2023 TEEN ACCELERATE FINALISTS

This year at Accelerate, Young Entrepreneur Institute at University School provided an additional opportunity for youth in grades 9-12 to participate in, Teen Accelerate: Student Citizens Make Change. Twelve Finalists were selected and will pitch at Accelerate on February 23, 2023. Below are short descriptions of each Finalist's pitch idea.

The top winner, who will be announced on the main stage at Accelerate, will receive $1,000 plus a mentor from a partner organization and the runner-up will earn $500. The 10 remaining Finalists will win $250.

REPRESENTATION IN RESEARCH

Presented by: Zaid Ashruf

Representation in Research works towards a more equitable future of science research in the Greater Cleveland area. By identifying underrepresented schools in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), we can send high school students to inform elementary and middle schoolers on the basics of research and introduce them to both programs and science fairs that will cultivate their interests in STEM. We would spend time evaluating the student's needs and the direction the school would like to go so as to maximize the effectiveness of the program. This initial phase can be done with a survey and communication with the school's existing scientific and research-based administration.

THE ANTI-GROOMING INITIATIVE

Presented by: El Braunsdorf & Isabel Mearini

Our goal with The Anti-Grooming Initiative is to educate people on the topic of grooming/predatory dating, how to set boundaries in healthy relationships, identify the signs of unhealthy relationships, and provide resources on how to get out of toxic environments. We are working to create a short film addressing the sexualization of teen girls and sexual harassment in today's day and age. We'd like to present our short film to our school community, and share it with other schools and communities in northeast Ohio to bring awareness to this topic. Our PSA will benefit communities because it will help to educate our peers about the dangers of grooming and sexual harassment, especially in middle school through high school.
SCHOOLSWAP
Presented by: Ben Elliott & Matthew McMahon
SchoolSwap is an App that encourages and allows for the sharing of school-based resources specifically amongst members of the educational community – school boards, administrators, and teachers. It connects those districts that find themselves with excess and those that have need. Whether it be partially or unused art supplies, out-of-circulation textbooks, used laboratory equipment, athletic/physical education equipment, desks, or bookshelves, what one school might be done using could exactly match what another school needs but does not have the monetary funds to purchase. SchoolSwap will be free to join and will undoubtedly assist in the exchange of goods. When the next school year brings new sporting equipment, or a science department upgrades its microscopes, no longer will they be thrown away or tossed aside. Educators in participating school districts can assess their supplies, post, and claim these items.

OHIO FOR EQUITY
Presented by: Jason Folk, Sasha Turner, Jaxon Farmer, & Ashton Spradling
Ohio for Equity fights to bring fairness and inclusivity to speech and debate through policy change and community outreach. Over the past three years, Ohio for Equity, primarily through social media, has created a platform for members of the Ohio speech and debate community to share experiences of inequity as well as share resources to benefit the community at large. Currently, Ohio for Equity is creating a website to provide competition and equity resources for Ohio speech and debate community members as well as an archive of competitor stories. Additionally, Ohio for Equity works in tandem with the Ohio speech and debate Association’s Board of Directors to pass equity policy – including the creation of equity offices, implicit bias language on ballots, and ballot accountability measures.

ECO-BRICKING FOR UNIVERSITY CIRCLE
Presented by: Alyssa Valentine, Gabby Robinson, & Jahna Harris
We want to start an Ecobricking initiative in the University Circle neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. Ecobricking involves tightly packaging clean and dry used plastic in a bottle to keep plastic from degrading into the environment and provide a deeper awareness of plastic waste. Ecobricks are an efficient way to recycle waste in order to reduce the community’s carbon footprint and could be used to repurpose non-recyclable plastic accumulated by businesses and restaurants in UC. The use of the Ecobrick is an efficient way to recycle waste in order to reduce our community’s carbon footprint. Eco bricks prevent plastic debris from polluting the ecosystem with greenhouse gas emissions. Our group Ecobricking for UC will work to implement this process of Ecobricking into the businesses of University Circle. The bricks can be used to make public installations and create green spaces and will provide business owners and residents with the knowledge and resources to better the community environment.
OCCASIO JOBS

Presented by: Young Kim, Colin Schnitter, & Seth Wojnar
Occasio Jobs LLC aims to efficiently allow students to apply for desirable jobs, both seasonally and year-round, and allows companies to have access to a large pool of applicants. Our team has created a website at www.occasiojobs.com to enable employers to post jobs and reach students for potential jobs. Founded by three high school students and their mentor, Occasio is designed to help both student employees, and local businesses connect as effectively and with as little hassle as possible.

