



Bridging the Gaps

Community Health Internship Program

2022

Celebrating 25 Years

◆ ***University of Pittsburgh*** ◆

Nursing ◆ Dental ◆ Social Work ◆ Pharmacy ◆ Public Health ◆ Medicine

*Honored to be working this summer with
& within the communities of:*

◆ *Beltzhoover ◆ Hazelwood ◆ East Liberty ◆ Oakland ◆ South Hills ◆ Northside* ◆

Bridging the Gaps - Pittsburgh:

- provides health and social service professional students opportunities to work directly with local, underserved communities, to better understand their health concerns and needs, and
- provides health-related services, 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 the program office, one that leaves the host organization with tangible products. 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, trainings 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, sharing challenges and gaining insight into creative interventions to make positive change.

“I first-hand learned an incredible wealth of knowledge about underserved populations and the structural/societal barriers that they face, as well as the ways in which I can work to break them down. I aspire to carry the lessons that I learned from our clients, mentors, and the other interns with me into my future career work and I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity.”

-A. Sequeira, Pharmacy

“In my initial interactions, I found myself making assumptions not informed by any knowledge of the students’ lives outside of YES. Learning more about the students and their experiences has made me more empathetic because it showed me how an individual’s environment, upbringing, and experiences shape who they are and what they struggle with. This deeper sense of empathy will be a valuable tool in the future, especially when interacting with the underserved communities I hope to treat one day as physician.”

-A. Henderson, Public Health, Epidemiology

Youth and Young Adult Resource Guide

Diana Bellino, School of Public Health, Dept of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology

Jamie Hutchison, School of Social Work, Direct Practice Concentration

Community Mentors: Danielle Chaykowsky, Executive Assistant, Sarah Crenshaw, MEd, Education Programs Manager, Center of Life and Donna Smith, MPM, Director of the Social Justice Resource Center, Center of Life

Academic Mentor: Nina Markovic, PhD, MS, School of Dentistry

Center of Life, Hazelwood

Center of Life is an organization founded in 2001 by Pastor Tim Smith. The organization serves Hazelwood and its surrounding neighborhoods to support them as they strive to be strong and to make their communities strong. They offer a large variety of out of school programs that focus on things such as physical fitness, music and arts, and social justice. They focus on a holistic approach to community, believing that commitment to others is most productive when you walk with those served in their schools, homes, and families.

Website: <https://www.centeroflife.net/>

The Project:

The interns worked closely with the teen social justice program called Ambassadors of Justice. This included co-leading social justice presentations, activities for the teens, decorating the classroom where the program is held, and creating materials for the program. Materials created include a logo for the program, a digital version of t-shirt designs created by the students, and fact sheets on social justice figures. The project the student interns focused on was developing a resource guide for youth and young adults with resources and supports to meet their needs, including for substance use, housing, employment, mental health, child care among others . This project was presented to the Ambassadors of Justice for feedback multiple times during the duration of the internship to best serve a young population, additionally incorporating banking and financial resources and guidance on getting around the city.

Teacher Onboarding Manual

Yousuf Al-Abdulaheem, School of Pharmacy

Larisa Garza Chapa, School of Public Health, Dept of Infectious Disease and Microbiology

Community Mentor: Deborah Gallagher, M.Ed, Early Head Start and Family Center Director, and Margot Russell, M.Ed, COTRAIC

Academic Mentor: John Maier, MD, School of Medicine

COTRAIC Early Head Start, Hazelwood

Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC)

Early Head Start is a federally funded program that provides free or low-cost childcare to families at 100% poverty level or below with children 0-3 years old. They offer a variety of services both in the classroom and home to promote the healthy development of infants and toddlers. Home-based options include home visiting, which provide weekly meetings between families and staff for resources and recommendations. Center-based options include COTRAIC-operated classrooms, partnered classrooms (such as Brightside and family homes), and monthly visits. COTRAIC EHS services neighborhoods all over Pittsburgh and has recently expanded into Philadelphia.

Website: <http://www.cotraic.org/>

The Project:

Interns developed a Teacher's Onboarding Manual to address organizational needs. After expanding their operation scale, the management team at COTRAIC realized that there had been a lack of consensus on the orientation process, responsibilities, and expectations for several positions, most notably classroom teachers. For that reason, it was decided that developing an onboarding manual to introduce newly hired teachers to their positions would be of benefit. The teacher's onboarding manual includes five sections: Introduction, Organizational Policies, Classroom Policies and Procedures, Health Education, and Resources. Throughout the summer, interns shadowed different roles within COTRAIC Early Head Start to learn about their contributions and enrich their understanding of the program. Interns participated in management meetings, home-visits, classroom involvement, socialization events and other activities.

