YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN IN CHARGE
FOUNDATION, INC.

Alumni Spotlight

Jaime Puente Cantillo
YMWIC Class of 2020

My name is Jaime Puente Cantillo and I graduated from YMWIC in 2020, which was the time that I entered college. For me, one of the greatest gifts YMWIC gave that I take with me everywhere is curiosity and a feeling of belonging in a field that often does not want you there. Before joining the organization, I was a quiet and fairly shy kid. Being a minority in STEM is not easy, as you often are the only one in the room. The silence that forms in the room when you walk in for the first time is palpable, and the glares, stares, and whispers that soon follow all come together to create an unwelcoming and quietly hostile environment.

Because of this, I often stifled my own curiosity for the sciences as I felt that others would not accept me; it was not my place to take up space. When YMIC, now YMWIC, came around to my school at Saint Katherine Drexel in sixth grade, the poster caught my eye. Here was an organization trying to empower disadvantaged youth to become leaders in the scientific field, something that seemed like an absurd idea at the time as people would never really accept me as a scientist of any kind. Even so, I asked my mother if she could take me after school and it was one of the best decisions I would end up making. One of the greatest lessons that I learned from Mr. Roberts, and the many wonderful leaders at the organization, is to be curious. Explore as much as you can, and when you learn something new, keep learning some more.

Thanks to my newfound curiosity, I pushed myself beyond what I thought I was capable of and was able to continuously break the ceiling of my own expectations. During high school, my curiosity was able to secure me wonderful opportunities such as the Yale University Young Global Scholars program, science fairs, and research opportunities. It allowed me to receive a full scholarship to the college of my dreams, Rice University, where I would go on to secure more incredible opportunities in STEM. My curiosity and love for learning have finally led me to medical school at Penn State College of Medicine, where I will further push the limits of my curiosity and love for science.

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The next greatest lesson I learned is to take up space, and to own it. I used to be ashamed to stick out, but now I make my presence known to all. Never be ashamed of your racial, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic background. It makes you unique, and it makes you stronger. If others are uncomfortable as soon as you walk into a room, that is their problem, and know that you are pushing the bar forward for historically disadvantaged people everywhere. I am so glad YMWIC came to my little school in Chester, PA all those years ago, as I do not think I would have the same strengths that I do now if it hadn't. Never ever stop learning, grow your curiosity and never be ashamed of it.

Since graduating from YMWIC, I attended Rice University in Houston, TX where I would go on to major in Psychology with a minor in Neuroscience. I graduated two months ago on May 10th, and since then I have been preparing to transition into medical school. Overall, my college experience was wonderful. As I stated earlier, my drive and curiosity allowed me to excel in many classes while also securing me many wonderful opportunities in the medical field such as research, shadowing, scribing, and so much more. Although college was challenging at times, I would say that my time there was made that much easier due to the tools YMWIC gave me. I knew how to navigate the academic field very well as soon as I got there, and I was not afraid to reach out to my professors, researchers, and doctors thanks to the confidence the organization gave me.

I am currently transitioning into Penn State College of Medicine to one day receive my medical degree. I begin classes on Monday, July 21st where I will begin a challenging yet exciting chapter of my life. I aspire to go into primary care, as we have a significant and quite worrisome shortage of primary physicians. As an immigrant and native Spanish speaker, I dream of providing care to the many Spanish speaking individuals who often go without care due to the fact that only 6% of doctors are Latino, and only 2% of those doctors speak Spanish in any capacity. I am happy in the medical school I have ultimately chosen, as It focuses on community care and healthcare advocacy for disadvantaged groups, something I am extremely passionate about.

Like many of the other kids in YMWIC, I come from a single parent home that struggled to make ends meet. My mother was, and still is, the sole provider. Even when I began working at a young age, that money was often spent to keep us afloat. We have relied on food stamps and government aid just to survive, and there was very little money that could go towards expensive science camps and extracurricular activities. That is why when YMWIC came into my life and offered to give me opportunities I could never dream of doing for a very small fee, my mind was

blown. Even then, I was still a bit scared and overwhelmed by all the organization had to offer. I remember that Mr. Roberts asked me to participate the Science Expo, and I immediately got nervous. The responsibility of running a science project and speaking in front of hundreds paralyzed me, but with support I got through it, and it was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. After that, my shyness disappeared and I made sure to take advantage of everything the organization had to offer. Mr. Roberts opened up a new Robotics lab in his garage? I'm already there. Next year's Science Expo was just announced? I'm already brainstorming ideas. They are hosting coding workshops? I already have the scratch open. The Foundation is hosting a four-day long college visit trip in different states? I am first in line for the bus.

My advice is simple: do not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, you might just surprise yourself. Second, take advantage of all the wonderful things YMWIC has to offer, like I said before, do not be afraid to be curious and to take up space. The organization, and the people who run it, are invested in your success and have set up all these wonderful events just for you. Although you cannot possibly do all of them, you would be remiss to not do as many as you can. Considering my background, I did not think a kid like me would have had access to all the opportunities I have been a part of. Twelve-year-old me would have never thought I would be accepted to medical school, yet that dream just became a reality. Please, please, please involve yourself in as much as you can, your future self will thank you for it.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank everyone at this organization for what they have done for me. Their belief in me never faltered, they gave me a chance and a future I never thought I would have. Additionally, thank you Mr. Roberts for coming to my little school all those years ago, I do not think I would be where I am today without your guidance and wisdom. I take many of your teachings with me today, and one day I hope to inspire the future generation just as you inspire me.