

# Wyandanch

Community Advisory Board

## In This Newsletter

May 2025 Nassau CC  
Valedictorian

### Fall Events

- **Stop the Bleed**, Wyandanch Public Library, September 17, 5:30 to 7:30pm. Hands on wound care training
- **8th Annual Ujamaa Fest**, Delano Stewart Plaza, Saturday, September 20, 12 PM to 6 PM
- **NYSCHECK: Children's Environmental Health Day**, October 9. Details at <https://nyscheck.org/cehday/>
- **Wyandanch Public Library Give Back Fall Festival**, October 18, 11 am to 3 pm

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## Iyahna Garcia, Valedictorian Nassau Community College, 2025

By Tara Lauther  
Wyandanch CAB Intern

Iyahna Garcia, the valedictorian of Nassau Community College's Class of 2025 is an inspiring young voice in psychology, political advocacy, and community engagement. Iyahna's journey from Harlem to Nassau County and now Wyandanch exemplifies resilience, determination, and a deep commitment to equity and public service.



Iyahna's academic path began at another school that didn't quite feel like the right fit. Her transfer to Nassau was a turning point. "I was just focused on getting myself the closest I could to graduate school," she shared. That focus, coupled with her leadership in student clubs and her authentic, confident voice during the valedictorian interview process, helped her stand out from her peers. She remained dedicated, not just to her grades, but to her growth as a leader and future psychologist.

Although she moved to Wyandanch only two years ago with her mother and brother, Iyahna commuted to finish her degree at Nassau County Community College. Her decision to remain enrolled there highlights her strong sense of perseverance and commitment.

“Even though I’ve only been here for almost two years now, I’ve really enjoyed being out here and in the atmosphere,” she said about Wyandanch.

Iyahna’s experience working in family court opened her eyes to the impact of social and environmental conditions on children’s development. “95% of the time, especially for children under 18, the people they become and how they shape themselves is truly hyperdependent on the people they’re surrounded by,” she observed. Her work caused her to understand that many behaviors in children are a reflection of circumstances, not innate character. That experience helped her realize that her calling lies not in adult psychology, but in working with children between the ages of 5 and 17. “I want to foster an environment where children can feel safe to express themselves,” she said.

Iyahna also spoke about how violence, poverty, and unstable housing can trap young people in cycles they didn’t choose. Drawing from personal and professional experience, she connected how children in violent environments will be impacted. “You can have the best parent possible... but if you're surrounded by violence or abuse... that’s what’s going to be a large factor in shaping who you become. It doesn’t always mean that you will end up stuck in that cycle of violence, but it is called a cycle for a reason.”

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Iyahna’s leadership extends beyond psychology. During her final year at Nassau, she was involved with Civic Influencers, a nonpartisan organization that connects young adults with civic engagement opportunities. Through them, she attended the Democratic National Convention and led a unique, politically-themed book club exploring dystopian literature and its real-world relevance.

“Gen Z is kind of taking a step back in that realm,” she noted about civic engagement. She highlights the importance of youth political participation. “I wanted to be able to go out and teach our generation the importance of voting.... I was really hyper-focused on making sure that people our own age knew what was going on in the world, not even just politically, but socially and financially with the different legislations being put into place that is either limiting our financial aid or preventing us from being able to afford housing.”

Iyahna’s financial awareness has translated into a passion for helping others, particularly students of color, gain access to financial literacy and support. “What are the barriers... and how can we support ourselves and allow ourselves to be as debt-free as possible?” she asked, a question that continues to guide her advocacy.

# Q & A

**Q: How do you think economic hardship affects the family's ability to prioritize children's health?**

**A:** When a family goes through economic hardship, I feel like, inadvertently, their children get put on the back burner. Obviously, the basic necessities—food in your belly, a roof over your head—come first. But if a child has two parents and both parents have to work full time, continuously, just to barely scrape by for rent...

If that child has a fever or is having difficulty breathing, the family might not be able to afford healthcare. That means they can't take them to the hospital right away because the bills would be enormous. Or, even if they do have insurance, they might not find the time to go to the ER because both parents are working so much.

