Bridging the Gaps - Pittsburgh

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Bridging the Gaps Pittsburgh is part of the Bridging the Gaps Consortium, administered in Philadelphia and comprised of representatives from five academic health centers in the Philadelphia region, plus programs in Erie, Lehigh Valley, New Jersey, and Pittsburgh.

Community Health Internship Program

2016 Symposium

University of Pittsburgh

Honored to be working with and within the communities of:
Braddock • Hazelwood • South Side • Oakland • Garfield • Uptown • Northside • Downtown • Clairton
My time at CHS has been a learning experience, not only academically, but full of life-knowledge as well. When faced with large, institutional-level problems, like poverty and homelessness, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, as if a small solution is nothing but a bandage on a gushing wound. But my time at CHS has taught me that small interventions make the world of difference – that by providing food or a home, and ultimately both, you can start the process of completely changing a person’s life and their entire well-being.

- K. Wint, Public Health

**Bridging the Gaps - Pittsburgh:**

- provides health professional students opportunities to work directly with underserved populations, to better understand their health concerns and needs, and
- provides outreach and support to organizations that are on the “front lines” of health care.

**Learning from vulnerable populations, mentors and peers**

Interns work in interdisciplinary pairs with any one of a range of different underserved populations in Pittsburgh, including people in recovery, children, homeless women or many other “at risk” populations. In this internship, interns spend the majority of their time learning directly from people served about their perspectives, needs and priorities.

**Building reciprocal and responsive partnerships**

Interns must complete a project by the end of their internship, chosen by the students in coordination with their community mentor and this office, one that leaves the host organization with a tangible product. Interns’ faculty mentors are available to provide feedback on project design and resources. Past and current projects include

- Developing and delivering health education curricula
- Developing resource guides and informational brochures to better meet a population’s needs
- Internal surveys and needs assessments to improve program quality

**Learning through reflection and discussion**

Once a week interns attend a full day reflective session on campus, instead of visiting their sites. These reflective sessions include guest presentations and discussions related to working in vulnerable communities – issues of poverty, health inequities, health literacy, community violence, advocacy, and social determinants of health. These weekly sessions allow students the opportunity to share their thoughts and questions about their work with peers from other health professional schools – comparing approaches and gaining insight into creative interventions.
Health and Wellness – at Bethlehem Haven
Katherine Halza, School of Pharmacy
Maria Jeronimo Talavera, Graduate School of Public Health and School of Social Work
*Community Mentor:* Sharon Higginbothan, PhD, COO, Bethlehem Haven
*Academic Mentor:* Ann Mitchell, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FIAAN, FAAN, School of Nursing

**Bethlehem Haven Women’s Shelter, Downtown Pittsburgh**
Bethlehem Haven is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing a number of services including emergency shelter; transitional housing; permanent supportive housing; medical, dental, obstetric and mental health services; and employment services to women in the Pittsburgh area. The Haven also provides some medical, mental health and employment services to nonresidents, including homeless men.

**The Project:**
As Bethlehem Haven was starting a new Wellness Program that provides the women with fitness and healthy lifestyle opportunities, the interns saw an opportunity to create an 8-week curriculum to supplement the program. This curriculum was created to span the length of time that women are allowed to stay in the emergency shelter, and covers a different health topic each week. A bookmark with curriculum highlights was also created to ensure that the women who do not stay the 60 day limit still have exposure to the health information: the bookmark will be given to the women at their intake. In addition, a housing checklist was created to reduce miscommunication around what is expected from the women to obtain housing and what staff can do to assist them in this process. The interns also created three budgeting tools to help the women achieve and maintain permanent housing, the three tools target the following: while the women are in shelter, in permanent housing after shelter, or in supportive permanent housing. The checklist and budget tools are given to the women at intake.