Testimonial Video and Wellness Corner

Grady Cooper, School of Social Work

Nivitha Periyaptna, School of Public Health, Dept of Infectious Disease and Microbiology

Community Mentor: Allison Haley, LCSW, Program Supervisor

Academic Mentor: Sharon Connor, PharmD, School of Pharmacy

Peoples Oakland, Oakland

Peoples Oakland was originally founded in 1974 as a response to deinstitutionalization mandates requiring mass discharges from inpatient mental health facilities. Today it remains a beacon of hope for many, and continues its work as a non-profit social rehabilitation center. Located in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh, the organization serves adults with serious persistent mental illness, and relies on the recovery model to guide and support members through their mental health journeys.

Website: <https://www.peoplesoakland.org/>

The Project:

The interns worked to create a testimonial video that captured the collaborative spirit of the organization and represented all the members and staff. The video was created to use on the website and at organization events to encourage new member registration and new donors. The student interns also worked to create a wellness corner, also with member input, to pull together resources concerning smoking cessation programs, primary care, dental care, STI screening, and mental health. The interns aimed to increase program participants' access to healthcare and make wellness resources simpler to use.

“This experience leaves me with an even greater appreciation for all the great work community organizations do...”

-D. Bellino, Public Health, Infectious Diseases and Microbiology

Reimagine Reentry Community Resource Guides

Andrew Martuscelli, School of Public Health, Dept of Genetics

Arvin Sequeira, School of Pharmacy

Community Mentor: Julia Donnelly, MPH, Reimagine Reentry

Data and Project Manager, and Jim Paolicelli, Reentry Coach

Academic Mentor: Thuy D. Bui, MD, School of Medicine

Reimagine Reentry, Northside

Reimagine Reentry is an organization that provides trauma informed, holistic care to returning citizens using a strengths-based approach. They work with clients for three years to prevent recidivism by finding equitable solutions to the barriers posed by reentry. They provide wrap-around services including housing assistance, workforce development, and most importantly, by providing a one-on-one coaching service to develop various professional, social, and mental skills needed for client success.

Website: <https://www.letsreimaginereentry.org/>

The Project:

Citizens facing reentry after incarceration face a lot of structural and social barriers from full community reintegration. Allegheny County is rich in resources but it is hard to know where to look, especially without a social network or support system, as seen with those who are returning from incarceration. By creating resource guides, informed by the specific needs of the population gathered through visits and client interviews, Reimagine Reentry is better able to serve their clients and inform the reentry population about what is out there. By providing resources that are identified as important for clients, and vetting their ability to aid those with criminal backgrounds, the team is able to bridge a disconnect that occurs between people and the resources they need. These resource guides also aid in forming a network of organizations that can all work together to better their communities.

“This was a much-needed addition to the book learning that I am so enmeshed in during the school year, which couldn’t possibly match the real, lived experiences of the people I intend to serve once I graduate.”

-M. Avino, Public Health, Behavioral and Community Health

“Knowing that there is a place that is giving young people the space to express their interests around social justice issues while giving them the tools they need to learn how to use their voice gives me hope for the future.”

-J. Hutchison, Social Work

Resource Guide: An Introduction to Family-Friendly Fun in Allegheny County

Michaela Avino, School of Public Health, Dept of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences

Nicole McCaffrey, School of Social Work and School of Public Health, Dept of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences

Community Mentor: Karen Upsher-Williams, MSW, Family Housing Manager, Sojourner MOMS

Academic Mentor: Dr. Betty Braxter, PhD, CNM, RN, FAAN, School of Nursing

Sojourner House/MOMS, Garfield

Sojourner House is a recovery-focused organization that allows children to stay with their moms during treatment. This is a unique and much-needed model of treatment. They offer three levels of care: residential rehabilitation treatment; transitional housing with support services for families in recovery, and permanent housing coordinated through AlleghenyLink. The Sojourner House programs provide faith-based, compassionate recovery services that encourage self-sufficiency. <https://www.sojournerhousepa.org/>

The Project:

While at Sojourner House/MOMS, the student interns developed a guide to family-friendly, low-cost activities and places in the Pittsburgh area, particularly those local to the programs. Through their observations and conversations at MOMS, the students recognized that the parents living there, many of whom were unfamiliar with Pittsburgh, were eager for information about the surrounding area that would support their children's development, their relationships with their children, and their own recovery. The students provided current residents with a paper copy of the guide while working with administrative staff to offer an electronic version accessible to residents and the general public through the Sojourner House website. By using their community connections, the student interns were able to help the residents put these new ideas to use with a trip to the library where residents signed up for library cards and learned about library resources. Throughout this process, the student interns also facilitated programming on health-related topics like finding health information online, managing stress with relaxation techniques, and oral health.

