

USU STARS! GEAR UP Student Attends Congress of Future Medical Leaders

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High school student Wilkerline Sintyl shows off his Award of Excellence from the Congress of Future Medical Leaders. Will attend the Congress with support from USU STARS! GEAR UP.

Wilkerline (Will) Sintyl, a senior at Cottonwood High School in Murray, fulfilled a dream by attending the Congress of Future Medical Leaders last spring with the help of USU STARS! GEAR UP.

Cottonwood High School in the Granite School District is a long-time partner of the USU STARS! GEAR UP program, which encourages rigorous academic studies, provides tutoring, and supports students by removing barriers to continuing education after high school.

Will came to the United States from Haiti in September of 2018 with his twin sister, Kiki, because their mother was facing a medical emergency. While she returned to Haiti afterward, Will and Kiki stayed in Utah, living with family, to continue their education here and pursue their dreams of attending college.

When Will arrived in Utah, he knew very little English and had to adapt quickly to the new culture. With hard work and resiliency, he is thriving: he has made many friends, has good grades, and is on the track team. He is also enrolled in the pharmacy tech program at the Granite Technical Institute this year.

Lorraine Levanger-Behling, site coordinator at Cottonwood High School, said that as part of the GEAR UP team at the school, she values the relationships she has created with many of the students she works with. Will is an active

participant in the programs offered by Cottonwood High School's GEAR UP team and has logged 50 hours of activities, including campus visits, career exploration, financial aid, and academic and tutoring support.

"By offering services in classrooms and individually meeting with students, we are able to learn more about the obstacles they face and become valuable assets in helping them navigate, and hopefully overcome, some of those difficulties," said Levanger-Behling.

Will, who hopes to go into cardiology, is passionate about the medical field and was thrilled to have the opportunity to attend the Congress of Future Medical Leaders with help from GEAR UP. The Congress is an honors-only program for high school students who want to become physicians or go into medical research fields. Will was one of only nine Utah students invited to attend the congress in the spring. Since it was held virtually, he will be able to attend the next in-person event in Boston MA, which is scheduled for spring 2021.

"We were so happy that Will shared his dream with us," said Levanger-Behling. "We hope to be instrumental in helping many more students reach their goals of college and career readiness."

Cottonwood High School has been a partner of the USU STARS! GEAR UP program since 2017. The school is included in three GEAR UP grants, working with students in the classes of 2021, 2023, and 2024. In addition to Levanger-Behling, the GEAR UP team at Cottonwood includes Jennifer Vasquez-Acevedo as a data assistant and Ashley Johnson as a GEAR UP assistant. Sharla Bynum is a site coordinator for the class of 2024.

The USU STARS! GEAR UP program is part of the Center for the School of the Future in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. The program will continue to focus on helping students by reducing barriers to higher education and building a college-going culture.