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My name is Monique Smith, a PhD candidate at Oregon Health & Science University in the Department of Behavioral Neuroscience.

I am passionate about the work that I do, and I feel privileged to be receiving a PhD ... however, like many people, my path has not been straightforward. I was born outside of the U.S. and grew up in poverty, without any examples of academic or professional success. This is a part of the reason I am so passionate about getting kids involved in science early; because for many children, underrepresented or otherwise, becoming a research scientist isn't something they are even aware of as an option.

NW Noggin creates an opportunity for a large spectrum of kids to get excited about science, some of whom would have never responded to traditional methods of education. And through involvement with Noggin, these kids are now imagining themselves as scientists, engineers and artists.

Not only does this outreach create amazing opportunities for kids, it is an incredible experience for scientists. NW Noggin provides a platform for current scientists to feel connected to the community they work in, and gets that same community excited about the science happening all around them.

As a neuroscientist, I have committed my life's work to understanding how social variables impact chronic pain and drug addiction, because these pathologies afflict more people than heart disease, diabetes and cancer combined, yet receive much less attention and support. So, for the benefit of the hundreds of millions that directly and indirectly suffer, and for the economic burden these pathologies create, it is essential that we increase public knowledge and understanding about such pathologies. And this is just one example.

Outreach programs like NW Noggin tap into new outlooks and diverse perspectives that will help the scientific community to thrive and move forward. NW Noggin has helped me become a better scientist, educator and advocate, and has allowed my community to see that science is accessible and investment in science is worthwhile.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monique L. Smith".

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