



January E-Newsletter

Greetings from Our Office!!!

Hello everyone!

The year of 2025 has finally come to an end and we welcome 2026 with open arms for what is to come, like the snow that has taken over the streets and our neighborhoods.

To prepare for the new year, I conducted a casual discussion with the students, asking them to reflect on their progress and things that they would like to improve on. I asked each student to state their reasons for coming into the office every Saturday. Many students agreed they feel energized to be with everyone, as we've cultivated an environment where the students feel like good friends. Other students mentioned being able to positively impact the community. Some students mentioned that they come for the food - and I can't blame them, but every student agreed that they hold the responsibility of waking up early every Saturday morning to be at the office in order to learn and improve themselves.





It is not only the responsibility of the Operations team and volunteers, but it is a genuine passion of ours to facilitate the best experience for the students to feel encouraged and supported in their journeys of becoming the best versions of themselves. As time goes on, we can see the ripple impacts of our efforts each time the students walk into the office.

As part of the Life Skills Academy (LSA) program, each student is nominated to be Student of the Month. This gives students the chance to observe how the LSA Team operates, as well as incorporating their own ideas and suggestions for how to improve Saturday office hours. They are also tasked with presenting a topic about anything of their interest at the end of the month, giving them the opportunity to practice their public speaking skills, as well as learning how to engage an audience. Two of our newest students, Hanna and Ryan, have been chosen to be Student of the Month. Hanna spoke about crocheting and the positive effects it has on reducing stress, and Ryan (shown below) shared his expertise on video editing, inspiring many students to challenge themselves and create video edits as well. I believe this is my favorite part of each month, as I get to see students in their element, as they confidently illustrate what they are passionate about.





In the month of December, we had our students complete another round of assessments, where many were able to rank in level in our level-up system within the Life Skills Academy. It can be safe to say that all mentors agree that the students in their own ways have grown immensely, whether that is taking more initiative in their projects, or becoming more comfortable with speaking and presenting themselves. I can already see the direct changes and improvements in my own mentees. During this time the Operations team was also able to gather feedback in order to help mentors and the LSA team in order to deliver the best support possible for the students.

We have many exciting projects and events to come, all led by our wonderful and hardworking students, and we are very excited to see them execute and accomplish what they set forth. Marvin Pham (shown above) has been the lead of YouthCon 2026, the first project he's led independently. Marvin is another example of a student who has grown so much since the beginning of his time at AASuccess, a student who has broken out of his shell and took on various challenges, such as being a participant at Outward Bound and speaking about it at our 2025 Gala! Marvin is a consistent student and even if attendance was low, I knew I could always count on Marvin's presence to be there. His outstanding efforts allowed him to become Student of the Season- an honorary title to reward students who have gone above and beyond.

As proud as I am to see the ripple impacts in their growth, it also makes me feel like I have grown too, as a mentor and as an individual. I think that is the beauty within this community where we can all learn from each other, no matter what age you are, or what background you come from. This welcoming community is genuinely an experience I don't think you can find elsewhere.

As I am concluding this letter, I realize that I have the dreadful task of getting rid of the snow that has imprisoned my car like cement. However, like the resilient snow that has hardened and will probably take me over an hour to dig up, I would like to say that with the current rate our students are going at, the theme of 2026 for our students is resilience!

Love,

Lara Tran
Operations Team Member
Life Skills Academy Head



The Saturday Engine: Trust in the Organic

Saturdays at AAS represent a living engine of trust. Our role as facilitators is to protect this organic space so growth can happen naturally without disrupting the environment where twenty students lead and learn together. This past Saturday, I had a spontaneous conversation with Hanna, who joined us three months ago, and Grace, who is just beginning her journey at the Saturday's office year-round (Saturday Engine).

Here is how they described their transition from observers to active AAS Students.

Question: When you first walked into the office, what did you expect to see, and how did the reality feel different?



Grace: I expected it to be more like a classroom where I would just sit down and someone would give me a list of things to do. But when I walked in, I saw everyone already busy and working on different things. It was a bit confusing at first because it is not like school. You realize quickly that you are not just watching others work. You have to find your place and start helping too.

