MiNDS / BRIDGE

Scholar Newsletter

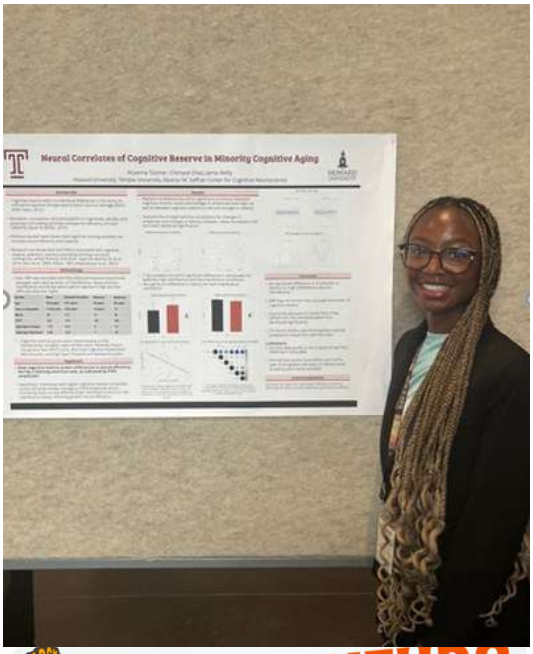
Temple University • Howard University • University of Maryland Summer 2026

A BIG Year in Review

As we reflect on the past year, one word continues to rise to the surface: resilience. It has been a year of extraordinary accomplishments amidst unprecedented upheaval and significant change. Our scholars presented research across multiple conferences, traveled to the Society for Neuroscience annual meeting in San Diego, celebrated graduations across partner institutions, expanded opportunities for community college students, and continued to build a vibrant scientific community despite uncertainty in the national funding landscape and amidst a heavy assault on science and identities. Most notably, we navigated the conclusion of the NIH ENDURE program that helped shape so many of our scholars' journeys and those at universities across the country. Through every challenge and every milestone, our scholars embodied the very values that have always defined the MiNDS and BRIDGE communities: perseverance, adaptability, and a commitment to opening doors for those who follow behind them. It's been a year, and we are proud of each scholar and alum for forging forward.

One of the most meaningful moments of the year took place in San Diego, where scholars gathered for the **Adapt and Endure Neuroscience Conference** before attending the Society for Neuroscience annual meeting in San Diego. The conference was intentionally designed to honor the legacy of the ENDURE program – to celebrate the community it created, to grieve its passing. Hosted at the Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion at UC San Diego, the day featured conversations with graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and neuroscience faculty, culminating in a keynote address from Dr. Michelle Jones-London, whose leadership was paramount and whose gifts birthed such NIH programs such as ENDURE and DSPAN that transformed pathways into research careers for countless underrepresented scientists. Scholars engaged directly with alumni who had successfully navigated the transition from undergraduate researcher to doctoral trainee and postdoctoral fellow, living the theme that "We Adapt, We Endure": the challenges of now will not stymie science or our futures. By gaining insight into the many paths available to them within neuroscience, the day was affirming and inspiring. From there, scholars presented their undergraduate research posters at the Early Career Poster session to scientists from across the globe.

Scholar and Conference Spotlight: Black in Neuro and Aryanna Toomer



BEST UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH POSTER • BLACK IN NEURO

Howard University • Dr. Ezra Kang's Lab

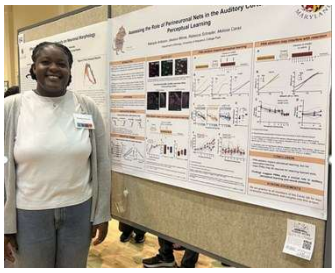
As part of our mini-grant options, several scholars traveled to conferences and poster sessions around the country, showcasing their knowledge and growing their skills. Black in Neuro, held in DC this past year, was an affirming opportunity for scholars to see reseachers from their lived experiences and advance their understanding of the intersection of identity and neuro. Throughout the conference, scholars engaged with presentations on neuroscience across the African diaspora, neuroethics and racism in science, alternative careers in STEM, and the future of interdisciplinary scientific research. Researchers such as Dr. Andrew Taylor Johnson's talk about his research at the University of Chile on early life stress and adolescent play showcased those leading the way in the field.

