

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hey everybody, I am so lucky to be joined today by Addy Adams, a senior at Cameron High School. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

**Addy Adams**

Thank you.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, so Cameron is pretty small for people who don't know much about it, which means your only option for language courses is Spanish. So even though you couldn't necessarily pick the language you took, you continued it into senior year past what's required for most colleges and high school requirements. So I'd like to assume that you do like it or at least find it valuable. So can you talk a little bit about why you continue to study Spanish and if you think it'll factor into your career, your college plans or anything else in the future?

**Addy Adams**

Yeah, I started taking Spanish in eighth grade, it was, I think, a required course in eighth grade, if I don't remember. And I really liked learning the language because my mom knew a little bit. And so I was like, *oh, this is like kind of a cool new way to communicate*. And then, one, one time, that really just like, solidified how much I love Spanish was I was in an Ulta, in Chicago. And there was a lady who was shopping for makeup, and the employee came up to her and started speaking English. And then the woman didn't speak English. And so the employee just burst out in fluent Spanish. And I was like, that is such a beautiful communication skill. And so from that moment on, honestly, I really decided that Spanish is going to be my track.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And are you thinking of using that in a particular field or just general?

**Addy Adams**

Yeah, I'm looking to go into political science, for college with a focus on just general communications with managing campaigns. And I have noticed in a lot of campaigns that posts, like social media posts that are being made, are often translated into Spanish. And I think that is just a really good way to reach people, and make other people of different cultures feel very comfortable with communicating around US politics.

**Claire Darmstadter**

That is so true. And for me, I grew up in a town that's a little bit bigger than where you are. So every semester I was having a new group of students in my class, and at my graduation I was looking around like, wow, I don't know half of you. But being in a smaller school and with less variance, especially language classes, right? Like you take Spanish two one year, the next year, your only option is Spanish three, do you feel like being with similar students kind of throughout the whole process made it feel a lot more comfortable? Like a closer bond, and you could be more kind of vulnerable trying out different things with language? Or what was that like?

**Addy Adams**

Yeah, definitely. Currently, my Spanish four class has maybe 10 people in it, and it's all seniors. And so, you know, we all kind of make the same, like grammar mistakes. And it's a judgment free zone, which is a really nice learning environment. But that small, like, personal level class where we all kind of know each other and nobody's gonna laugh if you stay por instead of para. That's a really good learning environment.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And now I first met you through Immigrant Advocates of Barron County, a group of incredibly kind people who work with immigrants in the area. But at the moment, you're primarily and we're primarily serving Somali refugees and working alongside them. So I'm fairly new to the group and I don't live in the Barron area, so I haven't been able to experience many of those or any of those in person interactions. With Somali being the main language spoken by many of these individuals, obviously, a language that you don't necessarily fluently speak. How would you show kindness and interact with them in a positive productive manner when there is a little bit of a barrier or a challenge associated linguistically?

**Addy Adams**

Yeah, I would say one of the main challenges definitely is the language barrier. But luckily, we have a kind of go between per se for the English speaking community, and the Somali community that is fluent in both languages. He's very wonderful and works with the school. But just on those personal level communications, I should be trying to learn some basic like hello, goodbye, how are you in Somali, but the communication styles have been, like, it's been challenging, you know, if you have two different language speakers, you might meet at like 10am versus 11am. And so you get kind of a communication barrier with that, but one thing is, is just kind of take it slow, take it in stride, because as much as you don't understand, a non-native English speaker, that non native English speaker doesn't necessarily understand you and the same around. And that's actually a beautiful similarity to be like, let's work on this together. And so it's kind of a group experience. Like, we know communication may be hard, but we are going to get through this

**Claire Darmstadter**

Sort of that meeting in the middle negotiation or conversation, trying to figure out how you can both connect with one another, rather than one group feeling like they have to, you know, learn English to be able to communicate. So looking at the community, kind of as a whole or specifically your school, do you feel like there's an understanding and a support for Somali speaking individuals? Is there, you know, a lot of bilingual aids in the school? Is there signage around the community in multiple languages? Is linguistic diversity specifically discussed and celebrated in school or what does that kind of like?

**Addy Adams**

Yeah, so I would say I live in Chetek, a town, like two towns over from Barron where most of the Somali population is. And there's a definite divide between the linguistic variety in Chetek and Cameron versus Barron like, nearly every sign for restaurants or stores in Barron have English

and Somali translation, sometimes Spanish. But if you get outside of Barron, it's extremely limited. But the linguistic diversity is really interesting, because it sort of ends at Barron, which is a little disappointing. I would hope some grocery stores, like some bigger grocery stores, like Aldi in Rice Lake would pick up some Somali signs, just to make it a little more inclusive. Within the school district, my dad teaches there, and so he has contact with Somali students, he's learning a bit of Somali, and there's good resources for the Somali students. But of course, one thing that has been difficult is the general social part of it for Somali students versus students of more European backgrounds, just kind of the language barrier, some of the culture barrier, and I hope that Immigrant Advocates can kind of help blend that barrier a little more, and, you know, make people a little more comfortable with a culture that isn't necessarily as familiar to them. And just like, make Barron County and Barron more of a welcoming place.

**Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. And I will leave a link down to the social media channels and websites, everything for the group in the show notes if people want to check us out, because so many incredible things are going on. Finally, I think you talked about this a little bit when you were talking about that exchange in the beauty store, but can you just give me a one reason why we should celebrate multilingualism as a superpower, and if you want to answer English or Spanish or a mix of both or whatever makes you feel most comfortable.

**Addy Adams**

Oh, my goodness, I might throw in a Spanish sentence at the end. But it might be a little rough, because it's 7:30 in the morning. But yeah, multilingualism is so important because just like the field of communication that opens up is like never ending even if it's just one other language or you know, some common phrases in another language. You can make somebody's day by just speaking that little bit of another language. Because it's really comfortable. Like when you're an American traveling in other countries, and you hear someone speaking English, you're like, Oh, that's really cool. They learn English. But I feel like we as Americans don't typically learn other languages as much as other countries learn English. So I think it's kind of returning the favor per se, and just making other people feel really comfortable and really welcome and spaces where they didn't necessarily expect to be.

**Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. Well, thank you so much for your time. I hope you have a great school day. I'm excited to see that it's safe enough where you guys can be in school and have a great rest of your day!

**Addy Adams**

Yes, you too. Thank you.