

By: Hansel Desouza

Mahitha Anumola can't stop leading.

After being national representative of the inaugural class of the Student Leadership Class, she's back for her second year, hoping to pass on her expertise to new participants.

Anumola's tenure with the SLC might have started in 2021, but she's been volunteering from a young age. As a kid, she was part of her local chapter of Girl Scouts. And for the past few years, she's been volunteering at the nearby Veterans Affairs Medical Center. "During COVID, things happened," she adds, with a laugh. "My chief at the VA reached out with this new program...and she was like: 'You should apply for this, I think you're a strong candidate'".

The rest is history. Anumola was chosen by the rest of the participants to be the regional lead of the Eastern Region of SLC, then quickly elected national representative.

It wasn't entirely smooth sailing, though. "As a leader...you have to know when to make the tough decisions," she said. Whether it was participants who weren't pulling their weight or a lack of interest, Anumola was in charge, for better or for worse.

And of course, as an active high schooler she had to juggle her activities to make it all work, including running a Girls Who Code club at her school with the experience of leadership gained from SLC. The passion is obvious when she talks about it, especially when she admits her plan is to major in Computer Science in college. "Over the summer, I did a project," she explained. "I held a summer camp and taught girls to code...and they made their [own] website."

Anumola credits her own parents with fostering her love for STEM fields and she realizes not everyone has the same opportunities she had and wants to make sure they do.

The same philosophy is clear in her commitment to SLC. "Coming back for a second year [means] being able to take on more leadership and really see what this program can become," she says.

And it's clear that she intends to be a positive force. "I missed volunteering [before the SLC]," she admits early in the interview.

So does she have any advice for incoming SLC student leaders? "What you put into the program is exactly what you get out of it," she says. "Because you are a leader and got chosen from a group of people that we thought would be good leaders. It's not just going to be handed to you."

"I got a lot out of [SLC]."