

Contact: Erica Ness, Youth Development Educator, Kenosha Extension, erica.ness@wisc.edu

UW-Madison Division of Extension Kenosha County and the Kenosha Public Library join forces to launch Nia program to help Black and other youth of color find success after high school

March 7, 2022

University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension is partnering with the Kenosha Public Library to bring the “Nia: Pathways and Purposes for the Future” program to the youth of Kenosha County.

Focusing on eighth-through-12th-grade students in the Black community, Nia is an outside-of-school program that will allow youth to explore their skills, interests, and options for after high school and help connect them with the resources available to pursue their goals and dreams.

Nia will encourage youth to explore opportunities, work with mentors, and learn about college, professional training, and work options before making decisions about their futures. The program will take participants on trips around Kenosha County, to other cities, and even to North Carolina to expose them to careers, colleges, and cultural experiences.

Nia is a Swahili word meaning “purpose.” Kenosha is one of three Wisconsin counties benefiting from this new and distinct program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The USDA’s Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program awarded \$640,000 to the UW-Madison Division of Extension and North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University to launch Nia. The program will focus on serving youth in Waukesha, Rock, and Kenosha Counties — three urban and suburban counties where Black, indigenous, and youth of color often experience disparities in transitioning from high school to success in college, careers, and the adult world.

Nia will also serve youth in limited-income rural communities in North Carolina, through Historically Black University, NC A&T.

The CYFAR funding will span five years. The first year is focused on building strong relationships with schools and community organizations and recruiting teens to participate in a Spring/Summer 2022 pilot program. About 10 youth in Kenosha will participate in the pilot and co-design the program alongside Extension and Library staff. The full program will be rolled out in Fall 2022.

In Kenosha, it will be housed at Southwest Library, consisting of dynamic programming every Thursday after school and other trips and activities throughout the year.

“The most incredible aspect of the Nia program is the prioritizing of youth voice.” said Extension Youth Educator Erica Ness. “We are planning a robust program in partnership with dynamic local organizations, business owners, and community leaders. However, it is the youth themselves, and in particular the youth involved in the pilot, who will decide what they want to see and do as part of Nia.”

The first event of the NIA program will be a tri-county excursion to Milwaukee’s Sherman Phoenix, a business incubator that features 30 mostly Black owned businesses on Saturday, April 2, 2022, from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Youth will have the opportunity to tour businesses, meet community leaders, discover

new locations, learn culture education, and more. To register, complete the youth registration forms at <https://4h.extension.wisc.edu/4h-resources/youth-enrollment-paper-form/> and send to justin.lieck@wisc.edu by Friday, March 11. This event is free of charge and lunch is included.

If you or any youth you know might be interested in joining the program or want to learn more, please contact Extension Kenosha County Youth Educator Erica Ness at erica.ness@wisc.edu or 262-857-1934.