

TutorBright

Written by Chelsea Arns

Emmett McFeetors is in grade 11 at Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive High School. Although Emmett is on the autism spectrum, he is just a typical teenager.

Like many parents of high school students, Emmett's mom, Lisa, sought a tutor-mentor from TutorBright for Emmett when he was having difficulty with grade 10 math last May.

I recently sat down with Emmett and his tutor-mentor, Paolo Punzal – a 3rd year University of Winnipeg student aspiring to go to law school – with the hope to give other parents and students a sense of what it's like to be a high school student with autism matched with a tutor-mentor from TutorBright.



Photo above of Emmett McFeetors and his tutor-mentor, Paolo Punzal

Photo below of Emmett McFeetors



TB: Hi Emmett! To start off, could you tell the readers at PACE a bit about yourself? What are your hobbies?

EM: Well, I love the game Minecraft and I love to be creative and build things. I do project building; by that I mean that I build movie props – Lord of the Rings swords and weapons, and time-machines. My first project, in 2013, was to recreate the car from the movie Back to the Future! That was the first project I made on my own. It's made out of cardboard, string and some wire. And then, this Halloween, I made a costume – I became Steve, the main character in Minecraft.

TB: Wow, that's so cool! With the wealth of technology out there these days, many people say that kids are not as imaginative or creative as they used to be. But for you, it seems that could not be further from the truth!

TB: What other kinds of things do you do after school?

EM: Well, I was a gymnastics student, and now I'm a gymnastics coach. It's a paid position. I'm learning to communicate with kids in different ways. I'm also part of a bowling league, and sometimes, I'll free bowl. Just bowling alone, it helps me to clear my head. I'll also sometimes compete in tournaments.

TB: What is high school like for you, Emmett?

EM: High school, sometimes it feels like it's an island. And I am waiting, as a survivor to be rescued! Other times, it's great. My favourite part about high school is hanging out. Sometimes I'll hang out alone. Other times, with my friends. My favourite subjects are art, Photoshop and science. The library is cool, so is the theatre and stage.

TB: Sounds like you have a similar perspective on high school as a lot of other students! What is it like having autism in high school?

EM: I may be one of the special kids. But some people don't really know me. I wear a leather jacket, these boots, and these shades. Most people interact with me, and I like that. It makes me feel awesome!

TB: How do you like working with your tutor-mentor, Paolo?

EM: Paolo is a fun guy! It's good working with him. We talk to each other about our favourite things, like games, and he helps me understand things a lot better. We work on math and a bit of history. Before I started working with Paolo, I thought to myself, "I'm not much of a math guy", but now I think to myself, "it's okay, I can be a math guy." Math is one of the most important subjects in school. When I take math next semester, I'll have Paolo for support. I'm looking forward to that!

TB: Awesome! I have seen lots of change in you when it comes to math since the first time I met you. You've made a lot of progress since May! You should be proud of yourself! Paolo, you've been pretty quiet so far. What do you like about being a tutor-mentor with TutorBright?

PP: It gives me an opportunity to make a difference. I help Emmett get better grades, but we have fun too! It's not just a tutor relationship, but I feel like we're also hanging out because it's not always just strictly down to business and work. We have a lot of common interests and we talk about different things to bridge his course material together. Emmett's also really helpful at telling me what he does get and what he doesn't. We work through these things together. It's more than just a tutor experience – it's fun!

TB: Paolo, what has tutoring Emmett taught you about students diagnosed with autism?

PP: That there are different brands of autism – I have a cousin with autism, and he and Emmett are very different. In a lot of ways, Emmett is higher functioning than my cousin. So, it's taught me that stereotypes about autism aren't always correct. Working with Emmett has also taught me that students with autism can and will exceed expectations.

TB: How do you think that working with a tutor-mentor can help other students, with or without autism?

PP: A tutor-mentor can help students because we can figure out how to guide them based on their interests and foundations. With patience and by looking at different ways of approaching things, and by bridging common interests, we can help them understand and grasp what it is they are learning at school.

TB: What are your goals in the future, Emmett?

EM: I can't wait to see what my future will be like one day! I'd like to open up a business and call it 'EJ's Projects and Building'. I'd like to sell some of my original projects. These props that I create and design can be used for movies or video games! I'd also like to be a youtuber and make youtube videos.

TB: That's awesome Emmett! It's great that you want to incorporate your hobbies and passions into your future goals. I'm really excited to see your progress throughout the rest of grade 11 and into your last year of high school!



Photo: Life size model of Steve from Minecraft, a video game.

TutorBright creates individualized academic and mentorship programs for all types of learning needs and for students of any age. Currently TutorBright works with students who are on the Autism spectrum, who have been diagnosed with ADHD, who have problems with socialization, and who have various types of learning disabilities and exceptionalities. To inquire about TutorBright visit:

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