

Deeper Engagement

COMMUNITY SCIENTIST ACADEMY DELIVERS FOR RESEARCHERS



High school students who graduated from TRI's Community Scientist Academy helped Jessica Snowden, M.D., develop appropriate materials to recruit for a pediatric asthma/vitamin D study.

As Jessica Snowden, M.D., was preparing to recruit asthmatic children into a vitamin D study, she needed feedback on the recruitment materials.

The input had to come from her target audience, not adults, said Snowden, associate professor and vice chair of Research in the Department of Pediatrics, College of Medicine.

Snowden is leading the Vitamin D Supplementation in Children With Obesity-Related Asthma (VDORA1) study. Arkansas is one of 15 states in the study sponsored by the IDeA States Clinical Trials Pediatric Network.

She didn't have to look far to find the perfect group to assist: high school students who had recently graduated TRI's Community Scientist Academy. The 24 Little Rock School District EXCEL students in the Advanced Medical Sciences Program attended the 10-week course conducted by TRI's Community Engagement Program. They learned about the research process and met with UAMS researchers.

The academy, typically a six-week program for adults, aims to foster community partnerships with UAMS research. It was a hit with the EXCEL students. Eight became enthusiastic participants in a focus

group style meeting with Snowden, coordinated by TRI's community engagement team.

The students dove into the recruitment materials, helping Snowden better frame tricky concepts, such as communicating about obesity.

"It was insanely helpful," Snowden said. "They told me, you need to fix this part of this language and this part of this graphic. They noticed things I didn't notice at all."

"The Community Scientist Academy is a really nice way to partner research resources to get a bigger bang for our buck."

- Jessica Snowden, M.D.

Zoe Holland, one of the students, said the work with Snowden was meaningful. "I like being part of something that's creating change for the good," she said.

Sixteen of the students also participated in a study related to teen pregnancy, helping assess existing teen pregnancy prevention program materials.

The students' participation in both studies represents an exciting new phase of deeper engagement, said Kate Stewart, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Community Engagement Program.

"We wouldn't have had those relationships without the academy," she said. "The students gained an understanding of the value of research and how they could play a role."



Kate Stewart, M.D., M.P.H.

Making a Difference

NEW CPEARL PROGRAM HELPS COMMUNITY GROUPS ADDRESS HEALTH

THE CPEARL AWARDEE ORGANIZATIONS ARE:

Arkansas Hispanic Health Coalition

Arkansas Prostate Cancer Foundation

Better Community Development, Inc.

Difference Makers of Hot Springs

Leaping Beyond

Our House

Health disparities have common threads that are plain to see for the Rev. Willie Wade and Esther Dixon.

"We've conducted three focus groups, which tell us that access is the key," said Wade, who founded the nonprofit Difference Makers of Hot Springs in 2014. Lack of access to health care involves many barriers, but transportation is a big one, he said.

Dixon, executive director of Difference Makers, and Wade have been refining their approach to the issue with assistance from TRI. They both attended TRI's first Community Scientist Academy in 2016 and gained insights that helped them draw a tighter focus on their wide-ranging community advocacy.

This year they are part of the inaugural class of Community Partners Educated as Arkansas Research Leaders (CPEARL), offered by TRI's Community Engagement Program in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Health.

The CPEARL program includes a 6-week course targeting leaders at community-based

organizations in Arkansas. It is designed to nurture research partnerships and teach skills that will help the organizations be more effective. The participating organizations also receive up to \$2,500 in seed funding to implement a real-world project.

Not yet midway through the program, Dixon said it had already helped hone her survey development skills.

"I have been able to use what I learned to perfect and build on the survey that we're putting out now," said Dixon, who was elected to the Garland County Quorum Court in 2018. "It has helped us to more systematically determine our target audience."

The survey will be used to determine residents' top five health concerns. An action plan for addressing those health concerns will follow.

Dixon and Wade said the CPEARL program had also improved their grant writing skills, helping them land a \$1,000 Blue and You grant from Arkansas Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Rev. Willie Wade and Esther Dixon