Happy Times at VAV: A Self Care Adventure

Saad Akhtar –School of Public Health, Dept of Human Genetics/
Genetic Counseling,

Jiyeon Lee –School of Nursing

Community Mentor: Dr. Maureen Anderson, Director of Programs, and
Richard Carrington Sr., Executive Director

Academic Mentor: Jamie Zelazny - PhD, MPH, RN, School of Nursing

Voices Against Violence, *Beltzhoover*

Voices Against Violence (VAV) initially began as a street outreach initiative by Richard Carrington, Sr. working with Pittsburgh gang members in 1992. VAV was formally established in 1995 in response to a growing need for holistic community-based programs that serve youth involved with gangs, drugs, and guns in South Pittsburgh. It soon became one of the first and foremost anti-violence organizations in Pittsburgh, pioneering programs in Street Mediation, Conflict and Restorative Justice Practices. VAV primarily serves male and female youth ages 4 to 24 residing in South Pittsburgh communities.

Website: <https://www.vavpgh.org/>

The Project:

As part of working at VAV's summer camp, interns created a three-part project focused on teaching self-care and wellness topics to VAV staff and participants in order to help them better cope with trauma from ongoing issues in their communities. Interns conducted a self-care presentation for staff, given during their training week, and distributed an accompanying self-care practice guide. For the second piece of the project, interns created age-appropriate activities revolving around different aspects of self-care each week for the young campers, with topics ranging from nutrition, physical and oral health and mental health. Lastly, the interns created a children's story book highlighting the self-care activities the camp youth were a part of during the summer session with the hopes of creating a reminder of positive memories participants could look back on.

Teen Health Resource Center

Alexis Henderson, School of Public Health, Dept of Epidemiology
Tianhao Ma, School of Nursing

Community Mentors: Jasmine Davis, Manager of Academic and Mentoring Programming, Youth Enrichment Services

Academic Mentor: Martha A Terry, PhD, MA, School of Public Health

Youth Enrichment Services, East Liberty

Youth Enrichment Services is a nonprofit in East Liberty that specializes in mentorship, enrichment, and the education of economically and socially at-risk youth around Pittsburgh, ages 13-18. They pride themselves on empowering students to be their own best resource, providing them with the tools they will need to be successful and confident leaders in their schools, homes, and communities.

Website: <https://www.youthenrichmentservices.org/>

The Project:

Bridging the Gaps-Pittsburgh interns assisted the Summer Scholars going through the Summer Work for Success program (incoming high school freshmen) in drafting a resume, cover letter, and business cards that comprised an application package, and trained them for success in job interviews. Interns developed and hosted their own individual apprenticeships, where each intern developed a 12-lesson curriculum about Personal Wellness and Nutrition. Each intern facilitated a group of eight students at YES's first Violence Prevention Summit where teens made their voices heard about violence in Pittsburgh's communities. Lastly, interns led groups of students through community participatory action research, where they helped students identify assets and problems within four specific neighborhoods around Pittsburgh.

“As a student with a background in biology, my classes have always focused on the medical model for the treatment of mental illness, and focused on brain chemistry. It was good to see the social aspect of mental health recovery in action, and I saw what a difference it made to the members to be a part of a community with so much support for their recovery.”

- N. Periyapatna, Public Health, Infectious Disease and Microbiology

“My time at VAV this summer has been a very meaningful and memorable learning experience for me in many ways. Not only was I able to practice putting myself into these children’s shoes, but I also recognized the importance of taking care of myself to become a better mentor for them.”

-J. Lee, Nursing

“As a nursing student who wants to eliminate health disparities, this experience allowed me to dig deep into the communities and see some of the challenges that people face. During the process of building new relationships with the students, I have also strengthened my empathy, adaptability, collaboration, and communication skills.”

-T. Ma, Nursing

“As a student in the school of Public Health, I intend to take everything I have learned throughout this experience with me as I continue my education, as well as in my future career.”

-A. Martuscelli, Public Health, Genetics

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.

Thistle Elias, DrPH, MPA
Program Director
Pitt School of Public Health

Alda Gonzaga, MD, MS
Program Co-Director
Pitt School of Medicine

Brandi Boak, Program Coordinator
Pitt School of Public Health, Masters Candidate

Antonio Gumucio, MS, Administrative Intern
Pitt School of Public Health, Masters Candidate

*“I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and **stand up** for what you truly believe.”*

- John Lewis

*“You **must** do the things you think you cannot do.”*

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Thank you

To the many community and faculty mentors and members of the BTG-Pittsburgh Advisory Board

To each University of Pittsburgh Dean of a professional school that supports student stipends for this program:

School of Medicine, School of Public Health,
School of Social Work, School of Pharmacy,
School of Nursing, School of Dental Medicine

To those staff and faculty who have provided additional support, enthusiasm and in-kind contributions this year!

BTG Pittsburgh is a member of the Bridging the Gaps Network. Bridging the Gaps is a collaboration among multiple academic health institutions in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and over 100 community organizations, linking the interprofessional education of health and social service professional students with the provision of health-related services for vulnerable populations.