

COVERING THE CRINGE- WORTHY



Teen ambassadors Jane and Finn participate in UPMC Children's Free Care Fund Benefit Show.

By **Nora Kogan**

Growing up can be awkward in a lot of ways, from the challenges some teens face fitting in socially, to balancing school, sports, and oneself, all while holding down a part-time job.

Talking about it with adults?
Doubly so.

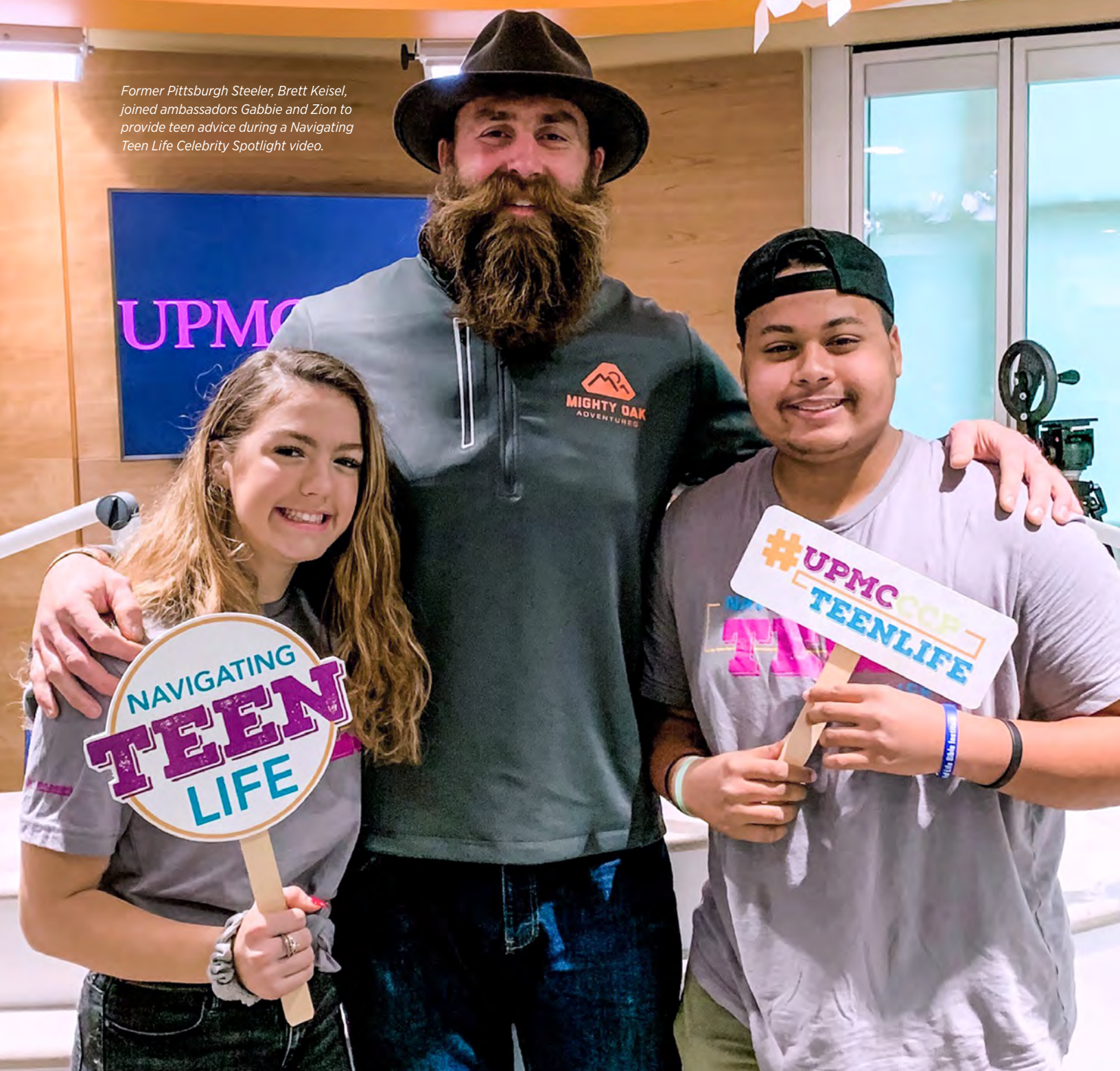


Above: Charlie Rudolph, 18, is a teen ambassador and freshman at the University of Pittsburgh.

Below: Pictured left to right: Teen ambassadors Niyah, Maya, and Nadia during filming of season two.



