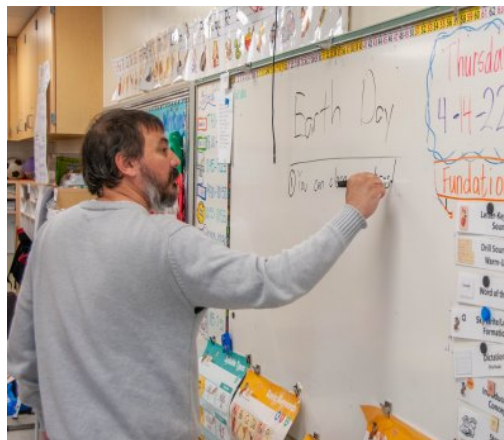




UHP staff selected as Community Team Leads of the Year for local education nonprofit, Adopt A Class

When Neil Choudhury began volunteering with Adopt A Class in Fall 2019, he found himself inspired by the non-profit's vision to connect Greater Cincinnati students to adult mentors eager to expose them to career experiences and opportunities to unleash their full potential. As the COVID 19 pandemic took hold and both higher education and K12 institutions began to conduct their work remotely, Choudhury was compelled to continue his involvement in the organization. The question was how.

Founded in 2003 by Bill Burwinkel, Adopt A Class is a Cincinnati based non-profit organization dedicated to connecting businesses and civic groups with students in economically challenged schools. Each year, 2,000 volunteer mentors across over 150 partners support nearly 6,000 pre-K- 8th grade students in 32 Greater Cincinnati schools.



Neil Choudhury presents easy ways for students to contribute to sustainability for Earth Day.

Choudhury, the Assistant Director of Global Opportunities for UC's University Honors Program (UHP), had strong reasons to continue his involvement. As an educator and father of an elementary aged son, he had a firsthand view of the challenging support structures for Cincinnati school children amidst a global pandemic. According to Choudhury, "[the pandemic] was hard for everyone. Mental health concerns, developmental delays, and lower emotional growth was evident. Students needed support now more than ever." He also noticed a trend of disengagement from UHP students, who no longer felt confident in their ability to secure novel experiential learning opportunities a core aspect of their UHP graduation requirements in a world that was closed off.

The parallels apparent, Choudhury began discussions with Adopt A Class Executive Director, Sonya Fultz, as well as Marcell Crawford, an Assistant Director and Advisor in UHP, about how to get a new team connected to students. Fultz assigned Choudhury and Crawford to a second-grade classroom within Cincinnati Public School's Academy of World Languages, a K-8th grade magnet program focused on preparing students for a globally linked society. The school assignment was a natural match with the UHP vision: Developing students into global citizen scholars who lead innovative efforts toward solving the world's complex problems.





Choudhury and Crawford recruited a team of four UHP students to join them for monthly virtual visits to the Academy of World Languages during the 2020-2021 academic year. Their team's approach, however, differed from other Adopt A Class partners throughout the city. The typical Adopt A Class team is comprised of either professionals from area businesses or students from local higher education institutions. These groups are tasked to provide educational and developmental activities through once monthly visits. Choudhury and Crawford's approach differed in two ways. First, their team would comprise of both working professionals and undergraduate students. Second, not only would their team connect monthly for their virtual visit, they would also have biweekly checkpoints where they discussed readings on trends in the field of education; how those trends impacted their work in the classroom; and how that learning would scaffold the activities they would engage their second-grade students upon their next visit.





Discussing the impact of this model, third year UHP student Anya Furman states that “this experience is valuable as it is able to bring different members of society together to learn from each other and discuss different perspectives. No matter the age of participants, it is important to be able to communicate and discuss while also learning from one another.”

Following the success of a virtual academic year, Choudhury and Crawford continued their partnership with Adopt A Class and the Academy of World Language into the 2021 2022 academic year. Sticking with their same second grade classroom, the two team leads recruited a new group of eight UHP students who were committed to in person classroom visits and preparatory meetings. The mentorship, joy, and learning that was shared during the previous virtual year was amplified by the novelty and normalcy of in person interaction. With the change in modality came new challenges, such as coordinating group transportation to the school and more intentional classroom management techniques. However, as the academic year progressed, so did the depth of the relationship between mentors and mentees.





The academic year concluded with a fieldtrip to the Cincinnati Zoo. For most of these Academy of World Language students, who were in kindergarten at the start of the pandemic, this was their first field trip. Following the conclusion of the year, second year UHP student Linlin Mu described the impact of this experience saying "I believe every visit brings happiness and growth to the children. Many of these children come from working class and low-income families, but they are very smart, cute, and sweet. I hope these children have a bright future and a beautiful childhood!"

For their efforts, Choudhury and Crawford were awarded the Community Team Leads of the Year award as Adopt A Class's annual Celebration Breakfast on June 7th, 2022. In her nomination letter, AWL second grade teacher Cara Grohnke shared that the two leads "... plan very fun, engaging learning activities each month for my students. Their upbeat energy is contagious, and they do a wonderful job working with each student in my class." Fultz shared that the UHP team "is a shining example of engagement of staff and undergraduate student teams actively engaging. [They] have been intentional in their planning to ensure both the 2nd grade students and the university students are positively impacted."

Moving forward, Choudhury and Crawford hope to expand UC's presence at the Academy of World Language and Adopt A Class more broadly by recruiting new volunteers from the UHP and other campus partners. For the 2022 2023 academic year, they hope to grow from one second grade classroom at AWL to supporting all three in the building.

You can learn more about Adopt A Class by visiting their website at <https://aacmentors.org/>. Those interested in establishing an Adopt A Class team of their own are encouraged to connect with both Neil Choudhury and Marcell Crawford.

Contact us!



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