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In the spring of 2020, I first learned about the LEAP program and instantly knew I needed to get involved. As a young teenager, finding the right job was challenging, especially because my daily life and responsibilities looked different than those of the average high schooler. Since joining, I've had the opportunity to participate in numerous LEAP events—from virtual programming in the spring and fall to summer internships in Burlington, Vermont, and even weekend retreats at Pico Mountain, where we spent time skiing and connecting with peers.

These experiences have had a profound impact on my personal and professional development. Most importantly, LEAP has helped me improve my ability to work as part of a team, adapt to challenges, and build strong leadership skills. For example, working at Resource in Williston gave me valuable opportunities to strengthen my communication skills and grow more confident in the workplace.

One of the most transformative parts of my time in these programs was learning how to use public transit independently. LEAP supported me throughout that process, and traveling alongside peers with similar experiences made the transition less intimidating. Public transportation soon became an essential part of my routine, and I credit LEAP with helping me build that independence.

Some of my most memorable moments include biking along the Lake Champlain bike path with other LEAP students, sailing on the lake with expert guidance, and navigating Church Street, where I developed strong crowd awareness skills. These outings not only created lasting memories but also helped me grow more comfortable in social and public settings.

Through virtual programming, I was able to explore essential skills such as job interviewing, disability disclosure, and professional communication. The insight I gained from these sessions was incredibly useful and applicable as I began to think about long-term career goals. As a mentor this past year, I have had the opportunity to help the next generation of youth learn from some of my experiences, along with other mentors as they prepare to enter their higher education or professional lives. As a mentor, giving younger, visually impaired youth the ability to look up to me and ask any question they want to know has been a very rewarding and exciting experience.

With all of these skills and experiences in mind, I went on to earn my bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity and recently secured my first full-time role as an IT Analyst. LEAP has been a constant support system in my life and has equipped me with several tools and confidence I need to succeed—both personally and professionally.