Hanna: When I first started three months ago, I was actually a bit terrified because everything moves so fast. I thought I would just be a student learning, but here, you are expected to take care of things. Now that I have been here for a while, I see that the work we do on Saturdays is real. It is not just a practice or a lesson. We are actually handling projects that help people in the community, and that makes me feel like what I do matters.



Question: How does the support of the other students help you when you feel nervous about a new responsibility?



Hanna: The older students and the people around me make a big difference. When I have to do something new, like speaking in front of the group, I look at the others and see that we are all doing it together. It is not just me alone. Because they support me and do not judge me if I make a mistake, I feel more comfortable trying things that used to scare me.

Grace: Even on my first day, I felt like I was part of the group. Seeing how everyone else is so focused on their work makes me want to do my best too. It feels like a chain reaction. If I see someone else being brave and taking on a task, it gives me the courage to try. It makes the whole office feel like a safe place to learn.

A Reflection on Staying Relevant as a Mentor

I, along with a few volunteer mentors, show up every Saturday making a genuine effort to remain relevant for effective coaching. However, even with decades of experience, we mentors make mistakes. There have been times when I have gone too far in my role, perhaps pushing an intensity or a pace that introduces a disruptive way to advance the very organic growth that is crucial to our success in building one person at a time.

Learning to adjust is a constant process for me. We must keep refining our approach to discover helpful cues by watching how these students think, how they work, and the ripple impacts they generate. When we see them putting in impactful work throughout the year, it reminds us to step back and refine our approach. More so, it gives us a humbling satisfaction to see ourselves making long-lasting differences for our future community of AASuccessors.

While these students spend their time under the operational management of senior members like Lara, Liem, and Angela, they are already applying frameworks like 3H-3S-3A and Crucial Conversations through their projects. They may not yet realize how these pieces align, but our responsibility as adults is to see the connectedness for them and provide the scaffolding of fundraising, networking, and social impact opportunities. As a member of our community, how can you also help us maintain this scaffolding? We invite you to reflect on how we can all stay the course together to ensure these young leaders have the destination they deserve.

Dave Nguyen
AASuccess Founder



The Saturday Engine: Resilience or Overheating?



For twenty years, AASuccess has run what we call the Saturday Engine—a community-like space where high school students gather weekly, not for lectures, but for something harder to define and harder to replicate. It's where stand-up meetings flow into project work, where mentor conversations about calculus homework shift into discussions about integrity, where students manage real-world initiatives like Shark Tank competitions, YouthCon scholarship programs, and community volleyball tournaments alongside seasoned professionals. Each Saturday, students arrive at 10:30 AM and stay through early afternoon, moving through knowledge-building activities, mentor-mentee conversations, and collaborative work. As NotebookLM has become an effective tool for in-depth learning, **this month's E-News presents a debate: What are the pros and cons of the Saturday Engine model?** Two perspectives emerge when we analyze it through the lens of student wellbeing and long-term character development.

[LISTEN TO THIS EPISODE HERE »](#)

How One Relationship Created Community Impact

The 36-Month Journey from Coffee to Tutoring Program

2022-2023: Cultivating the Connection



Alif Brahim joins AAS, eventually introducing founder Dave to Rotary leader Jim Holcombe.



Non-Transactional Trust Building

36 months of relationship cultivation before launching the final project.



Trust is solidified through dialogue, identifying a tutoring need at the Boys & Girls Club.

AAS



BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

Institutional Validation

Partnership bridges AAS, Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads, and the Boys & Girls Club.

2024: Identifying the Community Gap



2025: Student-Led Execution

AAS students Mason and Hillary design and manage a successful state test prep program.