Is Life a Bowl of Cherries? Re-”imaging” the Picture of Food Security – at Community Human Services
Megan Sybeldon, School of Pharmacy
Kristina Wint, Graduate School of Public Health
*Community Mentor:* Jon Hoffman, Chief Operating Officer, Community Human Services
*Academic Mentor:* Thuy Bui, MD, University of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

**Community Human Services, Oakland**
CHS’s mission is to empower individuals and families to live in stable housing, connect to community resources, build relationships, and access quality food. Last year alone CHS prevented more than 1,500 adults and children from becoming homeless, supported more than 145 adults and seniors with disabilities to remain living independently in their own homes, connected 1,400 people with fresh produce in our food pantry (each month), & empowered more than 80 families with young children to be ready for pre-school.

**The Project:**
The Bridging the Gaps Interns performed a pilot photovoice project with customers from the CHS Food Pantry to learn more about the customer’s lived experience and how the pantry could better meet their needs. The photos taken by CHS customers show how the Food Pantry has helped supplement their diet and the images display the creative ways they have found to use the food. The final images from this small campaign will be placed on postcards and given to future funders of the CHS Food Pantry. The photos will be used to help garner additional support, so the Food Pantry will be able to reach out to more members of the community. The interns also created a guide for performing the project as an aid to those who choose to continue the campaign.
While I believe that the hygienic practices and knowledge I passed on to the campers was valuable, I also firmly believe that what they were able to teach me about social differences, the benefits of personifying statistics I learn in school, and how to advantageously establish interpersonal connections with those I wish to help was of equal value to myself. I hope that I have given back even a small portion of what the community of Hazelwood has given me this summer, and I can say with confidence that I am planning on continuing my affiliation with Center of Life throughout my professional career. Thank you.

- M. Lepore, Nursing

**Early Head Start Child Care Staff Health & Safety Handbook - at COTRAIC**

Lisa Sophia Haen, Graduate School of Public Health  
Jennifer Mena, School of Medicine  
Community Mentors: Deborah Gallagher, M.Ed, COTRAIC  
Early Head Start, Pam Dickinson, B.S., and Katelyn Kaczorowski, RN  
Academic Mentor: Rachel A. Fusco, PhD, MSW, University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work

**COTRAIC Early Head Start:**  
COTRAIC EHS families are at or below the poverty line with children ages 0 to 3. The mission is “to promote the socio-economic development of the Native American Community and others who experience the same type of socio-economic difficulties in the Great Pittsburgh Metropolitan area.” Services include Child Development, Health Services, Mental Health, Nutrition Services, Family Support, Disabilities, Community Partnerships, and Pregnant Women. Early Head Start provides services through home visitors who work with the families for an hour and a half each week or through child care centers that partner with Early Head Start and Head Start.

**The Project:**  
The Student Interns created a Health & Safety Handbook to increase the Child Care Partners’ Staff’s understanding of the Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership and the EHS Health and Safety Standards. The Handbook aims to increase communication, collaboration, and compliance between the two partnering entities. The interns used information gathered from a literature search on current Child Care Standards and from conversations with Child Care Staff, Child Care directors, and EHS Child Care Liaisons. With this information, the interns created an accessible and understandable handbook that contains sections on hygiene, safety, communicable illness management and prevention, and emergency preparedness. The handbook will be used by Child Care Staff and Child Care Liaison to improve compliance with EHS health and safety standards.
My time with the BTG Internship has been an eye-opening, transformative, and thought-provoking experience. I have learned so much about the current state of childcare and early childhood education in low-income communities and the hard work that is being done to continue to improve it. This experience has moved me to become more attentive to the social issues that plague low-income families more actively involved in addressing them. It has further motivated me to dedicate my life to taking care of women and children.

- J. Mena, School of Medicine
Gwen’s Girls C.A.N.
Shannon Hughes, Graduate School of Public Health
Shannon Mance, School of Nursing
Community Mentors: Denise McGill-Delaney, MSW, Gwen’s Girls
Academic Mentor: Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD, University of Pittsburgh, School of Medicine, Children’s Hospital of UPMC

Gwen’s Girls, North Side
Gwen’s Girls was founded in 2002 by former Pittsburgh Police Commander Gwendolyn J. Elliott. Ms. Elliott had noticed the plight of girls and young women in high risk populations and the lack in services that would meet their complex needs. The mission of Gwen’s Girls is to empower girls and young women to have productive lives through holistic, gender-specific programs, education, and experiences. Gwen’s Girls offers services for girls aged 8 to 21, including foster care, after-school programs, summer camp, prevention, reunification and a group home. Camp Destiny, Gwen’s Girls’ summer camp program, focuses on providing structured time for the participants to focus on building life skills, hobbies, interests, and general summer fun.

