

Bridging the Gaps



Summer@Smith: Returning to In-person Learning through Play at Smith Memorial Playground

Student Interns

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Academic Preceptors

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Community Preceptor:

Betsy Neiva, PhD, Smith Memorial Playground and Playhouse

COMMUNITY PARTNER



Smith Memorial Playground (<https://smithplayground.org/>) opened in 1899 and is located in East Fairmount Park, where it serves as a safe and welcoming urban play area for unstructured play. Children of all backgrounds come together to play in nature and the extensive playhouse and playgrounds surrounding the mansion. Smith Memorial Playground funds and hosts several community projects to bring kids and their families out to a safe and fun space to explore and – most importantly – play!

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Summer@Smith started last year to return children to group play after a year in a virtual school setting as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The free camp primarily serves underresourced kids, providing them with opportunities for development and exploration that they may not otherwise have through the public school system. Philadelphia public schools are chronically underfunded, with large achievement gaps existing between children educated in private/independent schools and those in public school.¹ This trend is present to varying levels across the country, contributing to the necessity of non-profit institutions to serve these children.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gaps interns worked in collaboration with the Smith Memorial Playground staff to run the summer camp for preschool kids aged 4-5 years old and elementary kids aged 6-9 years old. The interns' main role was to coordinate and carry out the summer camp's daily activities and promote healthy social skills and group dynamics. This was achieved through engaging the children in literature, creative arts, athletics, and science. Learning and socialization through play in Smith Memorial Playground's vast outdoor playgrounds and indoor playhouse was a major component of the day camp's goals.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/JOYS

BTG interns had the opportunity to:

- Teach a lesson on oral health, with special emphasis on circular brushing technique
- Lead a heart health lesson using balloons and straws for demonstration with special emphasis on exercise and healthy eating
- Facilitate literacy activities
- Encourage learning and socialization through play
- Guide the campers as they explored their interests and discovered their strengths



REFLECTION

Kendra: "There was so much to love about working as a day camp counselor for Summer@Smith, but I especially enjoyed the oral health skit & workshop we did with the campers. I loved watching the metaphorical lightbulb go off in their heads when they figured out how to use their toothbrushes in small circular motions. It was more than just a fun activity; I truly believe it will help these children improve their oral health for a lifetime."

Lauren: "I enjoyed watching the kids grow throughout the summer and try new things every day. But I think the most impactful part of Summer@Smith was seeing how the social determinants of health play a role in every aspect of a person's life, even as children. Awareness of SDOH, children's experiences with trauma, and their impacts on behavior will make me a better and more empathetic pediatrician."

Muni: "Working at Smith was an incredible experience in so many different ways. What stood out the most for me is the opportunity to get a hands-on experience with kids and help them explore their creative and intellectual potential. I had never worked with kids before and this opportunity gave me the inspiration to want to become a pediatric nurse. Other than that, I was able to improve my communication skills with the kids and my coworkers."



¹Maggie Mancini. Pennsylvania school funding trial: Philly schools need more resources to close achievement gaps, Superintendent Hite says. Philly Voice. January 11, 2022. Accessed July 30, 2022. <https://www.phillyvoice.com/pennsylvania-school-funding-trial-education-philadelphia-hite/>