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The Education Foundation and UF Freshman Leadership Join Forces to Help Local High School Students



A group of middle and high school students from the local Take Stock in Children program attended the Youth Leadership Summit, a collaboration between The Education Foundation of Alachua County and the University of Florida's Freshman Leadership Council.

At the Youth Leadership Summit, students were challenged with creating new connections and exploring vulnerability as they tackled personal and professional development activities.

The Education Foundation of Alachua County is a local non-profit organization that works alongside the Alachua County public school system to invest in local students and teachers. Take Stock in Children (TSIC) is the largest program of the Education Foundation, and supports over 250 low income, at-risk middle and high schools students with mentoring and scholarship services.

The partnership between the Education Foundation and the Freshman Leadership Council posed a unique opportunity for Take Stock students to explore what it meant to be a leader.

“Our team is always looking for new opportunities for Take Stock in Children students to see themselves in higher education and in careers they may not have believed to be possible,” stated Jayne Moraski, the Executive Director for The Education Foundation.

Megan Steele, the Director of Programming for the Freshman Leadership Council (FLC) stated, “I was incredibly fortunate to have been exposed to the topic of leadership at a young age. In lower school, I was encouraged to participate in leadership activities like student government. In high school, I was given the opportunity to attend leadership seminars such as the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Summit, many student government conferences, and Marine Corps JROTC leadership camps. Unfortunately, there is a distinct gap in the students who attend such activities, since they can be costly. This was our inspiration for our conference. We wanted to help bridge that gap and give students who may never have such an opportunity for leadership experience to actually have such an experience.”

Steele has served as a mentor to a Take Stock in Children student at Eastside High School since the beginning of the year. Her experience as a mentor led her to consider the program when she was tasked with creating a service project as part of her role in the Freshman Leadership Council.

“The ultimate goal of this project was to equip, empower, and inspire TSIC students to realize their leadership potential and their ability to make a meaningful impact on themselves and those around them. My team wanted to help build a cohort of leaders that would serve to strengthen our diverse community” said Steele when asked about the goals of the project for her and her team.

Steele and Dr. Matt Jacobs, Director of the Bob Graham Center for Public Service, kicked off the event with a speech about their leadership experiences. “The work that the Freshman Leadership Council did for this event was truly outstanding. FLC group leaders found a way to make our students comfortable in a time when many students have more virtual and less face-to-face interaction. This is critical to developing skills necessary for interviews, and future leadership positions. Students were confident presenting in front of their peers, something they are usually very hesitant about,” said Moraski.

The Education Foundation looks forward to working with the University of Florida in the future to provide the best opportunities for their Take Stock in Children Students.

“I am overjoyed to have had the opportunity to work with the TSIC staff and students. This was an incredible opportunity for all involved. Each and every TSIC student had a unique perspective that allowed us all to grow. They were incredibly vulnerable and willing to open themselves up to the experience. My team at the Freshman Leadership Council left the conference feeling energized and excited to see what this next generation of leaders will accomplish.”

The Education Foundation of Alachua County needs 70 more mentors for our local program. This involves meeting with a student twice monthly at their school lunch, during the academic year. If you are interested in becoming a Take Stock in Children mentor and changing the life of an Alachua County student, visit our website at edfoundationac.org.