Former Pittsburgh Steeler, Brett Keisel, joined ambassadors Gabbie and Zion to provide teen advice during a Navigating Teen Life Celebrity Spotlight video.



As a result, most teens try to avoid these conversations, and the awkwardness that comes with them — at least with the adults in their lives. Instead, teens often turn to outlets like social media and the Internet for answers to the physical, mental, emotional, and social challenges that typify these years. Suffice it to say, as they seek direction, they often don't get the right answers and have to separate myths, misinformation, and hearsay from the facts.

“Navigating Teen Life has allowed us to find that creative way to get the message to our patients where they are, instead of expecting them to come to us.”

—Pamela L. Schoemer, MD



Navigating Teen Life, a program started a few years ago at UPMC Children's Community Pediatrics, a primary care division of UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, aims to solve that quandary by creating a resource for teens, from teens, on teen-specific issues — but one with accurate, medically sound, and expert-guided advice.

Navigating Teen Life uses the voice of teens to reach peers at a more personal level. The main form of communication they use is YouTube, where they've uploaded more than 60 videos in the last year, but they are beginning to make a shift more toward Instagram in the future.

“Having that high-quality information come from teens through a platform, like social media, makes all the difference,” says Charlie Rudolph, an 18-year-old from Pine Richland, Pennsylvania.

“Listening to peers is easier than listening to adults or your parents,” he says.

Meet Patients Where They Are

After noticing that the rate of those regularly going to Children's Community Pediatrics (CCP) in western Pennsylvania began to decline from around 80% to 60% once hitting age 16, **Pamela L. Schoemer, MD**, lead physician and director, Quality, Safety and Outcomes, UPMC Children's Community Pediatrics, along with others continue to work to ensure the highest CCP attendance for UPMC.

To guarantee this high attendance, innovations are being made to ensure UPMC is reaching patients in the best way; in this case, Navigating Teen Life to reiterate the importance of CCP.

“Navigating Teen Life has allowed us to find that creative way to get the message to our patients where they are, instead of expecting them to come to us,” Dr. Schoemer says.

Made up of more than two dozen teen ambassadors, like Charlie, from many different locations and backgrounds, Navigating Teen Life serves as a resource for teens to make topics less uncomfortable and more relatable.

As a teen ambassador, Charlie has been part of many videos in his three years with the program. He, like all teens, understands that some topic matters can become awkward when an adult is present. >



Above: Dr. Schoemer serves as a consultant for Navigating Teen Life to ensure all content is medically accurate and relevant for a teen audience.

Left: Pamela L. Schoemer, MD



“Speaking from personal experience, the topics we cover are really hard to talk to adults about,” he says.

Having open conversations hasn’t always been this easy. Dr. Schoemer reminisces about her own childhood, wishing she had a resource like Navigating Teen Life to help get her through her teen years. “It would have been wonderful to have information presented in a relatable way, easily accessed, and covering all the teen issues — making it a shared experience,” she says.

When it comes to YouTube videos, teen ambassadors come up with topics they think are important and then create videos on those topics with factual guidance from “special guests” — UPMC physicians, like Dr. Schoemer.

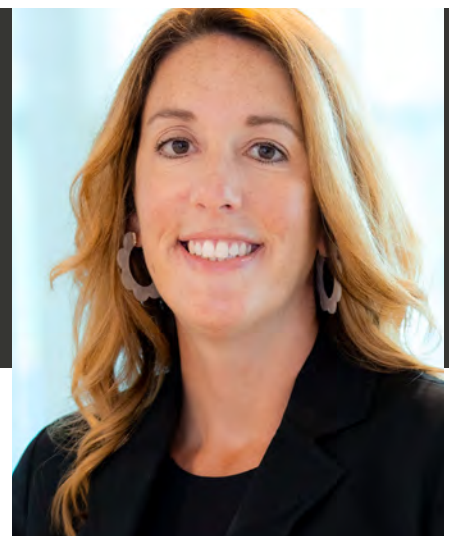
By pairing with these special guests, teen ambassadors can serve as a gateway between kids and professionals. The videos provide real examples to viewers, about how to talk with a medical professional and advocate for yourself as a patient. “It is really daunting to reach out to an adult or professional by yourself,” Charlie says.

The teens’ videos cover all wellness topics, not just topics that relate to physical health, including videos on safe driving, COVID-19 safety, sports injuries, puberty, and many more.