Key People Involved:
5 Leaders
(Mentors, Partners,
& Students)



Total Volunteer
Investment:
**70 Hours
Contributed**
(2022-2025)



Direct
Community Benefit:
**8 Fifth
Graders**
Successfully Tutored

NotebookLM



Field Report: Strengthening the Scaffolding of Community and Trust via Rotary Club of Annandale

For those of us who have remained steadfast in driving the AAS model, we recognize that our mission only thrives when it is self-sustaining. The vision we adopted in 2009, when KMi, Vihanh, and Nini restarted AAS, is now being mirrored in the Hanoi Incubator with our sustaining member Thanh Nguyen and her team of 2 AAS volunteers, is now being mirrored in the AAS Hanoi Incubator. While these engines are geographically distinct, independent, and possess their own local personalities, they are non-separable in the AAS values reflected in our [mission and vision](#).



A vital part of this scaffolding exemplified for this e-news is our relationship with the Rotary Club of Annandale, Virginia. Led by the newly elected president, James Holcombe, the Rotary Club represents a standard of service that aligns perfectly with our approach to building one person at a time. James envisions the Rotary Club not merely as a local organization, but as a proactive force for community renewal. His vision focuses on identifying gaps in the community and mobilizing resources to fill them, much like how AAS identifies the potential in a student and provides the coaching to bring it to life. By supporting each other, James through the Rotary Club in Annandale and AAS are investing in a living engine that transforms young people into ethical leaders who will, in turn, serve Annandale.

This field report serves as a reminder to our students and the entire AAS family that the support we receive from generous community stakeholders like [Eden Center](#), [Ebenstein Family](#), [Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads](#), [White House Farm Foundation](#), and local businesses is not a one-way street. It is a call to action.

As our Saturday Engine sustains itself organically, our AAS seniors and core and sustaining members must rise to the occasion. The resources provided by our community are the very tools we all need to cherish and embrace as resources to advance projects that give back to that same community. We invite our students and our network to reflect on how we can maintain this focus, ensuring that the AAS engine remains a reliable partner for those who believe in our work.

From Cold Call to Core Partner: The Anatomy of a Strategic Relationship



The Cold Call

Exploratory cold call from Dave Nguyen to Jordan Boswell in Florida, initiating contact.



Sharing Expertise & Connections

Initial contributions included Waste-to-Energy (WIE) expertise, Vietnam project referrals, and key professional network introductions.

2023-2025: THE NETWORK PARTNER

Projects in Action

Relationship evolved into executing tangible projects, including WIE feasibility study in Vietnam and Medical Glove Manufacturing planning.



2027 TARGET: THE SUSTAINING PARTNER

Future Sustaining Membership

Projected goal: MD Power provides sponsorship and charitable contributions via the US-IBDC business network.

Providing Strategic Guidance

Mark Boswell offers business development guidance and creates opportunities for AAS core members and future leaders.

Building a Self-Sustaining Ecosystem

Ultimate goal: Create self-sustaining healthcare and green energy networks through technology and partnership.

Creating Student Opportunities

AAS core team members leading business projects, with a plan for 3-5 LEAP interns to join in Q1 2027.

Building the Foundation of Trust

Partnership solidified through monthly calls and two strategic trips to Vietnam for joint work architecture.

Accessing Critical Resources

MD Power provided access to its knowledge base, technical review capabilities, and other valuable resources for joint projects.

THE IMPACT IN NUMBERS



480+
Volunteer Hours

Total hours contributed 2023-2025 to build the relationship's foundation.



\$500,000+
Private Expense

Significant non-AAS investment demonstrating deep commitment to success.



10+ Years
of Future Impact

Projected decade of sponsorship, grants, and internships for AASuccess.



10+
Project Participants

Individuals actively engaged in collaborative projects, expanding network's reach.

AASuccess January Dashboard

JANUARY DASHBOARD

IMPACT SNAPSHOT



SATURDAY ENGINE

6 Active Projects **20** Total Cohort
1:1 AAS Life Skills Mentoring
Key People: 3 Ops Managers, Dave, Jim, Nguyen
Total Hours: 50 Volunteer Hours

→ 3 New Students Interviewed, Accepted & Integrated



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Lead: Jim Holcombe
Key People: 5 (Alif, Jim, Mason, Hillary, Dave)
Total Hours: 70 Hours (2022-2025)