A highlight of the conference was the undergraduate research poster session, where several of our scholars presented, and where Aryanna Toomer earned **First Place** for her research presentation, an outstanding accomplishment that reflects both her scientific excellence and the strength of the MiNDS program.

Up next: a summer research program at Harvard University. Harvard is lucky to have you, Aryanna.

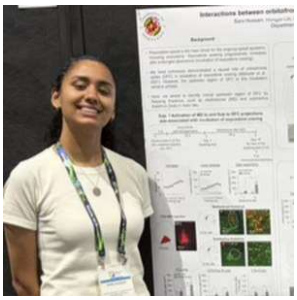
UMD MiNDS alums: Where They Are Headed

University of Maryland scholars are headed to new bright futures! The UMD partnership has been powerful over the time of MiNDS, and these scholars showcase exactly the intellect, drive, and tenacity to succeed beyond undergrad.



Makayla Anfuson
Research Technologist
Dr. Veena Padmanaban's Lab — Johns Hopkins University

Ashley Pocasangre
Master of Social Work
University of Maryland

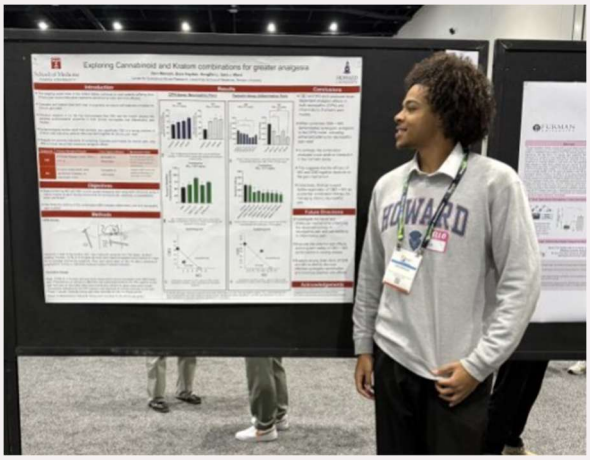


Sara Hussain
Postbaccalaureate Fellow
Dr. Andrew Holmes' Lab — NIH

Summer Successes

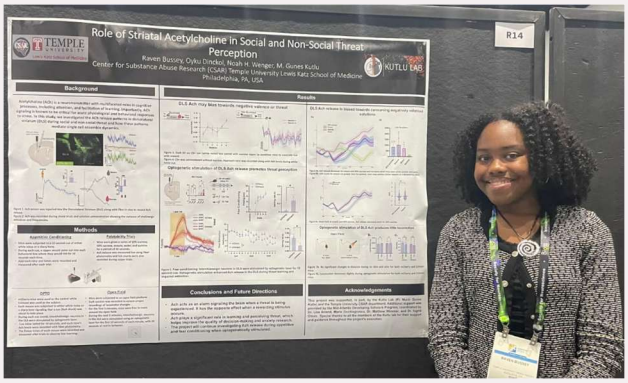
With the funding shifts, MiNDS was not able to bring Howard scholars to campus this year with a housing stipend. With guidance and support, our scholars pivoted and applied to new summer programs or obtained paid lab positions and found incredible success! These Howard MiNDS scholars are working in top research spaces across the country this summer. We could not be prouder.

Janeen Louis
University of Arizona
Summer Research Program • Howard / Bernal Lab



Zain Mensah
Georgetown University
Summer Research Program • Howard / Richardson Lab

Aryanna Toomer
Harvard University
Summer Research Program • Howard / Kang Lab



MiNDS alum--Where Are They Now: Natalia Rincon

MINDS ALUM • PHD BOUND

Natalia has been admitted to her **first-choice program, the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), for her PhD in Neuroscience, beginning this fall!**

During her two years in MiNDS, Natalia was mentored by Dr. Daniel Roche and Dr. Donna Calu (UMB School of Medicine) and Dr. Xuan Li (UMD), working in basic translational addiction neuroscience before moving into clinical behavioral pharmacology. She presented at the Society for Neuroscience and the Research Society on Alcohol, earned the UMD Psychology Undergraduate Silver Research Award, and co-authored a peer-reviewed paper in Addiction Neuroscience.

For the past year she has been a clinical research coordinator in Dr. Cecilia Bergeria's lab at the Behavioral Pharmacology Research Unit of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, building on the foundation MiNDS gave her.

"The guidance and funding provided by the MiNDS program have been instrumental to my growth — I would not be where I am today without their support."

MiNDS alum-- Where Are They Now: Gaby Castro

Gaby Castro

MINDS ALUM • NIH POSTBACCALAUREATE FELLOW

After completing her undergraduate experience with MiNDS, she continued her neuroscience journey as an **IRTA Postbaccalaureate Fellow at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)**.

She now works in the Section on Neurobiology of Learning and Memory (SNLM) at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), where she helps lead a research project investigating blindsight and the neural pathways involved in the rapid, nonconscious processing of emotionally relevant information.

Along the way, she has gained hands-on experience designing experiments, collecting and analyzing data, creating scientific posters, and presenting research findings, all while attending seminars, learning from leading scientists, and preparing for graduate school.

"The support and opportunities MiNDS provided gave me the confidence, skills, and mentorship that helped me get where I am today…and to keep growing in neuroscience."

Where Are They Now: Joyce Milandu

Joyce Milandu

MINDS ALUM • NIH POSTBACCALAUREATE FELLOW

After graduating from the University of Maryland, College Park with a B.S. in Neuroscience (Honors) and a minor in Black Women's Studies, Joyce continued her path as a Postbaccalaureate Fellow at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where she conducts tobacco-related disparities research.

Her work explores how psychosocial and structural factors shape health behaviors, particularly substance use, driven by a conviction to advance health equity through research that uplifts populations overlooked in science and healthcare.

Joyce credits MiNDS with connecting her to her undergraduate mentor, Dr. Edward Bernat, supporting her travel to international conferences where she built a network of informal mentors, and, through weekly professional development meetings, affirming that she belongs in science.

"I wholeheartedly believe that my experience in MiNDS has been life-changing… The weekly professional development meetings instilled confidence and reassurance that I belong in science."

MiNDS Scholars: Year 2, Back in Action

Our second-year MiNDS scholars are back at the bench! Scholars returned to their labs on **May 27** to pick up their research right where they left off.

This summer, MiNDS scholars are also stepping into leadership: they'll be **running professional development sessions for the BRIDGE cohort**, building on BRIDGE's historical success of near-peer mentors. UMD will run poster making training, and Temple/Howard will run Journal Club, creating tiered feedback and safe spaces to push into challenging content. Congrats to Ademola Adeyemi, who actually was awarded a housing stipend from his lab after juggling an academic research project at Howard AND Temple. We are excited to welcome Dami back to Temple's campus, along with our amazing MiNDS year two alums!

Spotlight: The Redcay Lab Research Assistants!

MINDS SCHOLARS • DR. ELIZABETH REDCAY'S DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE LAB • UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Hi! We're **Kayla Warren** and **Sophia Ubiera**, two undergraduates working in Dr. Elizabeth Redcay's Developmental Social Cognitive Neuroscience Lab at the University of Maryland, College Park — all through the MiNDS Program!

Kayla Warren and Sophia Ubiera in the Redcay Lab

Kayla Warren

Rising junior • Neuroscience major, Data Science minor

This semester studied the associations between neural sensitivity to social feedback and masking habits in autistic and non-autistic youth.

Looking ahead she'll continue exploring those associations — examining how different levels of social anxiety shape the relationship.

Sophia Ubiera

Rising senior • Psychology & Japanese major, Neuroscience minor

This semester explored the associations between social feedback cues and social anxiety in adolescents with and without autism.

Looking ahead she'll expand this work into her honors thesis, investigating how perceived and neural similarities may predict social anxiety and friendship outcomes in adolescents.

WHY ONGOING LAB PLACEMENT MATTERS

In neuroscience, the most meaningful research unfolds with time and consistency, which is why we employ our scholars full-time in the summer, but build out to academic year research for sustained skill cultivation. When students return to the same lab semester after semester, they move beyond simply learning techniques to truly owning questions and moving into leadership spaces. More opportunities emerge: designing follow-up studies, mentoring newer students, and carrying projects from early pilot data all the way to honors theses and conference posters. That continuity builds the deep technical skills, scientific identity, and strong mentor relationships that make students competitive for graduate school, while allowing a lab to invest in them as genuine contributors.

New for Summer 2026: The IBRO Community College Initiative

FUNDING SPOTLIGHT • INTERNATIONAL BRAIN RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

INTERNATIONAL BRAIN IBRO RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

Over the past two years, MiNDS and BRIDGE have built a relationship with **Dr. Callion Lockridge**, Chair of the Psychology Department at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), to expand our reach and begin addressing the community-college "leaky pipeline" in STEM. This year, a new grant from the **International Brain Research Organization (IBRO)** lets us take that partnership a major step further.

Through IBRO funding, we have designed a pilot initiative to provide full-time summer research experiences for community college students who have matriculated to Temple. The program specifically targets the "transfer shock point"-- the vulnerable window for students newly transferring. The goal is mitigating attrition and keeping promising scientists in the pipeline by girding them through the challenge of a new academic ecosystem. Research on STEM

transfer students consistently shows that successful transition depends on mentorship, community support, and structured opportunities to integrate into scientific communities

We are grateful to IBRO for investing in this student population and the expansion of BRIDGE to include community college transfer students! We believe that through our intentional interventions, we can have robust outcomes.

Sustaining the Mission: The Dana Foundation Grant

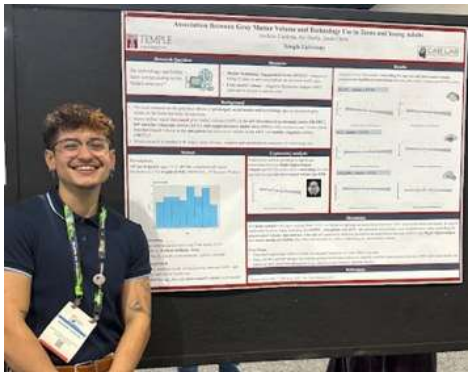
FUNDING SPOTLIGHT • DANA FOUNDATION

Federal research funding is in a period of significant uncertainty. MiNDS scholars over the last year have weathered program shifts and pauses in programming. Our greatest sadness is for those we could not support-- we were unable to recruit a new MiNDS cohort this year. BRIDGE, too felt the impacts: NOAs were released late over the last two years given our student focus, and it dramatically impacted recruitment and scholar compensation processes. As NIH funding priorities shift, training programs like MiNDS and BRIDGE face real risk.

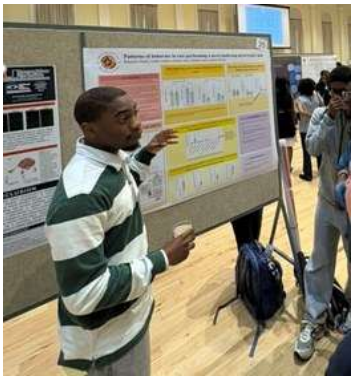
A new grant from the **Dana Foundation** helped buoy MiNDS through this upheaval. Private philanthropy of this kind, paired with sustained university support, is increasingly essential to protecting our mission: improving outcomes in STEM higher education and keeping the pathway open for students who have historically been underrepresented in the field. DANA stood in the gap amidst grant funding cuts and supported undergraduate researchers to continue on their trajectory. Thanks to DANA, MiNDS was able to support the existing cohort for another summer. We are deeply grateful to the DANA Foundation; their investment is a vote of confidence in our scholars, and in the field.

Conference Corner: University Research Days

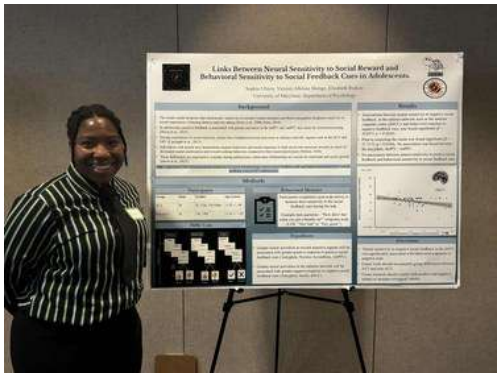
Across University Research Days this spring, MiNDS scholars showed up and showed out — every one of them showcasing their research to faculty, peers, and the wider community. A standout: **Andrew Cardona** presented "The Digital Brain: Technology Use and Grey Matter Volume in Teens and Young Adults."



Andrew Cardona
Temple University • Chein Lab



Benjamin Osuala
University of Maryland • Roesch Lab



Sophia Ubiera
University of Maryland • Redcay Lab

BRIDGE Spotlight: Medina and the LAURA Award

BRIDGE '25 • LAURA AWARD

Medina Hucks-Gonsalves: Journey in Her Words

Upon completion of my Summer 2025 BRIDGE internship, I continued in the Child Health and Behavior Lab full-time with Dr. Deborah Drabick. Since 2013, Dr. Drabick implemented the Coping Power (CP) program which was designed to teach anger management, perspective-taking, and social problem-solving techniques to school-aged children.

Even though the intervention is effective for Black, White and Latin youth, it did not address the systemic issues that undermined the mental health of minoritized youth. To address these issues, I had the opportunity to contribute to "**Enhancing a School-Based Mental Health Intervention for Minoritized Youth**", a project that focused on adapting the CP Program into Mindful Coping Power (MCP). The goal was to create a culturally and contextually responsive intervention that addresses the systemic challenges of minoritized youth such as racism, discrimination, and microaggressions. For the project, we focused on three initiatives. First, we added skills for mindfulness and distress tolerance to the intervention. Next, we understood that to effectively address these systemic challenges, we had to first understand the needs of the communities we serve. As a result, developed a mixed methods approach to gain insight into needs and strengths from community partners and l stakeholders. Lastly, we developed an assessment to gauge intervention acceptability. Collectively this work involv contributing to caregiver and teacher feedback, revising intervention content based on feedback, and supporting t development of MCP manual to help generalize skills across settings.

Receiving the Spring 2026 LAURA for this project was meaningful to me because it affirmed the value of research tha not only evidence based, but also community-centered and culturally responsive. I believe it is difficult to properly addr an issue if you don't comprehensively understand the problem. Additionally, presenting this work allowed me to sh how our team is working to improve access, acceptability, content, and generalizability of Coping Power for minoritiz youth. It's important to note that being a BRIDGE scholar afforded me the opportunity in the first place. The mentorsh research exposure and support, have all been important factors in helping to grow an emerging researcher a strengthened my commitment to clinically informed, community-engaged research that addresses mental hea disparities.

Thank you BRIDGE Program, Marie Occhiogrosso, Dr. Lisa Briand, Dr. Chelsea Helion, Dr. Thomas Olino, and my near p mentor Dr. Steven Martinez for laying the foundation and Dr. Drabick and the Child Health and Behavior Lab for be instrumental in cultivating my trajectory. Onwards and upwards... there's still much work to do!

Welcome the New BRIDGE Class!

Please join us in welcoming **11 new BRIDGE scholars** this summer—our biggest cohort ever! This is an incredibly talented group of neuroscience, psychology, and biology majors beginning their research journey with us. With our most applicants to date, these eleven individuals showcased deep self-knowledge, intense passion for neuroscience, and a desire to develop inquiry-based thinking in research spaces.

The cohort kicked things off at **orientation on May 26**, where they delved into research ethics, lab culture, and navigating imposter syndrome, in addition to norms and expectations with Dr. Lisa Briand, the program's PI. Then, over lunch, the scholars met one-on-one with their graduate-student near-peer mentors. Students were matched with mentors based on their experiences and aspirations; it ensures that scholars have a space to ask questions and that they build their professional network organically. The very next day, **May 27**, they started in their labs. Here, too, they were matched with labs that supported the kind of mentorship, culture, and research that aligns with their goals and processing.

Across eleven different labs, human and animal, med campus and CLA, scholars embark on their full-time research. With professional development, mentorship, career and college guidance, and the hours in the lab doing the work, these individuals will embark on a journey towards their futures in STEM. One of the most powerful components of both BRIDGE and MiNDS is the strength of the cohort; it's the shared space to be vulnerable, to triage challenge, and to navigate research and higher ed as a community. We are excited to see what their twelve weeks as a research assistant gifts them, and we look forward to seeing their learning codified in a poster session this fall!

WHY NEAR-PEER MENTORSHIP MATTERS

Research on undergraduate STEM education suggests that mentorship and experiential learning opportunities are strongly associated with persistence into graduate education, scientific identity formation, and long-term engagement in STEM careers. The National Academies notes that these outcomes are particularly impactful for students historically underrepresented in STEM, in part because mentored research experiences provide meaningful integration into the culture and community of scientific practice (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

The new BRIDGE cohort getting to know one anotherand share a lunch with their near-peers at orientation

BRIDGE Alumni: Where Are They Now?

Our BRIDGE alumni are out in the world building careers in science, health, and service. Two recent updates we're especially proud of:

"

I'm in a dual MSW/MBA program at UChicago. Learning structural social work is teaching me how systems impact individual well-being — whether that's mental health, physical wellness, or food justice. My business training will focus on how to build organizations that can effectively deliver that care at scale.

Olivia Garces

BRIDGE Alum • formerly Dr. Lauren Ellman's Lab, now pursuing a dual MSW / MBA at the University of Chicago, pairing clinical insight with the organizational strategy

"

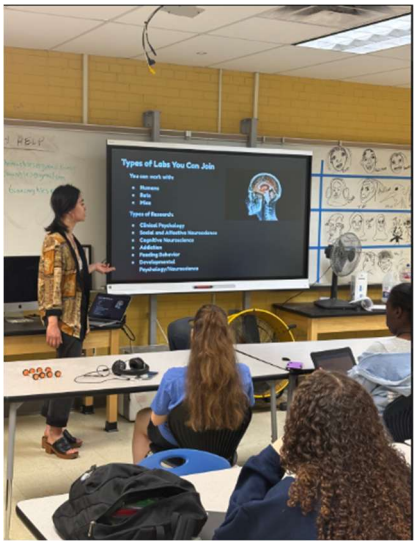
From BRIDGE, I built connections with the graduate students in my lab and used them as mentors to pivot into a clinical internship at the Psychological Services Center. I spent the entire 2024–2025 year at the PSC, and now I'm in an M.S. in Mental Health Counseling program at PCOM, set to graduate in 2027.

Asjenae Wright

BRIDGE Alum • Psychological Services Center, now an M.S. in Mental Health Counseling candidate at PCOM (Class of 2027).

Outreach: Carver Engineering & Science High School

DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR • LED BY DAVID KOUASSI, CARVER ALUM



Reaching beyond the lab is core to who we are. During the school year, MiNDS scholars presented on neuroscience research and ran info sessions at **Carver Engineering and Science High School**. Led by Carver alum and MiNDS scholar **David Kouassi**, our scholars showed students the power of STEM and demystified what higher-ed research actually looks like over a series of presentations. Thanks to David's drive and initiative, he was actually presented with the inaugural Outreach Award at the MiNDS retreat in 2025.

Carver is a Philadelphia magnet school built to prepare city students for careers in science and engineering, a mission that maps directly onto our own. With its proximity to campus and its focus on supporting city students achieving in STEM, Carver was an ideal partner for amplifying undergraduate research. Having a Carver graduate return to lead the sessions made the message tangible: these pathways are real, the goals are reachable, and they can start *NOW.*

Outreach: Summer with Upward Bound

THIS SUMMER • A FEDERAL TRIO PROGRAM

This summer, MiNDS scholars will work across a series of sessions with Upward Bound students in the Philadelphia area, running demos and hands-on activities designed to engage and activate scientific thinking and inquiry.

Upward Bound is a federally funded TRIO program that helps first-generation, low-income, and at-risk high school students prepare for college. It provides free academic tutoring, college campus tours, and multi-week summer experiences to help students graduate high school and succeed in higher education. Its mission fully aligns with our vision of outreach, which made it an ideal opportunity to leverage MiNDS's capacity toward a common goal. Thanks to Dr. Mat Wimmer for his intiative in building this opportunity and for all of his work to create Outreach Opportunities for our programs to ensure that we are cultivating a climate of community engagement and service.

WHY OUTREACH MATTERS

STEM education researcher Mica Estrada and colleagues have found that high-quality mentoring helps students develop a stronger "science identity," the belief that they belong in scientific spaces and can see themselves as future researchers, clinicians, and STEM professionals. This is particularly important for students from historically underrepresented and under-resourced backgrounds, who may have fewer opportunities to interact with scientist.. Studies show that mentorship strengthens students' sense of belonging, scientific self-efficacy, and identification with STEM, all of which are associated with greater persistence in STEM education and careers. Through our outreach at Carver and Upward Bound, MiNDS and BRIDGE scholars are helping younger students build those connections early, demonstrating that success in STEM is not only possible, but accessible.

STAY IN TOUCH, SHARE YOUR STORIES AND SUCCESSES! MiNDS and BRIDGE is a LIFELONG COMMUNITY. And here, you ALWAYS belong.