The Project:
The interns engaged with the girls on a daily basis through Gwen’s Girls’ after-school and summer camp programs. Building close relationships with the girls was essential in implementing the self-generated health and wellness curriculum during weekly “Bridging the Gap” sessions. The topics addressed ranged from healthy relationships to sugar consumption to body positivity through physical fitness. The interns also conducted a “Visual Voice” project investigating the community factors the girls want to change through social action, such as reducing gun violence in their neighborhoods. In response to feedback from Gwen’s Girls group facilitators, the interns created a “Staff Activity Book” to supplement staff resources in order to improve classroom engagement and employee support. In addition, the interns stimulated awareness around environmental sustainability by implementing a recycling program with help from the Allegheny County Health Department.

Fuel and Fun – at Heritage Community Initiatives
Annemarie Malbon, School of Social Work, COSA
Lauren Ojeda, Graduate School of Public Health, BCHS
Community Mentor: Laura Kelley, MSW, Heritage Community Initiatives
Academic Mentor: Mark Friedman, PhD

Heritage Community Initiatives, Braddock
For over thirty years, Heritage Community Initiatives has been privileged to serve thousands of families facing socioeconomic challenges through three major areas of focus – education, transportation and addressing the needs of our constituents through a series of pragmatic life enhancing initiatives. Although Heritage Community Initiatives is proud to call Braddock Pennsylvania its hometown, the organization serves thirty communities within Allegheny County. For the past three years, Heritage Community Initiatives, with the help of the Bridging the Gaps interns, has run a Summer Nutrition Program which provides a free lunch and snack to youth 18 and under.

The Project:
The Summer Nutrition Program is one of Heritage’s life enhancing initiatives and works to address the social and health inequities faced by low-income residents in Braddock, PA who are experiencing food insecurity. To further address these problems, the interns sought to strengthen the quality and implementation of the Summer Nutrition Program (SNP) and to document the functioning of the SNP. These objectives were met by developing, implementing, and documenting three projects: a comprehensive program manual, a “Hydration Station,” and “From Parking Lot to Playspace.” The interns worked with their community mentor to develop a printed and digitalized program manual comprised of an operation plan, an outreach toolkit, and a facilitation and resource section. The “Hydration Station,” a sustainable way to deliver water to the youth, was conceived following the interns’ experience with the youth in the first week and provides an oral-friendly alternative to sugary drinks. “From Parking Lot to Playspace” arose from a desire to transform an unwelcoming, desolate, unsafe environment into a friendly and colorful space that promotes physical activity, which both the youth and community could enjoy.
“When working in the day to day lives of these people, I can now realize the importance of the small victories towards a better life and better health, instead of wanting the whole problem fixed right away.” - K. Halza, School of Pharmacy

Wellness Curriculum at Center of Life
Maddie Lepore, School of Nursing
Miranda Steinkopf, School of Pharmacy

Community Mentors: Charonda Hill, MSOL, Director of Operations, and Kandace Powell, MSW, Family and Outreach Specialist, Center of Life
Academic Mentor: Thistle Elias, DrPH, MPA, Graduate School of Public Health

Center of Life, Hazelwood
Center of Life is a community-empowerment organization located in the Hazelwood neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Center of Life was founded in 2002 by Reverend Tim Smith to aid in the revitalization of the community and its people. Center of Life’s mission aims to help the families and youth through a variety of after-school programs, family outreach groups, and summer camps with a focus on education, art, music, and sports. The Center of Life staff believe that “everything is about people.”

