



Nationally recognized Entrepreneur and CEO Meets with LEADERSHIP LAUNCHpad Students

Ashtabula - Ashtabula County high school seniors participating in the LEADERSHIP LAUNCHpad program gathered at the Ashtabula Towne Square Friday, January 11 for a day of energetic discussion and entrepreneurial inspiration.

As part of the LEADERSHIP LAUNCHpad program, participants have been learning to combine skills and passions in a Design Thinking process to pitch social entrepreneurship ideas. Their January program day focused on practicing their pitches with a group of local professionals and engaging in dynamic rounds of feedback and discussion.

Students were joined in the morning by Jenny and Gunar Luhta, owners of Harbor Halcyon; Mike Hamper III, partner and owner of Lemire & Hamper LLC; Michael Speelman, owner of the The Chalk Box and Ashtabula City Council member and Stephanie Siegel, Executive Director of the Ashtabula County Visitors Bureau.

“What a great group of kids! I was impressed with how engaged and enthusiastic each group was in presenting and in sharing feedback,” Siegel said.

The ideas being pitched run the gamut from providing mainstream work opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities to environmentally friendly dental hygiene for underserved populations to providing social bonding opportunities to students across all economic spectrums.

Siegel also commented on the open forum-style opportunity saying “Their ideas were well-thought-out with a clear desire to create a positive change. These exercises are so important. I applaud the LEADERSHIP team for creating the interactive forum. We often don’t realize the simple power of brainstorming. Creative conversation can be the first step in creating change agents.”

In December, students attended a day long Design Thinking workshop at Lakeland Community College's HIVE makerspace. Director Dione DeMistro lead LAUNCHpad participants through a Design Thinking process to design their future selves. Later, students used the same process to brainstorm and build on their ideas for the program year.

"The LEADERship students not only have a very real grasp of problems faced in our current home, but also have solutions ready to try to tackle and pave the way for a better future. To have fresh young eyes ready and willing to take on challenges will impact our community and beyond in ways we can never begin to imagine," said Halcyon owner, Jen Luhta.

After a panel discussion with the invited guests and lunch from Los Compadres, students listened to We Can Code It owner and CEO, Mel McGee from Cleveland, Ohio. McGee spoke to the students about her journey to start up her business and how design thinking, problem-based learning and an entrepreneurial mindset all combined into making it a success and continue to help it grow. We Can Code It's mission is to create equity through technology by bringing opportunities in computer programming career paths to diverse populations.

We Can Code It boot camps have received many awards and McGee recently expanded to open an office in Columbus.

"All mistakes are just another opportunity to learn," McGee impressed upon the students. She encouraged them to try and fail and keep trying.

And for more information about LEADERship Ashtabula County's LEADERship LAUNCHpad program, visit leadershipac.org.

LAUNCHpad participants will meet again February 8th.

For media information contact:
Laura Jones
Executive Director
LEADERship Ashtabula County
C: (440) 813.9053
Email: Laura@leadershipac.org