

Young Changemakers Case Series¹

Too Young to Rent a Car, Old Enough to Change the World with BioMedizone²

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Commented by

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I hesitated, my finger hovering above the “publish” button on the first website I had built for my first organization. I was just 15—an observant young girl who saw the need for biomedical education and research opportunities in third-world countries. Thus, BioMedizone was born, a fiscally sponsored 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization by Hack+ striving to provide biomedical education and research opportunities to students worldwide in unconventional ways, particularly through connecting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education and Reduced Inequalities in the realm of biomedicine. BioMedizone has grown into a global initiative connecting over 100,000 students from 50+ countries to internships and research projects with

¹ The Young Changemaker Case Series in *PM World Journal* provides a platform for young project leaders to share not only what they accomplished, but also how they planned, adapted, collaborated, reflected, and grew throughout their projects. Each case elevates the voices of young changemakers by capturing their perspectives on the questions they explored, the decisions they made, the challenges they encountered, and the leaders they became. To foster intergenerational learning, every case is accompanied by a Professional Perspective contributed by a project management professional, educator, or recent graduate, followed by a question from the series editor that invites readers of all ages to continue the exploration. This series is created, organized and coordinated by Ms. Evelyn R. Chao; read her introductory article [\[here\]](#). To participate, young changemakers, [submit your case here](#); professionals, [sign up to be a commentator here](#).

² How to cite this work: Palav, A. (2026). Too Young to Rent a Car, Old Enough to Change the World with BioMedizone; Young Changemaker Case Series, series article, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue VIII, August.

professors and alumni from top universities. The journey was difficult, but these challenges have built BioMedizone's foundation on resilience, teamwork, honesty, and action.

From the very beginning, we were faced with limited resources. I mean, how can *high school students* develop and manage a successful nonprofit? There's no instruction manual for "how to create a successful nonprofit as a teenager." As young leaders with no formal training in nonprofit management, we were forced to learn quickly. I pored over Coursera courses on finance management and leadership and thoroughly researched the difference between cognitive and emotional intelligence in leadership. If you're going to be a youth leader, you need to stand up on your own feet. You need to be self-motivated. You should *want* to learn, because the key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority. One of my most useful learning methods was to research what other organizations did that made them successful, and I adopted their strategies. This included potential partners, marketing strategies, and product development. Our lack of funding forced us to be resourceful. If anyone was going to sponsor us, we needed to be worthy of it. So, we built our team from the ground up, recruiting nearly 250 passionate researchers and outreach members. I vividly remember setting up countless spreadsheets, detailed timelines, and juggling team meetings between school assignments. It was a steep learning curve, but we found our rhythm through trial and error, but most importantly determination.

One of our most defining events was Camp Biomed 2023, a five-week long summer camp for students around the world to learn from medical professionals and fellow students in the various fields of medicine. BioMedizone covered specialties from cardiology to neurology with virtual labs, lectures by various medical professionals, and case study assignments. Students joined us from all stretches of the world, Turkey to India, Cameroon to Saudi Arabia, Canada to the Philippines, collaborating on a capstone project like a niche research paper or presentation. The reason this event was the most outstanding was due to the depth of the research paper, which emphasized the importance of communication in research. Camp Biomed focused on translational research and communicating results so that they are understandable, a skill often lost by the excitement of scientific discovery. Thus, communication became integrated into Camp Biomed's curriculum and BioMedizone's core values, and by the end, we not only empowered 150+ participants, but we cemented BioMedizone's global identity.

An influx of people began to join BioMedizone, leading us to grow our initiatives to include free self-paced courses and software development. Now that we are a bigger organization with tangible projects and proof of success, we're finally able to look for sponsorships. We scoured

the internet for fiscal sponsors, cold emailing restlessly until we received responses. The key here is to find companies whose mission aligns with yours.

We kept the organization's momentum going, lining up events month after month. As the organization grew, however, our structure needed to grow too. We assembled a strategic team of executive members to help run departments like Events, Outreach, Research, and Education. We developed a streamlined leadership system, appointing department heads to manage smaller teams and report back to ensure smooth operations, very similar to most corporate structures. But what strengthened our work the most was our team's diversity factor. High school and undergraduate students from around the world joined our projects, bringing unique perspectives to the table.

I recall one experience when a public health internship researcher from Cameroon discussed the importance of public health infrastructure in his research endeavors due to the challenges of healthcare across remote areas. During this public health seminar, as we discussed international public health policy, I began to realize that healthcare demands context. You can't truly understand the depth of healthcare if you learn about it from the confines of your national borders. I can't emphasize enough how opening my mind to global healthcare systems has improved my leadership style and motivated me to provide quality education in third-world countries. For all future entrepreneurs out there, know that diversity is key. Learning from different perspectives allows you to build your cultural competency, a fundamental skill for all aspiring leaders.

