

AS SEEN IN

TODAY'S FAMILY

FALL 2019



Recent duPont Manual graduate Anjali Chadha teaches participants of Empowered how to code.

By Quinn Fitzgerald Photos by Melissa Donald

From a young age, 18-year-old Anjali Chadha fell in love with science. So, like most kids, she followed that passion. Unlike most children, however, Anjali turned her love for science into an entrepreneurial journey.

When she was only a freshman in high school, Anjali created the nonprofit organization Empowered, of which she is now the CEO, for minority high school girls to learn technical skills while being connected with minority women entrepreneurs in their community.

"This is something that has shown me that in our city, there are institutions and schools and organizations that do a really good job to bridge the gender gap, but most organizations, not just in our city but also throughout the county, are not like that," Anjali says. "We should look at the ones who do a good job and try to spread those models."

Anjali isn't the only one who has noticed the gap. Research shows that the gender gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) is not only real, but that there's a pattern. According to the National Science Foundation, the gap begins to widen in higher education and continues as women are underrepresented in the science and engineering workforce.

The solution? To expose kids, especially girls, to STEM early on in their education.

DuPont Manual High School, Anjali's alma mater, runs a Math Science Technology (MST) program that's designed to prepare students for STEM-related fields in any academic program at any college they choose to attend. Students apply their freshman

year and, if accepted, are required to participate in the program for at least three years. Vicki Lete, assistant principal, says with the plethora of rigorous STEM classes, kids are "exposed to college-like classes so that when they come through our program and go to another school, they're going to perform really well because they've been exposed to such high rigor."

In addition to the courses available, students at Manual are able to participate in competitions like Science Olympiad, both regional and local science fairs, and more.

One particular club at duPont Manual, Women in Science and Engineering (WISE), ensures more girls are participating in STEM. This past school year, 40 girls joined the club, which partners with Bowen Elementary for the annual WISE Expo, where fifth graders can learn about STEM topics through various fun activities like an elephant toothpaste demonstration and a building activity with marshmallows, frosting, and toothpicks. "It's making sure girls have an opportunity for STEM, and we support kids in that program," Vicki says.

Across the river in New Albany, Indiana, Prosser Career Education Center — the largest career education center in the state — has been providing students a different route for studying STEM. Prosser allows students from multiple schools to learn STEM through hands-on courses. Schools are able to save money on equipment and teachers by having the students travel to this one location.

"We continue to fight the stigma as far as what career technical education does and what it provides for individuals," says Principal Nancy Campbell. "Our goal is to give kids the opportunity to be successful after high school."

New Albany High School is one of the 22 participating schools who sends its juniors and seniors to Prosser Career Education Center. Prosser Counselor Jessy Spainhour says, "It is important to keep it going because it's a need and in demand for future jobs. Not all kids have the same path. We are mindful that to be successful, not all jobs require a four-year degree."

While bridging the gender gap in STEM is a big goal, Prosser is also working to change gender roles, for both sides, when it comes to career choice. By exposing girls, and boys, to "nontraditional" work like welding or nursing, Nancy says, "we're making progress."

This progress, she says, is made by reaching out to children and parents early on so they can understand that a career in STEM is an option. It's something Nancy realized a couple of years ago through her own daughter after attending Paint it Pink Day — an event hosted by Prosser in which girls in elementary and middle schools explore nontraditional careers. "On the way home in the car she said, 'You know, Mom, I never really thought about it, but I could be in welding or building houses,' and before that experience she was dead set that she was going to go into education."

"Those are the types of things we hope to do: to at least open their minds to it," Nancy says.

For Anjali, learning about STEM is a way to understand the different areas of knowledge that explain life and human existence as a way to "contextualize what is our place in this world."

"I think what's de-emphasized about STEM is how creative it can be," Anjali says. "It's really a matter of learning skills and figuring out how to apply them, and that's something I believe anybody can do."

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EMPOWERING YOUTH

By Quinn Fitzgerald Photo by Melissa Donald

Google “Anjali Chadha” and you’ll get a page of results about a successful entrepreneur who’s built an impressive list of achievements. Click on any of those results, and you’ll see why “impressive” is an understatement.

At only 18 years old, Anjali has become the example of hard work, creativity, and self-driven success for today’s youth. A Louisville native, Anjali is the founder and CEO of Empowered, a nonprofit organization created to help minority high school girls learn technical skills and connect with minority female entrepreneurs in their community.

Anjali says she chose to help other girls who felt the same insecurities she has felt as a minority girl herself. “I could see that I had all the advantages that most minority girls lack, and even still, I felt unconfident, anxious, and fearful all the time,” she says.

“I wanted to help minimize the negativity that minority girls face in their day-to-day lives regarding their abilities and potential in STEM fields when compared to their male and white counterparts.”

