

Hello,

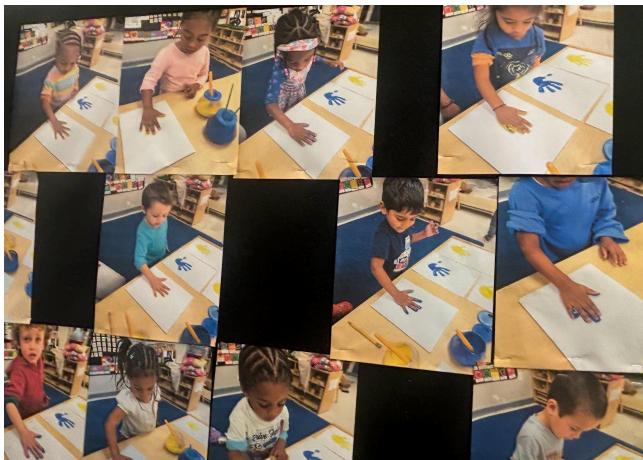
As our nation prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, I find myself asking a question: What good is freedom if our minds do not feel free? The founders envisioned life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but I believe these promises are incomplete unless every person has the chance to experience peace within themselves.

One honoree who understood this is Lawrence Anderson Davies, a leader whose impact extended far beyond politics. As the first African American mayor of Fredericksburg and an advocate for mental health access, he recognized that liberty is hollow when those who are emotionally suffering are ignored. Reverend Davies expanded access to care, supported wellness groups, and pushed for hospitals that treated every citizen with respect. He showed that “the pursuit of happiness” is not just the freedom to chase our dreams, but also the right to heal from the burdens we carry.

Even today, the struggle continues, but in a different form. Millions across the country battle anxiety, depression, and pressure to excel. I’ve seen classmates mask their struggles with smiles, chase perfect grades while their mental health crumbles, and conceal their suffering afraid of being judged. Many believe vulnerability is a weakness; however, Mr. Davies taught us that true freedom is not just freedom from chains, but freedom from silence and shame.



Guided by his example, I’ve made it my mission to advocate for mental well-being in my own community. By partnering with local schools, I launched a student-led mental health initiative that gives



students the space to talk openly, learn emotional literacy, and build resilience. In my workshops, I've witnessed younger students light up as they learn how to name certain feelings, and older students sharing things they've kept inside for years. Every conversation I had with these younger

students reminds me that healing begins with being heard. These workshops appear in the images on the left.

To me, the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness means ensuring that no one walks alone through their struggles. The United States cannot fulfill its founding ideals until every person, regardless of their background, has access to mental peace and the support needed to reach their potential.

Lawrence Anderson Davies built institutions that healed others. My generation must build understanding that heals the mind, because true liberty begins within our hearts, not with our laws.

Sincerely,

Vansh Goel