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ELi's Summer Youth Journalism Program Graduates First Class of Young Reporters ^[1]

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By:

Grace Bargerstock



Top row, from left: John Paul Robowski, Kepler Domurat-Sousa, Cody Harrell, Berkley Sorrells, Nadiah Dowker, Gadir Mohamed. Bottom row, from left: Grace Bargerstock, Evan Dempsey, Faiza Omar.

In a skinny room, air conditioned to a frosty comfortable, eight teenagers sat in their wheely chairs animatedly discussing the first amendment. They were discovering how thankful they should be for this addition to their constitution, and how their community could benefit from something as basic as freedom of the press.

East Lansing High School teacher Cody Harrell partnered with East Lansing Info (ELi) to prepare a handful of young journalists during a two-week course held in space donated by The East Lansing Public Library. Three hours each day, Harrell held classes covering topics from photojournalism to ethics.

?It has been amazing as a journalism educator to watch them (the students) talk about these tough subjects professionally and understand how to make ethical decisions, which is not necessarily the easy decision to make,? Harrell said.

Almost every class began with a discussion about different ethical dilemmas. Following the discussion, students would move on to the varied topics each day presented. The young journalists faced different challenges during the course, staged to prepare their skills for a final task of writing an article of their own.

?Talking through tough situations and deciding how to handle them journalistically was a fun way to prepare us for potential situations in the future,? Berkley Sorrells, a ELHS Senior, said.

With sources not responding, leads going cold or better ones arising, the students quickly learned the importance of being flexible with ideas and plans. Aiming to report to their community on news that matters to East Lansing, they were enthusiastic about their potential in community journalism.

?I absolutely see myself continuing to write for ELi, as well as writing for our high school student publication, *Portrait*,? Sorrells said.

This class worked to showcase how journalism and journalistic skills would be useful in almost any career. This was the first year ELi had run a summer training program, but thanks to the grant awarded to ELi by the Lansing Area Community Trust (LACT) the program was able to inspire many young writers.

?Journalism is a very fun and interesting topic, and I want to work more with it in the future," Gadir Mohamed, one of the students participating, said.

For their first article, the participants chose a wide range of topics, from interviewing a retiring coach to a highlighting a holocaust survivor visiting East Lansing. Each article was based on something about the community that they found fascinating or cared about.

Harrell watched these students tackle reporting vigorously.

?These are some of the most dedicated, energized students I have worked with in my career, and I hope that each year we can bring together a group of students to help create a culture of ownership and transparency in our community communications,? Harrell said.

Grace Bargerstock was a participant in ELi's Summer Youth Journalism Program.

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