"Growing up, I thought a science [career] was only attainable by a select few. Through great mentors and volunteering, I’ve gained confidence and I feel like it’s possible for me. I believe that outreach has the ability to cultivate diversity...[and] plant that curiosity seed; therefore, making science accessible to everyone, regardless of who you are."

-Sulema Rodriguez

Dear EXITO Community,

This spring we have been talking about communicating our research to those in our personal and professional lives. We are thrilled to wrap up by highlighting the experience and insight of a BUILD EXITO Scholar, Sulema Rodriguez. Sulema speaks of how her personal experience with stuttering led to her research interests and to the importance of working to share what we are learning through our research in a variety of settings, making science for everyone and not just a select few.

Don’t miss our Q and A and this short video of Sulema where she tells more of her story and perspective.

Q: How would you describe your research interests?
Sulema: My research interests lies in the possible etiology of stuttering. I’m especially interested in the brain processes and potential epigenetic components involved with stuttering. Stuttering tends to vary by case and is impacted by a variety of factors (bilingualism, social context, level of stress). In order to create the best treatment, I believe that therapy must be individually personalized.

Q: What drew you to do this research?
Sulema: I began to stutter when I was around 6 years old. Throughout my life, I've
experienced the stigma and difficulties of having a stutter. I think that the best way to break these stigma barriers is through education. I’ve always wanted to know why people stutter. I became really good at hiding my stutter. Unfortunately, this made me hide a vital part of myself. Hopefully, through research we’ll be able to improve therapy [and] the lives of stutterers.

Q: Can you talk a bit about the work you are doing with Dr. Griesar in middle schools? 
Sulema: Beyond neuroscience education, we answer questions about potential careers in science. I feel that every time I attend a school, I leave a better critical thinker because of all the great questions the students ask. As students, we get to share our academic and personal endeavors. I’ve met two students in at a middle that have shared with me, that they also stutter after I shared my story. I truly think that NW Noggin is helping to inspire future scientists!

4. How does your work and research experience fit into your long term personal goals? What about your hopes for the scientific community? 
Sulema: I’m currently a part of the “Stuttering Lab” in the Portland State department of Speech and Hearing Sciences. My academic goal is become a Speech-Language Pathologist and eventually obtain my P.hD. I hope that our scientific community places more emphasis outreach. Growing up, I thought science was only attainable by a select few. Through great mentors and volunteering, I’ve gained confidence and I feel like it’s possible for me. I believe that outreach has the ability to cultivate diversity; both of thought and people. Outreach helps to plant that curiosity seed; therefore, making science accessible to everyone, regardless of who you are.

Hear more of Sulema's story in this 4 minute video

Program Highlights

Welcome Cohort 3 Scholars!

After much deliberation and thoughtful review of this year’s applicants, we are so excited to welcome 97 amazing and inspiring individuals from Oregon and across the Pacific Rim into our BUILD EXITO Community. We are all looking forward to meeting you at our upcoming Scholar Orientation (June 21-25)!

Dr. Marilyn Mackiewicz on Reddit AMA

Another EXITO mentor took to reddit for an "Ask Me Anything" session where she answered questions about her work developing nanostructured materials that preform a number of functions essential to the early diagnosis and treatment of disease, including targeted drug delivery and imaging agents.

You can read some of the great questions and conversation created here!