

What's Up With Our Alumni? January 2023

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Tyler: Hello there. My name is Tyler Roberts,

Riley: My name is Riley Christianson

Megan: And my name is Megan Copeland. And we are doing a podcast where we wanted to check in with some of our alumni to see how they are doing and what they are doing now, and how their experience at MSAB is helping them today.

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Tyler: For this podcast, we sat down and interviewed Pablo, Brent, Hannah, and Curtiss, four of the alumni from MSAB.

Pablo: My name is Pablo Contreras and I was at the Academy from fall of 2019 to the spring of '21.

Brent: My name is Brent Otto. I was an Academy student from fall of 2016 to spring of 2018.

Hannah: Yeah, my name is Hannah. I attended the Academy Plus program from fall of 2014 until January of 2016.

Curtis: So my name is probably on the roster, if they still show the pictures. My name is Curtiss Johnson. I graduated in 1961.

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Riley: We asked the alumni what they're up to now, and here's what they had to say.

Hannah: I graduated from Bethel University in 2019 with a degree in Relational Communications and umm, after that I my my current job... So I work two jobs. The first is full time. I work doing recruiting. I used to do more hiring, but now more specifically recruiting for a medical transcription company. So just recruiting, working with colleges, universities, individuals, getting them interested in applying to work for this company where we hire people to document information into medical charts in real time. And my other job is part time, and it is for a nonprofit organization that supports kids who are deaf and hard of hearing and their families. And I am hard of hearing myself. And so, you know, that's just an opportunity, I feel, to give back to the community and things like that.

Pablo: Yeah. So right now I'm in college, I'm going in for Human Services, specifically the pre social or transfer pathway. And I'm going to Minneapolis Tech. It's a, it's a good time.

Brent: So I did not attend college. I currently work at a company called Minnesota Diversified Industries. They are a nonprofit warehouse industry, and one of their main goals is helping people with disabilities have a job. And one of the things that they do is very accommodating with all different types of people who have disabilities, anything from vision loss to struggles to doing only certain things with their hands, and anything you can think of. They work their way around it to help any person need an accommodation and help them set them up with a job they need and they even help assist with not even just getting a job at my current company; they can help people find jobs elsewhere.

Megan: Curtiss is now retired. However, he told us that he has a degree in sociology and psychology. He also got a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation, and he was a vocational rehabilitation counselor with SSB for 30 years.

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Tyler: We then go on to ask about any helpful classes, life skills, or activities that they might have learned at MSAB. Brent would go on to tell us about several cooking skills that he learned that really assisted him in independent living post graduation.

Megan: Similarly, Hannah also mentioned that cooking skills were helpful for her, especially her shared experience with one of her peers. However, Hannah also mentioned that taking college classes was really helpful for her.

Hannah: ...But the other thing that was kind of a nontraditional, I guess you could say, benefit of MSAB and something that I learned was at the time I really was not as accepting of my hearing loss as I am now, which is kind of ironic because I do work for a nonprofit that supports kids who are deaf and hard of hearing. And, umm, there were a lot of things that kind of got me on the path of accepting and embracing my hearing loss. But one of the things was actually, when I was at MSAB, I lived in the independent living house. And as part of that, one of the things we did, as I'm sure a lot of people know, is working on cooking and there was one particular time when I was cooking with another student who also happened to have a hearing loss and we also had hearing loss in the same year, which made communication interesting at times. But, you know, because of that shared experience, I for the first time was able to really open up and say OK... If we're boiling water, for example, I can't hear when the water is boiling. Like, what are some good strategies? And so collaborating with this other student as well as with the house parent that was working with us, you know... that, that

shared experience, that commonality of hearing loss was really the thing that even made me feel comfortable enough to ask that question. And if it weren't for that, I probably would have just taken a long time to figure things out on my own, but you know that that shared experience really helped me as far as...you know, being comfortable enough to umm, ask questions and embrace a part of my disability that I didn't fully embrace at the time.

Riley: Curtiss thought his Braille class was most helpful, though it did not start out that way.

Curtiss: I hated Braille. Absolutely hated braille. I'd make paper planes out of braille paper. (Braille paper, by the way, makes great airplanes.) But so I think braille, particularly now as I'm getting older... I use braille every day. It's amazing how that comes back. That was a very, very valuable class. Other classes I think I found valuable was touch typing; learning how to type without using your vision. I don't think I'd have been employed as a vocational rehab councilor, you know, so, so touch typing, is very important. The other ones aren't quite as important; I loved wrestling. It helped me become more outgoing, less shy.

Tyler: Pablo had a different story for us about some home maintenance skills that he learned that helped him out post graduation.