The Project:
The interns got to know the children of Hazelwood through the Voices Summer Camp and quickly heard from staff members and observed themselves that there was a serious lack of understanding about health and wellness concepts on the part of the children. For this reason, they developed a Wellness Curriculum for Center of Life to use during the summer of 2016 and in the future. To kick off the curriculum, the interns taught three different lessons and actively engaged the children in various activities dealing with personal hygiene, nutrition, physical activity, and healthy relationships. They also put together a Wellness Curriculum binder to leave behind for the staff members at Center of Life to use in the future to help ensure that the children remember what they have already learned and to give them the opportunity to gain even more knowledge in these areas.
“Sisters Plate” – at Sister’s Place
Alexandria Budney, Graduate School of Public Health, Health Policy and Management
Ka Ron Spriggs-Bethea, School of Social Work
Community Preceptors: Mary Parks, CSJ, Executive Director, Sisters Place and Patricia Wood, MSW, Program Director, Sisters Place
Academic Preceptor: Tracy Soska, Assistant Professor, COSA Chair, and Continuing Education Director, School of Social Work

Sisters Place, Clairton
Sisters Place is a supportive housing community assisting single parent families experiencing homelessness in Southwestern PA. Their mission is to assist families toward self-sufficiency by providing housing and supportive services. They provide housing and supportive programs for families in both a temporary and long term capacity. Programs include: child development and education case management; summer camp; food bank; and therapeutic support groups.

The Project:
“Sisters Plate” is a recipe book building off of the Bridging the Gaps 2015 project, the community garden. Each recipe was selected while taking into consideration of the food that is available in the Clairton community or available at a once a month food bank provided to the residents by Sisters Place. The recipes are healthier alternatives to many recipes that the residents typically make and are priced per serving to ensure the residents stay within their budget. The interns included a refrigerator guide to help teach the residents how to store food properly to make it last between trips to the grocery store, which is a 20 minute car ride away. There is also a MyPlate guide for parents to teach their children how to eat a well balanced meal.

“Coaches’ Catalyst” – at Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community
Leslie Carrese, School of Social Work
Manasa Ranginani, Graduate School of Public Health
Community Preceptors Mark Taylor, Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community and Justin Forzano, Cameroon Football Development Program & Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community
Academic Preceptor: Dr. Sharon E. Connor, PharmD, School of Pharmacy

Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community, Garfield, Hazelwood
Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community was founded in 2004 by James Meara and Mark Taylor. Their mission for over ten years has been to provide sport-based youth development programs in underserved neighborhoods in Pittsburgh. They seek to improve the quality of life of youth of all ages in Pittsburgh by incorporating health education, leadership, and life skills into the game of soccer. The program is especially interested in developing the capacity of coaches as mentors. Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community also collaborates with community based organizations that provide students with organized sports activities throughout the summer in order to reach greater numbers of kids. Through these programs, Pittsburgh Soccer in the Community seeks to assist children in making positive, healthy, and informed life decisions, whilst maintaining a relaxed and interactive environment.

The Project:
After recognizing the needs of the organization and conducting a community needs assessment, the student interns decided to build a curriculum to provide structure and consistency in order to attain the organization’s mission of providing high quality soccer training to children in underserved communities while incorporating important life lessons. The student interns created a portable curriculum tool for the coaches in the form of coaching cards. The topics in the curriculum aim to educate children on a wide range of issues ranging from nutrition and exercise to conflict resolution and integrity. The student interns provided a step by step sequence for the session while allowing freedom in the choice of soccer activities and drills. The curriculum is intended to encourage discussion of health and social topics while maintaining an organized soccer session.
Our work with the children and on the curriculum opened my eyes to the hard work behind creating thoughtful, creative and engaging education, but also unveiled the power of it. I will undoubtedly carry this experience with me as I move forward in social work and continue to learn from people of all walks of life.

- L. Carrese, School of Social Work

At Bridging the Gaps – Pittsburgh, it is our sincere pleasure to support the talents and aspirations of our many dedicated students and the remarkable organizations that host them and serve our communities each summer.

Joan Harvey, MD, Program Director
School of Medicine

Thistle Elias, DrPH, MPA
Program Co-Director
Graduate School of Public Health

Summer Rae Haston, Program Administrator
Graduate School of Public Health

Rabbi Art Donsky, Administrative Intern
Social Work/Public Health Masters Student

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt