

MCHS grad says TRIO changed her life

Charity Smith learned about college, and much more in the PNW program

STAFF REPORTS

MICHIGAN CITY — Education can take a person a long way, but for one Michigan City girl, it took her farther than she ever thought possible.

“How do you feel when you are gifted with something that consists of gaining opportunities, needed character development and meaningful relationships? How are you supposed to feel? Well, TRIO Educational Talent Search gifted me with exactly that,” said Charity Smith.

The 2020 Michigan City High School graduate is now a freshman at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, majoring in Media & Public Affairs with a double minor in German and Political Science.

She said it never would have been possible without TRIO, a program for high school seniors at Purdue University Northwest, which not only prepares students for college academically, but helps them in many other ways, Smith said.

“If you were to tell me that in high school that I would have the opportunity to visit



Charity Smith, second from left, and a group of Michigan City High School students got to visit colleges, and see the sights in New York City, as part of the TRIO Educational Talent Search program.

Photo provided / Purdue University Northwest

the East Coast to see colleges, I would call you a liar,” she said.

“I could not even afford to go on the Washington D.C. trips during middle school so what would make me think I

could go to Washington, D.C. to visit Howard University and Georgetown University?”

Her first TRIO trip was to Ohio to visit several colleges, she said.

“I have lived in Indiana for

nearly my whole life and I never visited Ohio even though it was right next door.

It was the opportunity of being able to see new people and be submerged into a different culture and atmosphere, even

though the cities were three hours away from Michigan City, Indiana.”

The group visited Toledo University, Ohio State and

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TRIO

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Bowling Green State University, and it made her want to go to college even more.

"This was one of the first times I learned about how college is and how it works on a personal level. I was able to visit dorms, learn about campus activities, Greek life and much more," she said.

"As a first-generation student, the thought of college has always excited me. Ohio was an experience I will never forget, it consisted of laughter with friends and learning more as a group."

But there was more, she said. TRIO hosted workshops, such as scholarship workshops, how to fill out your FAFSA, or how to do well on the SATs/ACTs.

"I attended a few workshops and I must say it was quite useful," Smith said.

Then came a trip that changed her life in many ways.

"In the summer, we ended up taking the East Coast trip. I was lucky enough to be selected for this unforgettable memory," Smith said.

"I believe the most important thing that I learned on this trip, besides information on



Photos provided / Purdue University Northwest
Smith and TRIP program director Maceo Rainey at the Museum of African-American History in Chicago. The 2020 MCHS graduate is now a freshman at UPU.

schools, was tolerance. When you visit these different universities and cities, there are going to be people different from you and that is OK.

"Mr. [Maceo] Rainey [director of the program at PNW's Westville campus] wanted us to understand the importance of tolerance since the highest result of education is tolerance."

The trip was eye-opening, she said.

"When we went to the Smithsonian Museum, I was nonplussed, but deeply saddened. The history, the untold stories, the music, the artifacts, it was real, it was all real.

"I went to visit the National



Smith, center, and other students in the TRIO program visited Georgetown University, among several colleges and universities, during their senior year of high school.

"I hope other low-income, first-generation students in Northwest Indiana are able to go on these trips and experience what I did.

"I have saved so much money with the knowledge I have obtained and I have made many meaningful connections. School is not cheap, but nothing is more expensive than a missed opportunity."

Smith did not miss hers, and now has aspirations of going to law school and becoming a trial or corporate lawyer, even running for an elected office

in the State of Indiana, Rainey said.

He wants people to know that the TRIO program is changing lives.

"The tax-paying public of La Porte County should know their tax dollars at the state and federal level are being used to support the educational advancements and attainment of youth that are matriculating in La Porte County."

He calls Smith a success story with a bright future. Rainey said he never doubted Smith's ability.

"I must say after observing and helping to nurture Charity's skills in the TRIO Program on the campus of PNW during her years as a student at Michigan City High School, it became obvious to see that her skill set, motivation, drive, charisma and personal commitment to excellence will make her the next success story coming out of La Porte County."

"This is a secure bet that I would gladly take to Blue Chip Casino and cash in with."

Community partners key TRIO achieve success

PNW program helps low-income, first-generation students make it to college

STAFF REPORTS

WESTVILLE — They say it takes a village, but if, as a society, we want things we've never had before, we have to do things as a society that we've never done.

That is the foundation of community partnerships, according to Maceo Rainey, director of the TRIO-Educational Talent Search Program on the campus



RAINEY

of Purdue University Northwest in Westville.

The program "has been blessed this year by an outpouring of community support geared towards assisting income-eligible and potential first generation college students in La Porte, Starke, Porter and portions of Lake County," he said.

"Our community partners have held hands with the students, parents, and staff of our program in offering financial literacy support, scholarship search support, 21st century scholar tracking, high school graduation celebrations, FAFSA (Free Application For Student Aid) completion," Rainey said, "and an array of services designed to support first generation college students, who will be the first in their families to attend college to pursue a bachelors degree and beyond."

According to a 2019 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: "Increasingly, it is becoming evident that schools and communities should work closely with each other to meet their mutual goals. With respect to addressing barriers to development and learning and promoting healthy development, schools are finding that can do their job



Photo provided / Purdue University Northwest

The staff of the TRIO-Educational Talent Search Program on the campus of Purdue University Northwest in Westville knows that without community assistance, they wouldn't be able to help nearly as many students get to college. From left are Erika Bradford, Kristen Noonan, Maceo Rainey, Julia Ferreyra and Lynann Neulieb.

better when they are an integral and positive part of their community."

Rainey said that has become apparent to him, as community partners "have stepped forward and put shoe leather to their words, allowing students and families to participate in and benefit from this giving: This is the process of holistic learning."

One example he cites of commitment to service through community collaboration is the partnership with Horizon Bank. Recently, the TRIO program teamed up with Horizon to offer a free on-line webinar on financial literacy aspects – from understanding credit scores and the financial responsibilities of having a credit card in college, to managing money and calculating interest.

"All of which," Rainey said, "are essential skills that first generation college students must have prior to entering the world of higher education. Kudos to Horizon Bank's Yolanda Davis for her time, energy, and investment in helping to prepare the next generation of NWI students for college and the world of financial transactions."

He also gives kudos to Alex Samuel and the staff at INvested Indiana for online

support in helping pre-college students and parents navigate financial aid and various means to offset the costs of attending college.

"Without the creativity and resourcefulness of Horizon Bank and INvested, our students would not have had such a robust experience to supplement the program services that we provide for NWI pre-college students at Purdue Northwest," Rainey said.

While he said it would be "difficult to pinpoint any one collaboration as most beneficial or memorable" for the TRIO program during "this unparalleled year," many deserve thanks from the staff and students enrolled in the federally funded program.

■ Michigan City Area Schools Board for providing office space for TRIO staff to work with students in the Early College Program, and providing after school tutoring for students

■ The Commission on the Social Status of African American Males for promoting dialogue on educational and social best practices, and supporting student recruitment efforts

■ Academic Tutoring Center for assisting in helping prepare pre-college students with ACT and SAT test prep

"Increasingly, it is becoming evident that schools and communities should work closely with each other to meet their mutual goals. With respect to addressing barriers to development and learning and promoting healthy development, schools are finding that can do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of their community."

HHS

support

■ Eclipse Bus Company for providing high quality transportation services for students participating in college tours in and out of state

■ Embassy Suites Hotels for providing students with overnight hotel accommodations during educational and cultural trips

■ U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute for hosting a scholarship fair, and providing motivational speakers for students who attended the annual student leadership forum

■ Robert Jackson's Man Up-Student Leadership Conference for providing male students with access to positive role models, scholarship opportunities, and career readiness support

■ PNW-Westville Police Department for helping pre-college students and their parents navigate the campus, and assisting with supervision

"As you can see, many hands have held our hands to make this a memorable and teachable time for students enrolled in our TRIO- Educational Talent Search Program on the campus of PNW Westville," Rainey said.

"We challenge you, residents of Northwest Indiana, to immerse yourself in this region. Become the change you want to see and remember: It takes teamwork to make the dream work."