

MAAP STARS Officer: Fardowso Abdi

My name is Fardowso Abdi and I am currently a senior at Paladin Career & Technical High School. This is my third year of being in MAAP STARS, and it has changed me into the person I am now. I am a warrior, a sister, caregiver, friend, student, citizen, and a MAAP STARS Officer. I have many roles and responsibilities in life, the most important of which to me is being an activist. I work everyday to make the voiceless be heard and valued; that was me just a few years ago. When I was in a traditional school, people only saw me for my hijab and I was subjected to harassment. Negative feelings festered inside of me and caused me great mental harm. However, I have realized my calling in life: dealing with implicit bias and am on a road to cultural diversity. At 17 years old, I have faced adversity and discrimination in the forms of islamophobia & racism and not having women's equality for far too long.

I was in an oppressive school system. I was treated differently because of the scarf that wrapped around my head and the color that coated my skin. Before I started high school, I was excited for the high school experience: the football games, the friends, and the cool teachers, but instead I got followed into restrooms, judged, and treated differently because of the way I looked. During my 9th grade year, my dad got really sick and as a result I was constantly in and out of hospitals and ERs with him. I tried and failed to juggle school, work, and caring for my dad. At the end of day, I had to choose between school and my dad. I chose my dad.

Paladin has given me many opportunities, both for a personal and academic growth. During my time here at Paladin, I have changed tremendously. I used to be an angry student and I didn't know why. Paladin gave me the time and space to understand where my anger was coming from, and having this information about my self has empowered me. I am now embracing my role as an advocate and leader among my peers. This is why alternative school programs are so important.

My sister urged me to join MAAP STARS as a chance for me to open up. I came in not knowing what to expect, worrying about not fitting in and not feeling welcomed. From the very first STARS fall conference I felt understood, surrounded by people who supported each other's growth. This organization has given me so much such as lifelong friends, resilience, and the confidence to stand in front of you today, with the courage to say, I am a leader. As MAAP STARS State Officer, I will work to build a community of inclusion and diversity. We all learn better when we learn together, and from each other. My goal as state officer is to bring awareness for those who can't raise their voice and those who are subjected to biases in society.

