

Niagara University ambassadors engage community in public health conversations



Niagara University public health youth ambassadors Rose Bright, Nevaeh Williams, Nye'Aria Brown and Ayla Patterson presented the work they completed over the seven-week program during a celebration at the Niagara Falls Public Library on Aug. 18.

BY NIAGARA UNIVERSITY

Over seven weeks this summer, four youth workers between the ages of 14 and 18 from the Niagara County Office of Workforce Development served as health ambassadors for the Niagara Falls community. The young women first learned about public health issues including COVID-19, vaccines, and social determinants of health, and then went into the community to engage members in conversations about these issues through door-to-door canvassing, social media and poster campaigns, outreach events for seniors, and educational workshops for their peers.

The program was hosted by Niagara University's Rose Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Equity and Mission, in partnership with Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.

On Aug. 18, the ambassadors – Ayla Patterson, Nye'Aria Brown, Nevaeh Williams and Rose Bright – shared their work during a closing celebration at Niagara Falls Public Library.

"We are extremely excited about these young people and proud of them because, when we all think about science, we think it is an adult space; we think that adults get to make decisions about how we all should live healthful lives," said Dr. Rolanda Ward, endowed faculty director of the Ostapenko Center. "But this process was about having young people learn some of these adult concepts, and then translate them into language where everyone has access to information about what keeps us healthy."

Ostapenko Center youth summer outreach coordinator Matthew Cosmai, summer outreach students Javeon Mathews and Shunlei Win, and project director Kaylyn Townsend provided leadership for the ambassadors throughout the program.

In addition to learning about public health, the ambassadors found out more about the resources available to residents through community organizations such as the Community Health Center of Niagara Falls, Create a Healthier Niagara Falls Collaborative, Heart, Love & Soul, Pinnacle Community Services, YWCA – Carolyn's House, Community Missions, Field & Fork Network, and the Coalition

for Economic Justice. They also learned ways they could become more involved in their community from leader Ezra P. Scott Jr. and Councilman Donta Myles.

"One of the biggest things that I've learned is that knowledge is power," Myles told the ambassadors during the ceremony. "So, I believe that what you are doing to inform us about the things that a lot of us didn't know is amazing. You are no longer the future; you are present leaders of today. We thank you for all the work that you are doing, and we'll be looking for more from you in the future."

Some of the program's activities included creating chalk drawings on streets in the city that featured motivational messages and information about public health and resources; doing COVID-19 outreach at Heart, Love & Soul and Community Missions; and meeting with the CEO of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center and members of hospital departments, including pharmacy services, infectious disease, outpatient behavioral health and psychiatry services, the P3 Center, the athletic trainer and sports medicine, rehabilitation, Health Home, business, the Child Advocacy Center of Niaga-

ra, and volunteer services.

The ambassadors also toured the Niagara University campus and provided COVID-19 education that focused on wearing a mask, proper hand washing, the effectiveness of vaccines, how germs spread, and how to take a coronavirus test for students at summer camps hosted by Niagara Falls High School and the YWCA – Carolyn's House.

The young women said that the experience helped them step out of their comfort zones and inspired them to continue to be community activists.

"This summer, I learned that helping people in our community is important," Bright said. "It gave me more motivation to help people in need. In the future, as an ambassador, I will try to help the community by doing more volunteering and eventually starting my own charity for people in need."

Although the program came to an end in August, the work the ambassadors did will continue, Ward said. "We will be using their posters, putting them on bus shelters, in the newspaper, and on social. Their products are how we will communicate with the community on how to keep safe."

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BBB tip: Be safe when sharing back-to-school photos of your kids

BY THE BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU

With the school year starting again, social media is full of adorable back-to-school photos. Often, these pictures feature a child holding a "first day of school" sign with basic information, such as their name and grade. But before you jump on the trend and snap a similar picture of your little one, read Better Business Bureau's tips and be cautious about what you share.

✓ **Avoid sharing personal details about your child.** Back-to-school photos often involve kids holding a board with their full name, age, height and other details. Scammers or predators could use this information to commit identity theft or earn your child's trust.

✓ **Leave off information about kids' schools.** Even sharing the name of your

child's school, teacher or grade level could make them a target for unscrupulous people. Not to mention, these details are often used as security questions for banking or credit card accounts.

Before you jump on the trend and snap a similar picture of your little one, read Better Business Bureau's

✓ **Double-check your privacy settings.** Review your social media account's privacy settings regularly. Be mindful of whom can view your posts. You may want to remove personal information from your account that others

can see, such as your telephone number or address.

✓ **Watch out for phony friend requests.** Don't accept friend requests from strangers. Also, think twice before you accept a friend request from someone you are already connected with. It could be an impostor trying to access your information and friends list.



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