

Bridging the Gaps



DREXEL UNIVERSITY
College of
Medicine

Building Community at North Light through Mentorship in Health and Wellness

Student Interns: Jack Armstrong, Lauren Carmody, Tharun Nandakumar, Kelsey Talarico,
Drexel University College of Medicine

Academic Preceptor: Tariem Burroughs, PhD, Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health
Community Preceptor: Krista Wieder, MBA, North Light Community Center

COMMUNITY PARTNER

North Light Community Center is located in the heart of the Manayunk neighborhood. The aim of North Light is to support and strengthen their neighborhood through initiatives such as a summer camp for children to learn and play, programs for teens to reach their full potential, advice and assistance for parents, and a safe space for the community to discuss issues they face. Their mission is to empower people of all ages and abilities in their communities, especially those most in need, to reach their fullest potential as productive and responsible citizens through initiatives that support and enrich children, teens, and families. Learn more about this wonderful community landmark at <https://www.northlightcommunitycenter.org/>

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

North Light Community Center was founded in 1936 to serve as a drop-in center for youth to decrease delinquency and petty crime. This goal has evolved over time to match the needs of the community. NLCC serves as a place for children to bolster their education as well as meet their recreational needs and for teenagers to gain the college readiness skills vital for their future success. NLCC's day camp focuses on social, emotional, and physical well-being for over 150 children.

Summer camp demographics:

- 49% of campers identify as Black
- 35% White
- 4% Hispanic
- 12% some other race
- 57% of campers identify as male
- 43% female
- 32% of children receive a state subsidy
- 22% receive North Light financial aid
- 46% are full pay.

NLCC has also had a vast impact on the Manayunk community, distributing over 160,000 pounds of food to help address food insecurity and providing 1,800 people with critical needs like food and utility assistance.



Campers at The Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University.



Workshop on CPR and first-aid

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gaps student interns worked as mentors alongside staff at the summer camp at North Light Community Center. The interns worked with children aged 4-12 years old and engaged in play, learning, and communication. Daily activities included learning about the environment, exploring nature, and fostering connections between the campers. The interns also taught important health topics such as CPR, first aid, oral health, and personal hygiene.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Taught CPR using training kits
- Taught about oral health using models and diagrams
- Discussed administering first aid and calling 911 when needed
- Reviewed personal hygiene
- Discussed mental wellbeing and tools to de-stress
- Engaged in physical activity and sports
- Fostered creative thinking through play and arts and crafts

REFLECTIONS

Jack Armstrong: "Volunteering at North Light taught me more about early childhood education and introduced me to a warm, tightly knit community. I gained a greater appreciation for the invaluable work that educators and child-care professionals do and was witness to significant resilience demonstrated by so many young children. Furthermore, I learned that there is still so much more work and resources that need to be devoted to children's wellbeing in Philadelphia. I am very grateful for my experience at North Light, and I will always remember the community's kind welcome and focus on their children."

Lauren Carmody: "Volunteering at North Light this summer gave me a deep sense of compassion for the kids I worked with. Alongside teaching and organizing play, I learned about their family lives and how North Light was a space of safety and community for them and their peers. The summer re-ignited my inner child and natural curiosity as we talked about many topics from first aid to engineering. Additionally, I practiced patience and learned to problem-solve in our classroom. I enjoyed contributing to this community and am thankful to the kids and staff for being so welcoming."

Tharun Nandakumar: "I have learned countless valuable lessons from working at North Light Community Center this summer. I gained a new appreciation for teacher working in communities like the diverse one seen in Manayunk as each child comes from a unique background and situation at home. The various challenges we had to navigate from the director of the camp quitting the day before it started to losing air conditioning for the entirety of the camp has taught me how to adapt on the fly and remain resilient. Despite the challenges, seeing the smiles on the kids' faces made every minute working at North Light incredibly satisfying!"

Kelsey Talarico: "North Light Community Center has been a pillar of community strength and connection for generations. I am so grateful for the opportunity to become part of that community for the summer and to observe the love and care the campers and staff have for each other. Through this summer I have learned so much about the work and time devoted to developing North Light into a safe haven for children and adults. North Light is a place where everyone is accepted and I will take away lessons of hope, resilience and compassion."