

# These 18 Arizona students are the next generation of leaders and innovators

Cemile Kavountzis, for Junior Achievement Published 3:00 a.m. MT April 13, 2020

*Junior Achievement celebrates promising young people already shaping the future.*



For more than 60 years, Junior Achievement of Arizona has helped millions of local students succeed in life. (Photo: Junior Achievement of Arizona)

You might not be able to predict the future.

However, you can carve a path to a brighter one by empowering the next generation of innovators, leaders and groundbreakers.

“If you work hard in every way, your dreams will become a reality. Look for your strengths, and strive to thrive, thrive, thrive,” said Jordan Davis-Wiley, who published her first book, “Dreamcatcher,” at the age of 13 and co-founded a family-owned publishing company showcasing young authors. Reflecting on the challenges she faced at school, such as bullying, she wrote the book to encourage others to be dream catchers and rise above tough times.

Through music and words, Jordan has become a positive voice for her generation — and one of this year’s talented **18 Under 18** (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?l=260382&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.azcentral.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fjunior-achievement%2F2020%2F04%2F13%2Fthese-18-arizona-students-next-generation-leaders-and-innovators%2F5130838002%2F&w=173838&s=260385&p=19582&tz=-5>) recipients. In partnership with The Arizona Republic and [azcentral.com](https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?l=260383&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.azcentral.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fjunior-achievement%2F2020%2F04%2F13%2Fthese-18-arizona-students-next-generation-leaders-and-innovators%2F5130838002%2F&w=173838&s=260385&p=19582&tz=-5) (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?l=260383&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.azcentral.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fjunior-achievement%2F2020%2F04%2F13%2Fthese-18-arizona-students-next-generation-leaders-and-innovators%2F5130838002%2F&w=173838&s=260385&p=19582&tz=-5>), Junior Achievement of Arizona’s (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?l=260384&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.azcentral.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fjunior-achievement%2F2020%2F04%2F13%2Fthese-18-arizona-students-next-generation-leaders-and-innovators%2F5130838002%2F&w=173838&s=260385&p=19582&tz=-5>) annual 18 Under 18 awards program honors some of the most outstanding young people in the Grand Canyon State. The program shines a spotlight on up-and-comers who exhibit exceptional entrepreneurial spirit, leadership, community service and an overall extraordinary skill set.

“We are inspired by the hope Arizona’s youth offers us in our combined future,” said Katherine Cecala, president of Junior Achievement of Arizona. “With everything going on around the world and in our own community, we wanted to help highlight the amazing students who bring promise of a better tomorrow.”

For more than 60 years, Junior Achievement has helped millions of local students succeed in life and in work through programs focused on money management, career exploration, work-readiness, critical thinking and entrepreneurial inspiration. JA students have a higher graduation rate than the state average, and 88% of past participants are satisfied with their adult careers.

Among JA's many everyday success stories, however, there are those who aim higher, seek to inspire others and push progress forward. They're the young entrepreneurs who turn a homework project into a business proposal, the go-getters who rally their peers to volunteer, and the visionaries who see the life-changing inventions of tomorrow today. Their narratives are inextricably woven into the larger story of JA, which launched its first Arizona office in 1957.

"We help students get a better idea of their own potential and gives them the skills and knowledge needed to step into that potential," she said of JA programs.

In these swiftly changing times, STEM education — science, technology, engineering and math — has been increasingly important for today's youth. For students, these disciplines offer powerful problem-solving tools and skills. Working with young people from low-income backgrounds, JA helps many kids actualize their dreams and turn good ideas into reality.

"One in three adults who received JA programs as a students credits JA for their future career decisions." Cecala continues, "They learn from volunteers working in the 'real world' about career possibilities they never knew existed. Then they go on to pursue those same types of careers."

A pervasive theme among many of JA's 18 Under 18 recipients, who have never known a world without the internet or social media, is an interest in the convergence of tech and medicine. They see enormous value in using apps and the "internet of things" to improve the lives of disenfranchised individuals.

On a medical mission to Costa Rica, Arjun Moorthy, who also co-authored a motivational book with his brother about their adventures with the Boy Scouts of America, was struck by the lack of health care for uninsured migrants. When he returned to the U.S., he realized many people right in his own home state struggled to see doctors. To meet the need, he launched Screening on Wheels, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating and doing health screening for homeless communities of Arizona.

For him, technology has great power to improve people's lives, especially through preventive medicine. He has created two medical apps to help patients screen themselves for cancer.

"This year's cohort is incredibly diverse and well represents the intricate fabric of the Arizona community," said Cecala. "They come from diverse backgrounds, world perspectives, experiences, skills and interests."

Within this highly talented pool, gifted students range from classical musicians inspiring creativity to inventors building cutting-edge gadgets. From a young age, Elaina Ashton participated in "makeathons" and "hackathons," going from competing in local Lego leagues to completing robotics challenges, on her way to becoming an electrical engineer with a passion for giving back to the community.

This past holiday season, she put her robotics knowledge to good use by adapting interactive toys to make them easier for children with disabilities to use, adding buttons and large controllers, among other tweaks.

Whether it's organizing a book drive or raising thousands of dollars for charity, engaging and involving others is a common thread among this year's 18 Under 18 recipients. They're able to generate excitement and mobilize people through their authentic hope for the future.

With this level of passion, concern for community, and intelligence exhibited by so many local students, Junior Achievement of Arizona has much to celebrate going forward.

*To learn more about Junior Achievement of Arizona's 18 Under 18 recipients, visit [18under18.org \(https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?l=260382&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.azcentral.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fjunior-achievement%2F2020%2F04%2F13%2Fthese-18-arizona-students-next-generation-leaders-and-innovators%2F5130838002%2F&w=173838&s=260385&p=19582&tz=-5\)](https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?l=260382&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.azcentral.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fjunior-achievement%2F2020%2F04%2F13%2Fthese-18-arizona-students-next-generation-leaders-and-innovators%2F5130838002%2F&w=173838&s=260385&p=19582&tz=-5).*

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