

# BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN IRELAND

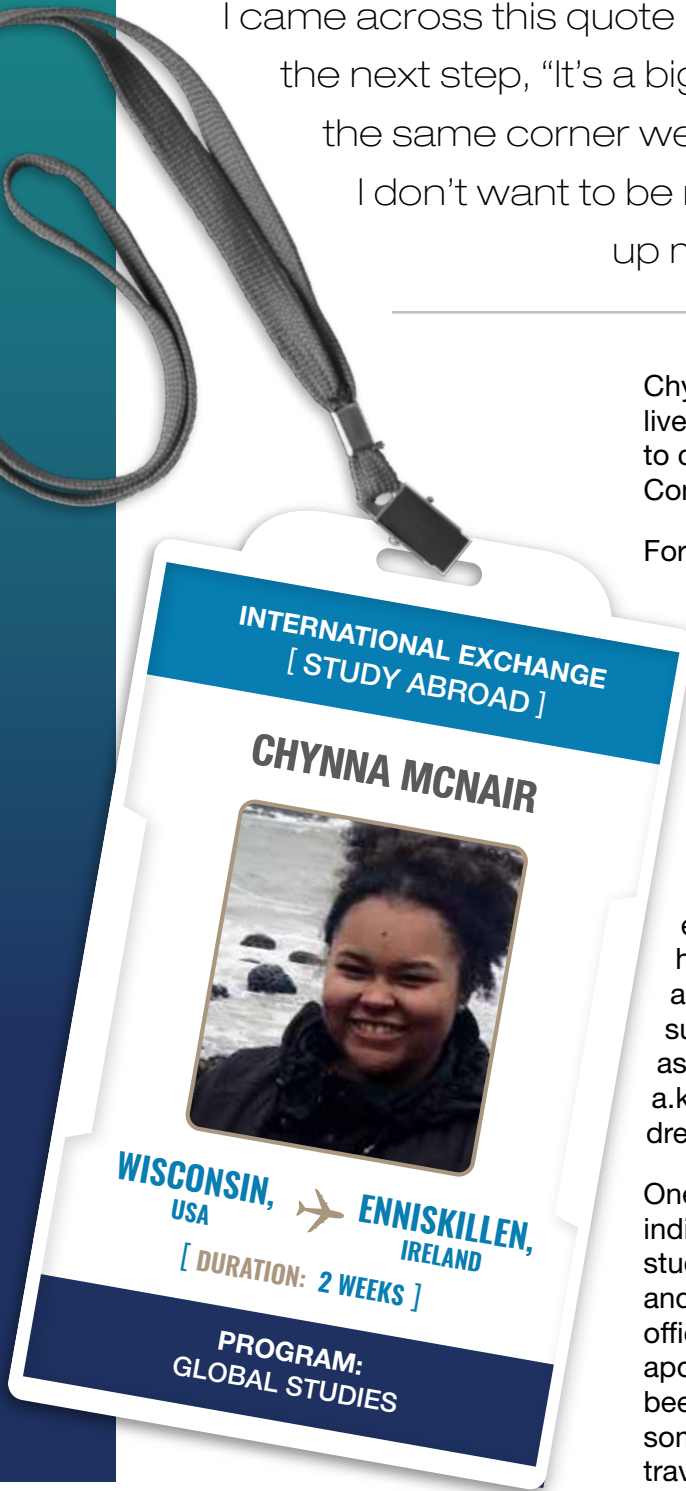
I came across this quote by Oberyin Martell that pushed me to take the next step, “It’s a big beautiful world. Most of us live and die in the same corner we were born and never get to see any of it. I don’t want to be most of us.” Next thing I know I am setting up meetings and signing up for study abroad!

Chynna McNair might have grown up thinking that she would live and die in Madison Wisconsin, but all that was destined to change after she enrolled at Madison Area Technical Community College (MATCC), her local community college.

For many years she had been curious about the world outside of the United States, but Chynna was also scared of what she might find. She had grown up thinking that the world is an unsafe place full of danger at every corner. She also had had her hands full in Madison sensing that as a deaf black woman with a cochlear implant she would have to work three times as hard to prove herself to others and to get ahead.

But she was ready for the next step. She had been fortunate to grow up with a supportive mother who encouraged her to work hard, and who advocated for her to be in mainstream classes where she would be adequately challenged. She also benefited greatly from the support of her special education teacher Jovita Gandolfo as well as her sign language interpreter Meinel Margaret, a.k.a. Peggy, all of whom encouraged her to strive for her dreams.

One day as she was checking her email she saw a message indicating that she could be eligible for a scholarship to study abroad. Chynna closed her laptop feeling surprised and unsure. A week later she was at the study abroad office looking at the list of program offerings. She smiled apologetically at the advisor explaining that she had never been abroad before. She began researching to try and calm some of her fears, looking up stories of people who had traveled and checking kidnapping rates abroad.



Motivated by the courageous Game of Thrones character's words, Chynna decided to join the 2019 global studies seminar, a two week exchange program organized by MATCC with partners in Ireland and Germany. In 2019, the destination was Ireland.

She had a million fears as she contemplated what those two weeks would involve. What if she lost her implant? What if she got lost? What if she couldn't communicate effectively with her classmates? Nevertheless, she knew that she didn't want to spend her life never knowing what was beyond Madison, and it was time to take a risk and venture out.

The students went to Enniskillen Ireland. They took a seminar on ethical business practices with students from MATCC's sister school in Ireland before dividing off into groups and visiting a business that was focused on these practices. Chynna's group visited a butcher shop which made sure to avoid using artificial dyes and chemicals in the meat and they maintained a free-range island where animals could roam freely.

The students also had time to learn more about Ireland. They visited the Titanic Museum, the Guinness Storehouse Tour and the Peace Wall between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. They saw the St. Patrick's Day parade, the set of Game of Thrones, along with Chynna's favorite, the Giant's Causeway.

It was the program's first time hosting a deaf student, and they did their best to provide reasonable accommodations that would enable Chynna to participate. They hired two sign language interpreters who accompanied her during the formal parts of the program. Since the program schedule was quite intensive, Chynna discovered that it was challenging to concentrate on the interpreters all day long. They let her know when it was appropriate to take a break.

While she was included in all formal activities of her program, Chynna had to keep up with the group during evening social gatherings where there were no interpreters. Her classmates were

not inviting her because they just didn't know that she could interact without an interpreter.

Growing up, Chynna became accustomed to letting other people speak for her. When ordering at a restaurant, she would have to explain that she couldn't hear, the waitress would give her a pitying look, before taking her order from her parents.

It was time to overcome her fears and invite herself to the social activities. She realized that just by explaining how she could read lips and how her peers could get her attention by tapping her on the shoulder, she could become part of the group.

Chynna has a lot to show from her time spent at her local community college. She has won academic honors, traveled internationally and grown into a more confident woman. She plans to transfer to the University of Wisconsin where she will major in business, and she hopes to one day own her own business, and to work to encourage others as herself to achieve more.

