

When Nyree Randon and her mentor Sumi Lee met each other four years ago at a pairing event, they knew they wanted to be matched together after having a conversation about ancient civilizations and history. Although the two are different from each other in many ways, they have built a relationship together that has lasted beyond the structure of the mentoring program they joined 4 years ago at Denver Urban Scholars. Nyree chose to participate in the mentoring program because she wanted to have another adult to talk to outside of her family, and because she wanted to try new things. Sumi joined because she saw mentoring as a great way to give back to her community, and she found mentoring to be more of a learning experience than she ever expected.

Over the course of the program, Nyree and Sumi have focused on getting to know each other by participating in new experiences and activities. One of their favorite shared activities is catching up over breakfast at one of their favorite diners in the Sunnyside neighborhood of Denver. Sumi appreciates the fact that Nyree never says no when Sumi gives her some coaching or an idea to try out, her willingness to try things out has led to some valuable learning for both of them. Nyree has gotten out of her comfort zone by participating in ropes course team building events hosted by Denver Urban Scholars with Sumi and trying new foods she has never had, like pho noodle soup, which she now counts as a new favorite. Sumi has learned a lot about anime, art, and comics by going to the Comic Con and Nanu Desu Kan conventions with Nyree that celebrate pop culture, comics, video games and cartoons.

Nyree and Sumi have a mutual connection through art and creativity. Nyree is a talented artist and often shares her art with Sumi. Especially because Nyree is a shy person, art can be a great conversation starter in their mentoring relationship. Outside of her career in the legal field, Sumi pursues creative writing projects as a personal passion, and being around Nyree's out-of-the-box thinking has helped re-inspire Sumi to keep writing while balancing her career. Sumi even wrote a short play for a competition at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts that will be used to promote conversation around diversity and equity in the legal profession.

After being together through the Denver Urban Scholars program and Nyree's high school graduation, Sumi and Nyree feel like their lives have changed in many ways. . They fondly remember their earliest outings and major milestones, from seeing Cirque du Soleil with other mentors and scholars shortly after meeting, to senior year milestones like getting ready for prom and graduation. Nyree credits her mentoring relationship with Sumi for helping her to become more open and willing to share about her life with others. Sumi has grown in her ability to be patient and persistent, and has come to understand that sometimes just showing up can make all the difference. Sumi says, "In our society we think of grand gestures as making the most difference, but sometimes your presence alone can be what it means to be there for someone." Sumi recognizes that while she has had an impact on Nyree's life, it hasn't been a one way street. She keeps a picture on her desk at work from a ropes course event where Nyree is helping literally pull her up on an obstacle they were working on together. Mentoring is like that, Sumi thinks, it's not really about the mentor knowing the answer to everything or having youth being "pulled up" by their mentors, it's much more of a partnership where both partners pull each other up. Since Nyree graduated high school, she and Sumi still hang out and maintain their friendship outside of the program and plan to be a part of each other's lives for the next chapter. For Nyree, that includes plans to study Game Art and Graphic Design, and break into a career creating art for video games.

Sumi and Nyree's message to someone considering becoming a mentor would be to use activities and shared interests as a way build the relationship over time. Sumi says that even though she

was a little bit scared that she wouldn't know what to do or how to be a good mentor at first, she thinks that knowing that mentors and mentees solve problems together is what has made her a good mentor. Being curious, and being open to learning are more important in mentoring than knowing all the answers. Sumi also really appreciates the staff and volunteers at Denver Urban Scholars for providing support. "Mentoring is really not done alone... Even though it's a one on one relationship, there is a village behind every mentor. There are people there who want you to succeed and will be there to answer your calls and problem-solve with you," she says. Through thick and thin, with the support of a community of staff and volunteers, Sumi and Nyree have learned to be there for each other in ways they never thought possible.