RUBY’S RETREAT

Presented by: Ruby Raichart
Most of us have several responsibilities that can become overwhelming at times. Whether that be work, school, or kids, stress can extensively affect our physical and mental health. Even the process of planning a vacation to take a break can sometimes be stressful. Ruby’s Retreat believes that nature can be a grounding experience and a beautiful reminder that we all need peace and stillness to recharge and grow. Ruby’s Retreat will eliminate stress while providing opportunities for others to prioritize their mental health and wellness. This family-friendly and stress-free environment will allow individuals to escape their fast-paced lives and connect with nature without having to sacrifice quality sleep, showers, and home-cooked meals. Ruby’s Retreat will provide the perfect experience for individuals, families, and small groups.

HEALING THROUGH HARMONIES

Presented by: Anshul Sharma
Healing through Harmonies hopes to connect local student musicians with Hospice/Palliative Care facilities, nursing homes, and physical rehabilitation centers in the Cleveland area. Through this, I hope to help bring more joy into the lives of the elderly living there. In fact, a study from the University of Utah Health found that “Music helps reduce pain by activating sensory pathways that compete with pain pathways, stimulating emotional responses, and engaging cognitive attention. Music, therefore, provided meaningful intellectual and emotional engagement to help reduce pain.” In addition to improving the quality of the lives of seniors, I hope to remove any ageist sentiments in students through regular visits from student musicians. This will also help provide someone to talk to regularly for senior citizens!
MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Presented by: Samantha Sunderhaft

As a Girl Scout who is working towards her Gold Award, I am beginning to plan a project where I can invite a speaker to address our high school during an assembly focused on mental health. I would like to have the speaker help our community to recognize when they need help and support and educate us about some important steps we can take to improve our mental health. In addition to a speaker, I would like to create a Mental Health Awareness day where students and community members can try out various activities designed to lower stress and improve mental health. Some of these activities may include mindfulness, breathing, yoga, pilates, cardio drumming, kickboxing, painting, dancing classes, self-defense class, writing, cooking, art, and comedy. According to a CNN10 report, the rate of depression in teens has risen dramatically. Back in 2004, only 9% of teens were diagnosed with depression, but by 2019 that has risen to 15.7%.

“I'M FINE” - PODCAST

Presented by: Gabrielle Williams

My initiative is a podcast that promotes awareness and provides an understanding of adolescent mental health issues, the authentic complexity of mental illness for adolescents, and the journey they face when coping with and healing from mental illness. “I’m Fine.” Is a safe space where adolescents can find community and comfort during their journey with mental health, and where parents can learn about mental illness as we break the stigma, build bridges, and redefine how we talk about mental illness so adolescents can no longer hide by saying, “I’m fine.” Through this online community, I invite teenagers, parents, and medical professionals to bring perspective with the goal of providing support to families. I hope to connect with local nonprofit organizations to reach a wider audience.

SHOOT FOR A CHANGE

Presented by: Isabella Williams

My initiative is to raise awareness for people with developmental delays such as autism, down syndrome, and the mentally handicapped. I genuinely feel they see the world so incredibly beautiful compared to us, so raising money for other organizations that support it is a dream of mine. My idea is to hold a charity basketball tournament at my school and invite student-athletes from schools and organizations such as Potential Development, the Down Syndrome Association of the Valley, Purple Cat, the Rich center, Turning points, and much more. This can allow the arteries from this school to have fun playing sports they may not be able to do in a normal high school environment and they can have a good time. This event would have a t-shirt sale, concession stands, and a basket raffle. All of the money would be distributed evenly among all of the organizations participating in the event.
[CODHERS CLE]

Presented by: Ella Witalec

CodHers CLE is a hackathon aimed at middle school girls from around the Cleveland area. The weekend-long program is intended to introduce girls, including those with no prior coding experience, to the basics of Python, a multi-purpose programming language. By moving away from the traditional work-all-night nature of hackathons, the program is meant to be approachable and enjoyable for this age group. Working in small teams with the mentorship of a female high school or college student, attendees will design an app meant to address a problem they see in their community, engaging them in the process of creating a project from start to finish while also inspiring them with the power of computer science and allowing them to address an issue they care about.