improving on the design of a standard hay feeder for farm animals.

Despite the rainy weather, students were excited to visit Feels Like Home Farm in Willoughby, Ohio. Farm owner Alissa Helwig welcomed LEADERship LAUNCHpad students onto her urban farm with a brief tour and helped them get set up in the barn with a dozen or so “yoga goats” for an hour of feel good goat yoga with instructor Angela DeMichele, a Geneva High School graduate who now owns Snap Fitness in Madison.

“Goat yoga was not what I thought,” said Jefferson Area High School Senior, Ginny Grier. “I expected it to be a lot more intense and smelly. I definitely gained a new respect for yoga and goat farming, because I realized how many resources the goats use. My favorite activity was the meditation at the end of the session. It gave me a sense of calm and peace. I really enjoyed the experience and hope to do it again!”

Goat Yoga does not require the most precise poses or “OM’s” but does involve a lot of laughs, “help” from the goats, selfies, and an occasional request for lap space for napping.

Goat Yoga lore indicates it originated in Oregon when the owner of several goats was asked if yoga could be taught on her property. She indicated, “Yes” with the caveat that the goats be allowed to participate. The animal’s curious nature and propensity to climb on everything, created a fun and mood-boosting experience for participants and so the craze was born.

“Goat yoga for sure held up to my expectations,” Conneaut High School Senior, Emma Lamont said. “I was going to make sure that I made it that day because I have been excited for this event since I was accepted into the program. I was able to cuddle a baby goat named chestnut until he fell asleep in my arms. I was extremely tempted to take him home but I sadly had to leave him there. I will most definitely be back to the farm for the puppy and goat yoga because I had such an amazing experience.”

LAUNCHpad students also gained a variety of knowledge about farms, goat breeds and how Helwig started and maintains her business. The group also discussed the research that supports the positive impact on our brains and bodies when we spend time with animals.

Students returned to Grand River Academy in Austinburg to be joined by Prevention Specialist Katie Morrison from the Community Counseling Center for a presentation about resilience and the impact of trauma on our physical and mental health.

“I think everything she had to say is extremely valuable to youth in Ashtabula County,” said Edgewood Senior, Bella Mollick. Many kids have experienced setbacks and identifying them and ways to overcome them is a huge advantage later in life! Regardless of whether LEADERship kids have experienced certain things, it helps us be conscious of others who have.”

Students also participated in an activity that tested their resilience. Teams of five had to build a pyramid out of cups without touching any of the cups with their hands and using only a rubber band and three pieces of string.

Lakeside High School Senior, Taylor Allgood pinpointed the morning activities as good icebreakers and learning more about their personalities. “I really liked having Katie Morrison there. She had a lot of valuable information and it was interesting.”

LEADERship LAUNCHpad will meet again in December to focus on their year-long project and learn about Maker culture and the Maker Movement. For more information about LEADERship Ashtabula County, visit their website: <http://leadershipac.org>.

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