***I definitely know that I suffered with asthma—and I still do.***

I definitely know that I suffered with asthma—and I still do. When I was younger, it was just my mom. She didn't always have someone to help her, and it left her in a tough spot. It was either: I can miss a day of work—an entire day's worth of food and rent—to take my child to the hospital, or I can try my best to manage this at home and hope she gets better.

So, when a family is economically and financially behind, they can't focus on their health needs as much because, for them, they're just trying to survive. How can I afford the time to worry about health?

In the same sense, if a family found out their area was overcrowded with air pollution and it would be advisable to move, that would be the least of their concerns—which could, unfortunately, increase their health disparities. But they can't worry about that now, because they're just trying to make it to tomorrow.



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Microsoft PowerPoint image

**Q: Could you tell me more about your advocacy for political participation among young people?**

A: Prior to my fourth semester, I created one of Civic Influencers' first... politically related book clubs....[We'd] read these dystopian books that talk about the futures we might be trending toward, and see how they relate to the political tension that's arising.

When I actually attended the [Democratic National] Convention, ... I definitely didn't see as much of Gen Z as I thought I would....We also went to smaller events where we spoke to people protesting in the streets or marching, and it really showed me that ... there are people from all age groups across all of those political categories. And at the same time, there aren't nearly as many people actively involved as you'd expect, given the size of the population.

It also taught me a lot about how I connect with others. I realized I prefer speaking to people who don't necessarily agree with me on everything—but who align with me on the issues I care most about. Whether someone is older, younger, or my age, that's something I really value.

**Q: What's the best way to reach young people and families to teach them about environmental risks?**

A: "I feel like, especially it's mostly people of color, unfortunately, that are the least informed about these sort of issues, and I feel like where that especially starts is at home. Families feel like they don't have the time to worry about these sort of things. So in my opinion, to get families to be more interested is to teach children about it.

Obviously, children won't understand everything at the most advanced level, but if you get them involved—like saying, "Hey, your community might be at risk for this, here's a little test to see if you're affected"—they'll take that in. Kids are sponges. They soak up everything.

My little brother is only nine, and he soaks up so much. Every time he learns something new that excites him, he'll come tell me all about it. Even if I already know what he's saying, just listening to him makes him even more curious and excited. So when kids are included in these kinds of activities, ... they're more likely to go home and talk to their parents about it....The more the child brings it up, the more likely it is the parent will think, "Wait a minute, maybe I should look into this thing."



**Q: What advice would you give to other students who want to get involved in promoting safer, healthier futures for children? And what advice would you give for students who want to be politically active like you are?**

A: "I would say my first piece of advice is definitely read. I'm a big reader—and that was such an easy way for me to get interested in the political sphere and to become more informed. I feel like the more you read, the more you expand your knowledge... the more you're able to find connections with organizations doing work that resonates with you.

I met a professor who helped me land an internship, which eventually became a job. So I'd say: make connections early, even if it sounds cliché. At first I was like, "Where am I supposed to find time to network?" But seeking out professors who are already in the field you want to be in—or who are well connected—can really help.

Through that professor, I met people working in family court, which led to another role... and then another... and so on.

I also think people overlook volunteer work or unpaid internships because they think, "What's the value of something that doesn't give me an immediate return?" But honestly, those unpaid opportunities are what often lead you to finding your path—especially in areas like environmental justice or child advocacy. Taking up all the opportunities you can while you can is what gets you further along."

## **What's Next for Iyahna?**

Iyahna is currently a student at the University at Buffalo, pursuing her bachelor's in psychology. She plans to pursue her master's degree upon graduation at John Jay College of Criminal Justice where she hopes to get certification to be licensed and begin to help juveniles in need of intervention. She says she is open to exploring graduate opportunities at other schools and or pursuing her PhD in the future, and is excited for where her path will take her.

Iyahna's ability to connect her lived experiences to the systemic challenges others are facing makes her voice a powerful one in conversations about youth health, justice, and equity. We're honored to feature her as an emerging voice for change and look forward to her future accomplishments.