While a money management talk with mom and dad might not be cringe-inducing, Charlie says some topics are best covered through the lens of more recent, shared experiences.

“It has given us a voice internally to help educate that we need to **change our mindset and experience for teen patients.”**

— Michelle Faderewski



Pictured left to right: Ambassadors Katie, Daisy Jade (Pittsburgh CW), Jane, Izzy, Gabbie, and Sydney during filming at The CW network studios in downtown Pittsburgh.

Below: Michelle Federewski

"The video about puberty was one of the first I helped make, and I wasn't necessarily certain I'd be comfortable talking about a subject that was super awkward in my eyes," Charlie says. "Over time, though, I realized we all had gone through the same things."

A New Way to Measure Success

Michelle Federewski, director, marketing and communications, UPMC Children's Community Pediatrics, and creator and program director of Navigating Teen Life, strives to make a difference in the lives of teens on the daily. What started off as a program to increase the number of patients regularly going to a CCP office, soon evolved into a way to empower teens, while also connecting them with expert advice.

The overall success of this program is not tied to a single data point. Although UPMC CCP attendance has increased, that is not the best way to measure the success of Navigating Teen Life. The relationships and impact of this program are far more important — the cultural shift seen at CCP is a more accurate reflection.

"Our success is the general awareness and the relationships we are building," Michelle says. "You can see the cultural shift in the way we address things that in the past were not taken as head-on."

Not only has this program enhanced the UPMC Experience at CCP, but it has also allowed staff to communicate and collaborate with other departments to understand specialists' needs and therefore use this platform to spread other information that may be helpful and necessary for Navigating Teen Life's followers.

"We collaborate internally with different departments so we can support their message and needs as well," says Michelle. Navigating Teen Life has emphasized the importance of mental health and collaborated with behavioral health professionals to serve as a gateway between professionals and patients who may need their care. The brain development and behavioral health of adolescents is very important, which is why this specific collaboration continues to better patients.

"It has given us a voice internally to help educate that we need to change our mindset and experience for teen patients," says Michelle. >

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DREAM BIG STUDIO

Josh Getzoff, Pittsburgh Penguins Radio Network play-by-play announcer, interviews ambassador Nadia about NTL for UPMC Children's Fan of the Game program. This interview aired during the Penguins pre-game show.



Even though UPMC Children's was once again named in the Top 10 children's hospitals, there is always something to add to make the care even better. Navigating Teen Life continues to find ways to do this. In our innovative world, this program could create ideas on how to spread information to best reach patients, beyond teens. It is an ongoing learning experience to continue to provide the best care possible for UPMC patients, and now to the community.

Being based on social media, this program affects more than just UPMC Children's patients. With just the click of a few buttons, it meets teens regardless of where they are or if they are UPMC patients. The information is helpful for not only patients but also parents and community members.

"We play an integral role in helping families raise functioning adults," Michelle says. "We help to guide this process through the mental, social, and emotional well-being of adolescents."

A Look Into the Future

Following four successful seasons, season five will be coming out in the fall of 2021. This season will be all about the "Top 5s", so get ready. Be sure to also follow their Instagram for upcoming contests. With this new season, Navigating Teen Life will continue to give teens the help they may need, in a way that speaks to their age demographic.

"It is unique for the reason that teens are leading, and the professionals are just the guests," Dr. Schoemer says. **FF**



NTL can be found on YouTube @Navigating Teen Life, on Instagram @navigatingteenlife, and online at childrenspeds.com/justforteens.

For more information, contact **Michelle Faderewski**.



A \$23 billion health care provider and insurer, Pittsburgh-based UPMC is inventing new models of patient-centered, cost-effective, accountable care. The largest nongovernmental employer in Pennsylvania, UPMC integrates 92,000 employees, 40 hospitals, 800 doctors' offices and outpatient sites, and a more than 4 million-member Insurance Services Division, the largest medical insurer in western Pennsylvania. In the most recent fiscal year, UPMC contributed \$1.7 billion in benefits to its communities, including more care to the region's most vulnerable citizens than any other health care institution, and paid more than \$900 million in federal, state, and local taxes. Working in close collaboration with the [University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences](#), Schools of the Health Sciences, UPMC shares its clinical, managerial, and technological skills worldwide through its innovation and commercialization arm, UPMC Enterprises, and through UPMC International. *U.S. News* consistently ranks UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside among the nation's best hospitals in many specialties and ranks UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh on its Honor Roll of America's Best Children's Hospitals. For more information, go to [UPMC.com](#).

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