Pablo: I want to say the most...the useful one that definitely comes in handy now for me, is um... when I was working in the work program with like all the woods and like crafting and stuff because that's where I learned how to use a drill and like all that fun stuff and I've just had to fix my bathroom. So, you know, I could have had maintenance come do it. But I'm like, I know how to do this. I don't wanna pay. So I, yeah, I ended up doing that. Something happened in my bathroom and I just got some tools and I was good to go.

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Riley: Next, we asked the alumni if they had any advice for current MSAB students, and here's what they had to say.

Pablo: If I could give any current and any advice for any current students. It would be... to just get the most out of your program because like when I was in the A+ program, you know, obviously COVID was like a thing. And you know, there wasn't really...we were really limited. I don't know how things are there now, but now that things are going, now that things are starting to clear up a little bit, um, you know when you get more opportunities to do more things, jump on it, because I remember like before COVID, I was planning on doing like, you know, classes there at like the college or like, you know, work opportunities off campus. Um, so like if you get any sort of thing specifically like for those of you

who are in the A+, I would just jump on every opportunity that you get because you might not ever get something like that again. Especially, it's really hard to find those sort of things in like smaller cities. Because I know that in bigger cities there's like a lot, but yeah. No, MSAB's pretty...the A+ program and just the school in general is a pretty, a pretty sweet place, man.

Curtiss: I think that joining a team sport, whatever it is, or band or some activities... I think activities are as important as other things because you learn to work as a team, you know. You learn to socialize. So I think just getting involved with as many things that you possibly can.

Brent: I guess my main advice for any student at MSAB would be to take your time to never rush through anything. I think if you go too fast, I think it can distract you and then you forget a step or two. So taking the time to learn one step at a time can make a lot of difference, and that can be from anything that you learn in MSAB, no matter what class it is.

Hannah: Regardless, I would say, you know, kind of going back to that original example of, you know, the cooking situation. You know, this is the time to ask questions, to learn things, and to have that safe space. I know it sounds kind of cheesy to say it that way, but the safe space to ask questions and to, you know, not fear judgment for that, for those questions because you know, even relating back to that that example I shared earlier, you know...part of me asking the question about what should be a good strategy to boil water, you know, part of that was, you know, I wasn't the only person in that room that had the hearing loss, but also just realizing, OK, I'm here for this transition program. This is the time to learn things, and this is the time to ask questions and I'd rather learn things now and figure it out than go off to college or live on my own and have to start, you know, figuring this out when I had the opportunity in front of me to ask those questions.

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Megan: Finally, for our most important question, we wanted to ask our alumni what their favorite cafeteria food was.

Brent: Um. I would say my favorite was their breakfast pizza.

Curtis: My favorite food was pie. ...you know, they'd make roast beef dinners and gravy and I got introduced to a lot of vegetables my mom never made, like asparagus, broccoli and cauliflower and rutabagas and some of them I liked and some of them I didn't like so well. But it was amazing the food they served.

Hannah: I guess I would have to say the tater tot hot dish. That was pretty good.

Pablo: Ohh man that's a hard one cause...I'm trying to think was it the tater tot hot dish or was it the times where we would have like those breadsticks. Because man, I miss those breadsticks, man, I don't know if it was... it's not technically a meal, but like man, those breadsticks. Those were good breadsticks. I, don't know what they did to them or what they put on him, but man. Like I'm sorry, but like there was some times where like they had just come out the oven or something. And I'm like, dude, am I like Olive Garden or something?

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Tyler: Well, I gotta say, that was a very enlightening, very interesting podcast. What would you guys say was, like, your main takeaway from that?

Megan: Well, I think the main thing I took away from that was all the alumni said that you should always take advantage of every opportunity you get here, whether that be a class here, or being able to take college classes, or the cooking, whatever it might be, just jump on every opportunity. How about you, Tyler?

Tyler: My main take from everything is that the food here was pretty good. Breadsticks, especially those Olive Garden breadsticks.

Megan: Ohh, I see. How about you, Ri-guy? We haven't heard from you yet.

Riley: My biggest take away was probably I would have to agree with what Megan said that I think, yeah, you should jump on all the opportunities you get. And this podcast is part of the reason I'm considering joining the A+ program. And also braille paper makes for good paper airplanes!

Tyler: That it does, Sir. That it does!

Megan: Yeah, maybe we should throw braille paper airplanes at our recording studio teacher!

Tyler: (laughs)

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Megan: Hey, we'd just like to thank our friends Noah and Anna. They did all the behind the scenes work for this podcast. So thank you guys so much. (clapping)

Riley: We would also like to thank our alumni: Curtiss, Pablo, Hannah and Brent for providing the information given in this podcast.

Tyler: Thank you for listening, and we hope you enjoyed the podcast and hope you learned something about MSAB.

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)

Pablo: Never let the beadsticks go away...never let the breadsticks go away...never let
 the breadsticks... (fading, in background)

(rock beat rhythm on drums and guitar)