

## Bridging the Gaps: Inspiration through Community Engagement

The national Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program focuses on connecting low-income underinsured minority women with nurses during their first pregnancy and working to maintain the connection until the child reaches the age of 2. This past summer I had the opportunity to work at the Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership and Mabel Morris Home Visiting Program (NFP/MM) through the Bridging the Gaps (BTG) Community Health Internship Program. The Mabel Morris Home Visiting Program connects nurses to low-income disadvantaged mothers with children under the age of 5. The nurses conduct home visits with each client every two weeks to provide education concerning pregnancy-related information, developmental milestones for their child, and/or nutritional and healthy living tips.

I worked alongside two other BTG health professional students, a doctoral occupational therapy student from Thomas Jefferson University and a nursing student from University of Pennsylvania, to organize the non-profit's annual Community Action Day (CAD). The purpose of CAD is to promote a sense of community for families and encourage community engagement based on self-identified needs. Our goal was to bring in partners from the community that could provide resources to the mothers and families in the program. The responsibility of organizing CAD challenged me in so many new ways. Instead of acting in the role of an assistant to others, I was able to work with the other BTG interns and take on the responsibility of making decisions regarding the event. It was very encouraging to be able to exercise the skills I learned in my public health

classes in the real world. I also learned how to network with other organizations in the community. It was very gratifying to see the results of our hard work that made Community Action Day a success. I enjoyed seeing the families take part in the activities and get connected to resources in their community that they may not have been aware of prior to the event.

Working at the NFP this summer was an amazing experience. It showed me the extent of the reach and impact that community health organizations such as NFP/MM can have on the community. True health care should not only be limited to clinical care but also include social partnership, and NFP/MM embodies that notion. NFP/MM is an invaluable program that truly bridges the gap in health, information, and resources for the mothers and families that they serve. It's much more than a home visiting program. They are a family. NFP/MM gives new meaning to the age-old adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." My understanding of community health has definitely been affected and expanded by my experience working at the Nurse-Family Partnership. This experience has only further cemented my desire to work with underserved populations in the field as a future clinician and public health practitioner.

Unlike other health professional summer programs, BTG brings together the opportunity to work in the community, network across health professional schools, and to also hear from individuals in the field that are doing amazing the work that we as students hope to one day be doing. This summer I felt as though I did "bridge the gap" through each individual life I was able



*Nisha Hodge by her poster at the Bridging the Gaps Symposium.*

to help and the connections I made with other BTG interns. I know now it is possible to make an impact even if it is a small one. As the chaos theory states, "something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world." I believe BTG is the catalyst that sets in motion the journey for each student to make a difference in the future in their respective professions for a better world.

**Nisha Hodge**

*MPH Student*

*Jefferson College of Population Health*

*Nisha.Hodge@Jefferson.edu*