→ 8 Fifth Graders Tutored



SUSTAINING MEMBERS PROGRAM

Lead: Mark Boswell
Key People: 10+ (Mark, AAS Core Team, Dave)
Total Hours: 480 Hours (2023-2025)

→ 1 Strategic Partner + Network Expansion

→ HOW TO ENGAGE AAS >>



PRIORITY #1: SATURDAY MENTORS

URGENT NEED: 4-6 MENTORS, 3-4 HOURS/MONTH

WHAT IT MEANS:

- 🌟 Share Professional Expertise
- 👥 Coach Through Real Challenges
- 🏆 Model Character-Based Decisions (Training Required)

PROCESS:

- Month 1:** Observe one Saturday (10:30am - 1:30pm, no commitment) at 6521 Arlington Blvd., Ste 502, Falls Church, VA 22042
- Month 2:** 2-hour training if interested
- Month 3+:** One Saturday/month

NEXT ORIENTATION: March 7, 2026

CONTACT: information@aasuccess.org - "Saturday Mentor Interest"



PRIORITY #2: AAS SHARK TANK SUCCESS SPONSORSHIP

GOAL: \$1,000 - \$3,000 SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

EVENT TIMELINE: Shark Tank Pitches (Oct 2025 - Nov 2026), Winners Implement Projects (Jan - July 2026)

PROJECT LEADS: Selected AAS Students

OUTCOME: Winners Receive Scholarship Funding for Qualified Education Expenses

DEADLINE: June 30, 2026

CONTACT: information@aasuccess.org - "Shark Tank Success Sponsor"



WHERE YOUR DONATION GOES

Program Development Operational Support
Student Scholarships Educational Materials
Community Outreach



OTHER AAS OPPORTUNITIES

🏐 **Volleyball Tournament (April 2026):** Student-led fundraiser. Interest form available.

📅 **Parent Info Session:** March 7, 2026 - 8:30pm virtual. Email: information@aasuccess.org - "March Info Session"

Link to Volleyball Tournament Interest Form: [CLICK HERE >>](#)

Where Your Donation Goes: [CLICK HERE >>](#)

AAS Community News

1. [THE PLEIN ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND](#)
2. [EDEN CENTER - LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS](#)
3. [AAS DECA INTEGRATIVE MEDICAL CENTER](#)
4. [THE BAILEY'S CROSSROADS ROTARY CLUB \(BXRC\)](#)

AASuccess is a 20-year tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit organization (EIN 20-5897385) dedicated to providing life skills training that empowers youth for both career development and the advancement of our humanitarian mission. Our unique model of student-led community impact has been officially recognized by the General Assembly of Virginia through House Joint Resolution No. 5172. Please note that our programs and the organic growth of our students are sustained solely through the generosity of private sponsors and our dedicated AASuccess sustaining business members, whose support allows our engine of trust to remain independent and steadfast.





Keep the Engine Running with Just \$10/Month!!!

At AASuccess, we believe that every young person deserves the chance to learn, grow, and thrive through life skills training—not to be burdened with fundraising to keep our programs alive. That's why we are reaching out to you, our community, to join us in sustaining this mission.

A monthly gift of just **\$10** can go a long way in helping us maintain our office operations, provide a stable environment for our students, and keep the “engine” of our programs running smoothly. When you contribute, you're not just helping with overhead—you're directly empowering students to stay focused on what matters most: developing leadership, emotional intelligence, and career-life readiness.

We are also excited to share some great news: **AASuccess is now officially listed in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)!** Federal employees and retirees can now select AASuccess as a beneficiary using our **CFC ID: 88404**.

Your support—whether through the CFC or direct monthly giving—ensures that our students can continue to transform their futures without distraction. Together, we can keep this powerful cycle of mentorship and learning alive.



Join us today with a \$10/month pledge and help fuel the future of our youth!!

Donate online: [AASuccess.org/donate](https://aasuccess.org/donate)

AASuccess: Perfecting the Act of Giving Back

6521 Arlington Blvd., Suite 502, Falls Church, VA 22042

www.aasuccess.org

A community without boundaries, built on the principle that when we invest in character development alongside competence, everyone thrives.