

Bridging the Gaps: A Wealth of Learning on the Front Line

Thomas Jefferson University continuously demonstrates its dedication to the advancement of the Philadelphia community and beyond. As MPH students here in the Jefferson College of Population Health (JCPH) we experience daily how our curriculum challenges its students to advocate for populations and communities that may not have as many resources as its surrounding communities or the rest of the nation. JCPH not only wants to develop advocacy skills in the classroom but also through tangible experiences within the community. This summer, two students from JCPH, Kerona Sharpe and Sydney Shuster, were able to gain experience with working with underserved populations through Bridging the Gaps (BTG) program this summer. [Bridging the Gaps](#) is a consortium comprising Thomas Jefferson University, the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Drexel University, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Philadelphia University and other affiliate programs. The program makes a strong effort to promote interdisciplinary collaboration by recruiting interns who are studying public health, medicine, nursing, social work, occupational therapy and other health and social service professions. For over 25 years, BTG has partnered with various non-profit organizations across the city to promote improvements in the health and social services of the unique populations that these various non-profits serve. This seven-week immersion program provides valuable resources and experiences for both the organizations and the interns who had the opportunity to collaborate together this summer. Also included in this meaningful experience were weekly lecture sessions from guest speakers about various social and health topics that helped us all to consider social determinants of health that we as future professionals should consider in our work. Overall, this experience was excellent

and provided exposure and experience that will prove to be valuable for our future careers.

KERONA'S EXPERIENCE

This summer I was paired with [Southwest Community Development Corporation \(CDC\)](#), a non-profit organization that works to provide resources and support to all its community members ranging from housing and economic development to educational opportunities for youth. More specifically, Southwest CDC hosted a summer program at Patterson Elementary School. My job, along with two other interns who were from the University of Pennsylvania's Dental and Nursing programs, was to create a curriculum that would teach the children from grades K-6 about the human body, taking a 'head to toe' approach. We developed short health education programs and taught various health topics that fall under cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive and immune health. We also incorporated pertinent discussion about more common conditions within their community such as asthma, diabetes, and issues such as nutrition and reducing exposure to second-hand smoke. When working with children, it is important to recognize how much potential is sitting in each seat before you. Our job was to learn from them how we could best assist them in gaining usable and meaningful knowledge that would promote the improvement and maintenance of their own health and those who surround them.

Although my team and I have different perspectives about our approach to health given our various training backgrounds, we had a common theme and goal. We all understood that in order for individuals to have the best chance of living a quality life, one of the most important tools we can employ is to teach the younger generation

how to protect and advocate for their own health. With a foundational knowledge about their own bodies, they will have an opportunity to build more knowledge about leading healthy lives (including exercise and nutrition) and how to help prevent chronic conditions such as hypertension and diabetes and poor health behaviors such as smoking, ultimately increasing the health literacy of our group moving forward. It is my hope that I was able to pass on as much valuable information as they gave me. I was able to put into practice important listening skills as well as learning how to tailor health information for various audiences from the very young kindergartners to the older adolescent-aged individuals. It truly was a joy to work for the summer camp this past year and I am grateful for the opportunity that was offered to me through Jefferson and through Bridging the Gaps!



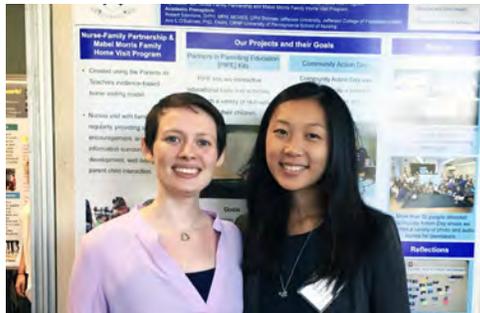
Kerona Sharpe (left) with Stephanie Chang, Penn Dental (center) & Katherine Mills, Penn Nursing (right)

SYDNEY'S EXPERIENCE

This summer I was afforded the opportunity to work with Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) and [Mabel Morris Family Home Visit Program](#), two nurse home-visiting programs based in the Fishtown neighborhood of Philadelphia. These programs use the Parents as Teachers evidence-based home visiting model. Nurse Family Partnership pairs nurses with low-income first time mothers. Mabel

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Morris Home Visit Program pairs nurses with low-income parents raising children under five. Nurses visit with families regularly, providing support, encouragement, and information surrounding development, well-being, and parent-child interaction.



Sydney Schuster (left) with Valerie Bai, Penn Nursing.

My main task over the summer was to work with my teammate, a nursing student at University of Pennsylvania, on several projects. The project that I oversaw most was an event called "Community Action Day." Community Action Day was designed to gather the perspectives of the clients on

policy and advocacy issues and give the clients a chance to learn how to organize and get involved around issues that they identified as important. We contacted clients who signed up to attend and administered a survey we developed to find out ahead of the event which issues were important to them. We also designed, implemented, and analyzed a photovoice project, where clients take their own photos of important health issues for display on the day of the event and to eventually present to lawmakers as health advocates. For the event, we collected and presented resources designed to assist clients in getting involved in their communities and influence change.

NFP and Mabel Morris Family Home Visit Program showed me that evidence-based programs intent on constantly evaluating outcomes do exist. I saw how programs like these can work to continually build a strong, patient-centered team of providers who are invested getting the job done and being effective. This experience gave me the opportunity to work with a population

I didn't usually study or interact with. I was able to use skills I developed in the MPH program to help a community advocate for itself. Because of this experience, I feel confident in my abilities and resolute to go forward and do more of this work in the future. Anyone passionate about working in Public Health could benefit from going through this program, and anyone who wants to learn more about Public Health will gain a greater understanding of why it's important through the program's different facets from the weekly workshops to working with interdisciplinary teams, and with various populations first-hand.

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