The 18-year-old attributes her love for STEM to her upbringing and schooling. She attended duPont Manual High School, where kids are encouraged to study STEM on a regular basis in a number of ways. Through the school’s science fairs, Anjali earned such recognition that she was featured in a documentary, *Science Fair*, at the Sundance Film Festival. National Geographic then picked up the film, which is now part of their documentary films collection.

At home, Anjali grew up with both parents working in the STEM field. Anjali’s mother, Vidya Richardran, is the co-founder of GlowTouch Technologies — a customer support and software development company. Her father, Vikram Chadha, also co-founder and managing director of GlowTouch, is the co-founder of Backupify — a cloud-to-cloud backup and recovery solution for SaaS applications, including Google Apps, Office 365, and Salesforce.

Growing up around philanthropists and entrepreneurs, it’s no wonder how Anjali found her taste for business. She says her parents have each taught her different lessons. “My dad [has taught me] to always be open-minded, curious, and a lifelong learner. My mom [has taught me] to be persistent, believe in my mission, and put forth 110 percent effort to make it happen,” Anjali says.

“I definitely owe a lot of the success I’ve had with different opportunities to my parents, who have contributed their time, feedback, and moral support throughout the years.”

Anjali says the greatest aspect of her family’s work is that it’s consistently mission-driven. Whatever her parents undertake, she says, begins by considering who will be affected and how can they help those people. “They do not quit until they have achieved the vision that they set out to realize,” Anjali says. “They’ve truly taught me to focus on maximizing impact and being purpose-oriented in any task.”

When Anjali needed a place to run the actual training program for her nonprofit, her parents decided she could use space at GlowTouch.

Everything else, Vidya says, Anjali has done herself. Vidya says her daughter makes the adults look like chumps sometimes. “She works harder than any person I know.



Anjali Chadha, founder and CEO of Empowered

Nothing she’s done or achieved was given to her,” Vidya says. “She’s so dedicated. It’s incredibly motivating. I learn a lot from her in terms of how much she’s willing to commit to something and keep working at it.”

Outside of STEM, Anjali loves to read and dance. She has been an Indian classical dancer for 12 years and plans to pursue Bharatanatyam, a major form of Indian classical dance, at least as a hobby in the future.”

Anjali started college this fall, studying bioengineering at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“I’m really looking forward to being in Boston. From a very young age, it’s been my favorite city, and I’ve always known I wanted to live there one day. I’ll be exploring the food, art scene, and events as much as possible,” she says.

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Like Mother, like Daughter

After interviewing 18-year-old entrepreneur Anjali Chadha, we decided to talk to her mother, Vidya Rivichandran, who is also a self-starter. On top of raising two girls, Vidya is the co-founder of GlowTouch Technologies, a customer support and software development company that provides personalized businesses with outsourcing solutions.

How did GlowTouch Technologies come to be?

Vidya: When I started 17 years ago, I honestly had no idea what to expect. I didn't really have any specific thoughts of the size or scale of the company. I just really wanted to start something. I've always been entrepreneurial. My primary goal was to have more flexibility in my life. I was working in the corporate environment and I was gone a lot, working long hours.

To whom do you attribute your love for philanthropy and entrepreneurship?

Vidya: I completely attribute it to my parents. They're very successful entrepreneurs. It's always been, for them, others before self. Always. Sometimes even at their own expense. It's always been important to them to make sure the people around you, the people who work with you, the community you live in, that we give back. I've grown up in a home where we were always talking about what we can do. It's the same kind of environment we've tried hard to raise my kids.

What goals do you have for your company?

Vidya: We are in the middle of an active growth phase right now. We have a number of initiatives we're working on. One is to grow the company through acquisition, so we're looking at different companies in parts of the world that would be good targets for us to acquire. We're also in the phase of organic growth. The goal for us is to be able to significantly scale up the company and grow the company within the next three to five years.

What advice do you have for parents when it comes to letting their children pick their passions and interests?

Vidya: The one thing I see a lot of kids do, and a lot of parents making their kids do or asking them to do, is to do things that are resume fillers. They want them to say, 'OK, I went and volunteered for two weeks' and then write about it in their college applications. They want them to do these things that they think a student should be doing in order for them to get into a good college or to get a good scholarship. The one thing I have learned from Anjali, quite honestly, is that's a very terrible idea. The things that are coming from her that she's made a commitment to doing, she's done significantly better and with more joy than the things that I have told her might be good for her to try. With Empowered (Anjali's nonprofit), I don't have to tell her to go do it. At the end of the day, colleges are exceptional at picking out the



Vidya Rivichandran, co-founder of GlowTouch Technologies

things that kids are self-driven toward versus the things their parents probably forced them to do.

What aspect of Anjali are you most proud of?

Vidya: As a parent, it's always easier to look at the things that still need to be done, and you lose context of what she has already done. Every time she goes up in front of her students or in front of an audience, that's when it really hits home for me how much she has done and how different she is than a lot of her peers. It's been incredible, and I feel very blessed. She's so gifted and she works so hard. It's really quite amazing to see her mature and grow.