



Aliyah Hoffman  
Senior Profile  
2020-2021

When asked about her first impression of LEAF Charter School, senior Aliyah Hoffman says, “ I thought it was a really pretty place and very nice but I thought no way am I ever going to go to school there. I actually started school at another school which started a few days before LEAF, my parents encouraged me to go to the first day of school at LEAF just to check it out. When I first arrived at LEAF that day, I thought it would just be a day when I do something a little different but by the end of the day, it was clear, I was going to school at LEAF! Until I visited, I didn’t really see LEAF as a possibility for me because it was so different from other schools I had been to. It didn’t seem realistic.” What about that first day changed her mind? “ LEAF was a really pleasant place to be and a relaxing environment. It wasn’t so crazy like other schools I had been to. It was also the

people. It was very easy to talk to everyone on that first day. In other schools, I had felt like I had my place and there were people I couldn’t talk to because I wasn’t in their friend group but at LEAF everyone talked to everyone and it was easy.”

What are some of Aliyah’s favorite memories of LEAF? “I look back fondly on freshman year. One day I got lost in the woods. It’s a fun memory. It wasn’t at the time but it is now.” “Our trip to Canada was also a really great experience. I remember how much fun we had when we went to visit a waterfall and we were all rushing down really steep stairs to get soaked by the waterfall at the bottom. We were soaked for the rest of the day and even at dinner we were still soaked, but it was great!” Aliyah also remembers Exhibit Nights. “It’s cool to have the whole community together to see everyone’s work. I like to build things so my big models of an ancient Mesopotamian Temple and the Luxembourg Palace really stand out to me. I was glad I was given that option.”

Many staff members have made a big impression on Aliyah. Humanities teacher Hillary O’Brien offered an “advanced reading program last summer that I absolutely loved. We met outside at LEAF. It was great to get together and talk about books which I love to do! In general, Hillary is a fun person to talk to about books. She is so smart and knows so much about things. She is a cool person.”

Humanities teacher, Chris Becker “is really cool and I learned a lot from him. Chris helped me look at things from new perspectives and helped me think about things differently and get out of my comfort zone. I really appreciate that and I think it was important for me. I learned to challenge my own thought processes.” Together, Chris and Hillary “have a really engaging way of teaching and you can tell that they are really interested in what they are

teaching. I like the way everything we learn about is connected to current events. I think that is useful.”

Aliyah has a lot of respect and admiration for founding director and art teacher Dakota Benedetto. “I really appreciate her opinion on a lot of things and I think she is an extraordinary person.”

Aliyah’s advisor, yoga and nature walk class teacher Elizabeth Burnell has been a positive influence. “Elizabeth makes me smile every time I see her. Sometimes I am having a bad day and she doesn’t even know I am having a bad day but just by being there she makes it better”.

Math teacher Chris Aguda-Brown “is so willing to help which is really nice. He is a good quality math teacher. He makes sure everyone gets it and he doesn’t leave anyone behind.”

STEM teacher Joe Quimby “is a funny person. His classes are fun but also challenging but in a good way. When I figure it out and really understand what I am doing in his class, it feels really good. It is really satisfying.”

While at LEAF Aliyah has enjoyed a variety of art classes. “Art classes at LEAF were very different from art classes I had taken at other schools. They’re more open and more creative. There is never a set way. I was able to be more creative. I took an art class my second year that was more technical but we then used the technical skills to do a creative project. As I have taken more art classes it has become more about developing a project and giving each other feedback. I learn a lot from classmates. Both by seeing their work and having them talk about their work. The art classes inspire me to be more creative.” Founding director and art teacher, Dakota Benedetto “is a very encouraging art teacher. She has ways of seeing things and different ways to think about art that leads to new ideas. She has never made me feel like my art was bad or didn’t look good.”

During her senior year, Aliyah participated in a pottery internship at Old Settlers Pottery. “I had never done pottery before. I learned how to use the wheel, wedge clay, use the kiln, and glaze.” She hopes to continue to pursue her interest in pottery in college.

When asked about her dream job, Aliyah says “ I don’t have a set job that I want to do in my mind but I have an idea of the way I would like my future job to fit into my life. I would like a job where I can be creative and artistic and I would like to be able to get outside. There are a lot of things I would be interested in doing for a career but I am not sure which one I want to do yet. I am thinking about teaching, writing, working with the elderly, or building.”

Aliyah has decided to attend Union College in Schenectady, N.Y. Why Union? “I am undecided about what my major will be. Union is a good fit for me because it has a strong focus both on STEM and the humanities. Union has so many different areas of study. I am looking forward to taking classes in art history, English literature, history, science, and French. I also want to travel to France and Ireland”.

When asked what the best thing about LEAF is, Aliyah says, “ My favorite part of LEAF is the people. I think everyone is very accepting and interesting and they all have something cool that they are really passionate about. There is always someone to talk to and I never really feel lonely at school with both students and staff. I feel like everyone belongs. The location of LEAF is also cool. The building itself and where it is located is different. There is a sense of community because of where we are. The building is a cool place to be and outside is beautiful. We have lots of space. It is a positive environment overall. The students embrace each other’s

differences more than at other schools. You don't have to try to fit in. You don't have to change anything. You can wear what you want, be how you want, and it is not a big deal. Students are pretty protective of each other. Teachers are more involved and dedicated and interested in students' lives and well being. There are less students so the teachers can be more involved and can form deeper connections and have more conversations".

As for advice to future LEAF students, Aliyah says, "Ask questions and talk to the teachers. Be nice to people."