From being more well-spoken and professional to being more emotionally receptive, I can proudly say that at 19 years old now, I'm a leader that I once aspired to be when I was 15. But, BioMedizone's success isn't just about perfect execution at all. I mean, we've had so many no-show guest speakers, low turnout events, and last minute cancellations. But true success is defined by creating enduring value for our community and working tirelessly towards reducing inequalities for all, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It's in those tough situations, where perseverance, resilience, and passion builds a true leader.

An essential part of our growth has been learning to embrace feedback and track progress over time. Starting with Camp Biomed, we built feedback loops into our programs, anonymous surveys, reflection forms, and post-event discussions with participants and board members. Constructive criticism shaped the way we refined our camp curriculum, enhanced our website usability, and adjusted communication within departments. For example, after Camp Biomed, we

asked students for their feedback, and many suggested new biomedical topics to include in the camp curriculum. Others offered insight on virtual lab assignment formation and grading techniques, as well as the possibility for more hands-on mentorship. We also began tracking long-term outcomes, like which students continued research, presented their findings, or pursued careers in medicine, to measure BioMedizone's lasting impact. These insights kept us accountable to our mission and reminded us that progress is never static.

As I reflect on the work we have done with BioMedizone, I find myself thinking about how our impact has transcended the weight that numbers hold. Throughout high school, college counselors have told me to measure and emphasize my impact with numbers because colleges would appreciate it more. And sure, reaching 250K people does sound pretty nice. But numbers don't tell the whole story. Our students reach incredible heights, doing things that simply cannot be defined by a few numbers. They further their BioMedizone research as they enter college, face their fears of public speaking in the face through our symposiums, or learn how to code for the first time to create a mental health chatbot. No number could ever do our students' success stories justice, because they're worth so much more. Our programs, such as Camp Biomed empowering public speaking and coding, are structured to become an incubator for helping students pick up new skills as they create meaningful solutions. We're making biomedical education attainable for students who might otherwise be excluded due to geographical or financial barriers, and we won't stop until we reach every single city in every single country.

As BioMedizone continues to evolve, our mission remains consistent: to empower the youth to take their first step towards making an impact and promoting biomedical education and research globally. I hope our story inspires others to approach challenges as opportunities to lead with empathy and determination, especially if it means working towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Despite the stigmas surrounding student-led organizations, I believe that student organizations are much more valuable than society gives them credit for. With enough passion, it can become a significant part of your identity, much more than an average extracurricular can. BioMedizone began as a mere dream, something I doubted my abilities to launch because we started with just two teenage girls. But with a dedicated team and a commitment to making a difference, it became a reality. As I look into the future, I see no limit to what we can achieve. As Margaret Mead once said, "A small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Youth-led organizations are the precursor to true change, something that only progresses as your passion grows with you into adulthood.

If we could do this at 15 years old, so can you. The power of youth lies not in waiting for permission to act, but in boldly stepping forward to create something meaningful. BioMedizone is proof that what starts as a sliver of ambition can grow into a resounding voice of change. My hope is that our story inspires others to realize that change starts small: with a question, a challenge, or even a doubt.

Professional Perspective

Anvi's story illustrates an important lesson that extends beyond nonprofit management: project management is ultimately about helping people organize purpose into meaningful action.

What stands out most is not BioMedizone's impressive growth, but the founder's willingness to learn while leading. Rather than waiting until she had all the answers, Anvi continuously developed new skills—from nonprofit management and fundraising to communication and team leadership—as new challenges emerged. Her experience reminds us that leadership is rarely a prerequisite for launching a project; more often, leadership develops through the project itself.

Another important insight from this case is the relationship between project management and learning. BioMedizone did not simply organize activities. It created feedback loops through surveys, reflection, and long-term outcome tracking, allowing the organization to improve continuously. This demonstrates that effective project management is not only about delivering outputs but also about building a learning organization.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking idea appears near the end of Anvi's reflection, when she questions whether numbers alone can capture impact. While participation data and organizational growth are important indicators, this case reminds us that meaningful change also includes confidence gained, new opportunities created, and identities transformed. These outcomes are often difficult to measure, yet they may represent the most lasting effects of youth-led projects.

As BioMedizone continues to grow, an interesting question remains: How can youth organizations build systems that allow future student leaders—not only founders—to sustain and expand the mission? That question may become the next stage of BioMedizone's journey, and it is one worth considering for every young changemaker.

One Question to Keep Exploring

How do we measure the success of a youth-led project when its greatest impact may be the people it transforms rather than the numbers it reports?

About the Author



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Anvi Palav is from Basking Ridge, NJ. She is a Stamps Eminence Scholar at The Ohio State University majoring in Honors Neuroscience on the pre-med track with a full-ride scholarship. BioMedizone, a nonprofit she founded, has grown as one of the largest student-led international nonprofits targeting equitable access to biomedical research and education, reaching 250K+ students in 50+ countries.

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Yan Xu, Ph.D., PMP®, PMI-ACP®, is an educational leader in digital transformation and learning innovation. She specializes in adult and online education, faculty development, curriculum design, student success, project management training, and youth development. Dr. Xu collaborates with learners of all ages and backgrounds. She is also a historian and a published author.