

JaxTHRIVE welcomes new generation of leaders

By Maya Jones, JaxTHRIVE co-president

A local student-led nonprofit dedicated to helping refugee children succeed in their new communities is entering a new chapter with a new team of leaders and a growing volunteer base.

Founded in 2017, JaxTHRIVE was created to provide a safe and nurturing space for refugee students, helping them succeed academically while building confidence and friendships.

What started with a small class of 25 refugee children has now expanded to more than 50 youth between the ages of 5 and 18, the majority of whom have resettled from Afghanistan.

Twice a month, on Saturday mornings, refugee students gather at a Jacksonville church where local teens volunteer their time tutoring, leading crafts, doing science experiments, teaching dance and playing sports.

For years, the nonprofit was run by its five original founders together with a dedicated co-leader, all of whom devoted their high school careers to shaping JaxTHRIVE's outreach. But with the last of the six heading to college in August, the organization faced uncertainty. Would the program continue without its original leaders?

The answer came quickly in the form of three new leaders from across Jacksonville schools: Maya Jones from Episcopal School of Jacksonville, Austin Koziarski



The JaxTHRIVE presidents: Maya Jones, Austin Koziarski and Greer Davis

from Ponte Vedra High School and Greer Davis from The Bolles School.

Maya, Austin and Greer have been JaxTHRIVE leaders in past years, and they are stepping up their involvement, initiatives and responsibilities. Together, they are ensuring that JaxTHRIVE not only survives but thrives. There are now JaxTHRIVE clubs in 10 high schools across the Jacksonville area.

Maya, who is spearheading the group's female empowerment initiative, says she is proud to lead the EmpowHer program.

"EmpowHer gives refugee girls the chance to see themselves as leaders," she explained. "Through mentorship, wellness and self-defense, we're helping them build confidence and envision bright

futures."

Austin has focused on expanding opportunities in financial literacy.

"Many of these students are navigating a new culture," he said. "Teaching them how to budget, save and understand money is a life skill that will help them and their families for years to come."

Greer highlighted the many traditions that have become a staple of JaxTHRIVE.

"From our annual backpack drive to the cozy pajama and treats drive during the holidays, these initiatives make

students feel cared for and part of the community," she said.

The new leadership team introduced the first official JaxTHRIVE T-shirts, launched an updated website and streamlined volunteer onboarding processes, making it easier for area teens to get involved. For teens looking to make a difference, the organization offers a meaningful way to welcome refugee children and help them thrive.

More information about volunteering with JaxTHRIVE can be found on the group's website, jaxthrive.org.



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