

## Meet Gavin - Future Entrepreneur and Community Leader



Profound statements can be made in the most unassuming places - like on a shuttle bus at Bradley International Airport.

"This is another adventure. A start of something new," Gavin stated to his Social Worker Saverio Mancini as they rode closer to the departure gate.

"Keep doing the things you love and never give up on creating new relationships," Gavin remembers Saverio responding.

That day, Gavin was leaving to study abroad. "American Airlines flight 2729 to Dallas Forth Worth," was the first destination on his journey to Sydney Australia where he would spend another semester studying in another country - following a series of classes he completed in Costa Rica the previous semester!

Creating new relationships and never giving up on himself are part of Gavin's fabric as a strong and determined 19-year-old young adult. He shows great insights into his future - and the bigger meaning of his life.

"I saw myself in a greater purpose other than just being a foster youth or being labeled as such," Gavin stated.

He aspires to be an entrepreneur so he can "cultivate my creativity and my ideas and turn them into real life projects to help everyday people."



Gavin wants to give back just like others poured into him.



Gavin firmly believes the Wilderness School is "one of the main factors" which contributed to his growth as a person and led to current successes.

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The DCF Wilderness School is a prevention, intervention, and transition program for adolescents from Connecticut.

Programs emphasize team building, peer relations, self-reliance, responsibility, improved self-concept, and conflict

"The staff have diverse experiences and that's why I feel like it makes it very unique when it comes to bringing us all together," Gavin stated.

While in High School, Gavin credits his experiences during 5-day and 20-day expeditions in the woods for aiding him to get out of his "comfort zone" and for "building a relationship with the outdoors." Those times showed him about what the power of a group can do.

"I'll be honest with you, that is something I will never forget," Gavin stated as he remembers repelled down rocks, rafting through rivers and kayaking. "It was just so fun."



Peers and staff all faced "challenges together." At the end of the day, they regrouped, strengthened and gathered to process the day. They formed unbreakable bonds.

The skills Gavin learned through team building and connecting with others at the Wilderness School motivated him to play sports. "It is that unity that I feel like is really going to be applied and is very applicable to anything that I would want to do." He joined the football team and played wide receiver and linebacker for his high school. "Pink panther" was his nickname given the pink arm bands he wore while "sneaking behind the offensive line."

"There it came football, there it came wrestling, there it came college and there it came entrepreneurship."

Gavin's world was opening. A focus on education was next.

"I wanted to see into the bigger picture. So, what I did was I started looking for my education. I started trying to peek at some of my interests. It really started to resonate with me especially when I can create things," Gavin stated.

Gavin is shaping his future while at the University of Hartford studying for a major in Entrepreneurship and a minor in Finance. High School at times was a challenge, but his grit pulled him through. Given his current academic success, Gavin received a Presidential Scholarship, that provides him with \$31,000 of funding above the current Post Secondary Education budget.

Early at the University, Gavin came into contact with Sun Scholars Inc. a non-profit organization funded in part by the Department of Children and Families to support youth in colleges and universities who experienced foster care, adoption and transfers of guardianship. Through academic coaching, peer mentoring and resource coordination, they assist youth to reach their fullest potential.



Gavin was introduced to Executive Director Christopher Baker Scott. "Chris' personality is so marvelous. You would speak to him, and you would basically be enlightened by his presence," he stated.

"Chris was an entrepreneur himself to develop Sun. I just learned so much from him. The whole program is just great. I would highly recommend it. They help solve the question of what the college experience is."

Sun Scholars Inc. is unique in that the staff all have lived expertise as they themselves were involved in the Child Welfare system. They "talk the talk" and can easily relate to the youth they mentor and support. "I can basically have a community that I can talk to that supports me and understands me," Gavin stated.



"You are with people who understand you and the circumstances that came to you in your life."

Gavin felt the staff and youth involved with the program all communicate with the same language and innately understand their collective and shared experiences.

Gavin has also cultivated personal mentors to round out his skills. "The mentors I have had, they are all business owners," he stated. This includes an Executive from Bass Pro Shops who gave advice. "Don't stop moving," he said. Gavin's former football coach who owns two Shop Rite stores is a role model as well for how he balances his personal and professional life.

According to Gavin, true entrepreneurs care about the "community and not just the profits."

Gavin wants to mentor and support youth himself in the future.



Gavin thanks Saverio for their 4+ year relationship. "A good worker. I think he is very supportive and understands me very well. He understands what I went through in the system, and he understands where I am in the system as well," Gavin stated.

"He understands what I want to be. He has a really good relationship he maintains with me and other youth as well."

Likewise, Saverio expressed his admiration for Gavin and the years they have spent together. "Gavin is hard working, self-motivated and determined to have a better outcome for his future than the path that was laid out for him as a young person who encountered the Department. He has developed a one-track mind, success at all costs. Gavin has been active with Sun Scholars and has developed a profound

connection to this agency which has assisted in propelling his life forward. Gavin even traveled to Florida in 1/2023 as part of the Robert and Anthony Dudchik SUN Memorial Fund," he stated.

Gavin continues to actively work on resetting his life and allowing his past shortcomings to fuel his future success. As evidenced by the fact that in addition to studying abroad for the past year, this Summer he obtained and successfully completed his first internship at the Liberty Bank Corporate Office in Middletown, CT.

"These experiences have expanded his global view, built his self-confidence and self-reliance, and allowed him to see first-hand that his upbringing doesn't have to repeat itself or identify his life as he launches towards adulthood," Saverio stated.

Gavin should be commended for his earnest and sincere desires to give back, lead and mentor.

In the near future - somewhere in Connecticut or maybe even somewhere around the globe - the welfare of a community will be enhanced, and Gavin will be leading the way!

Congratulation Gavin on all your successes and best of luck in the future.

