



Bridging the Gaps

Community Health Internship Program

2023

Celebrating 26 Years

♦ *University of Pittsburgh* ♦

♦ *Rehabilitation Sciences* ♦ *Pharmacy* ♦ *Nursing* ♦ *Dental* ♦
♦ *Public Health* ♦ *Social Work* ♦ *Medicine* ♦

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

♦ *Beltzhoover* ♦ *Hazelwood* ♦ *Homestead* ♦ *East Liberty* ♦ *Garfield* ♦ *Oakland* ♦ *S Hills* ♦

“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

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.

“For the first time in my life, I truly realized the trauma children can undergo because of the adversities they experience growing up. It made me want to do much more than this.”

-S. Bhansali, Public Health, Genetics

“I have learned that members are more than their symptoms, each member has strengths, aspirations, and goals [...] I came out of this internship with a new understanding of needs, concerns, progress, empathy, trust, and communication. In short, the relationships I have made here will stay with me for a lifetime.”

-A. Ghosh, Public Health, Behavioral and Community Health

Hydroponics: Nutrition and Sustainability in a Food Desert

Prashanti Limbu, School of Public Health, Epidemiology

With support from

Sara Worsham, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences,
Communication Disorders

Community Mentors: Sarah Crenshaw, MEd, Education Programs
Manager, with Nichole Howell and Kic McCrae, Center of Life
Academic Mentor: Thuy Bui, MD, School of Medicine

Center of Life, Hazelwood

Center of Life is an organization founded in 2001 by Pastor Tim Smith. Center of Life (COL) strives to support and empower the people of Hazelwood and surrounding communities. COL provides opportunities, resources, and support for children, youths, and adults. The programs in place at COL focus on providing academic and recreational out-of-school opportunities, music education, and varying support for community adults. The programs specifically for children include Fusion (after-school tutoring), Crossover (after-school physical education), and Camp Hazelwood (recreational and educational experiences over the summer). Other programs in place for families, and the community as a whole, include the Family and Community Engagement division and the Social Justice Resource Center.

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

The Project:

The interns at COL initially worked with the community preceptor to understand the population they would be working with while helping to prepare for Camp Hazelwood. The academic and community preceptors worked with Sara and Prashanti to brainstorm ideas for a lesson plan about hydroponics. Sara and Prashanti developed and taught campers the lesson plan “Hydroponics: Nutrition and Sustainability in a Food Desert” to reinforce the importance of nutrition and food sustainability. The second part of the lesson plan included an activity in which the children had the opportunity to grow celery hydroponically and use the celery stalk to make “ants on a log” (peanut butter and raisins on celery). Campers also received take-home information on how to grow more vegetables hydroponically at home and the site was given the lesson plan to use in future years.

What You Need to Know About Partnering with COTRAIC: A Partner Guide

Emma Ford, School of Public Health, Behavioral and Community Health Sciences

Darby Robinson, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Nutrition & Dietetics

Community Mentor: Deborah Gallagher, M.Ed, Early Head Start and Family Center Director, with Pam Dickenson, Holly Santry & Margo Buchan Russell, COTRAIC

Academic Mentor: Cyndy Salter, PhD, MPA, School of Public Health

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:

The interns created a project that would benefit the liaison's in providing information to new and current childcare partners. This project was in PowerPoint format with speaker notes included so that anyone would be able to give the presentation with ease. Topics discussed include who staff will be working with, ratios and class size, child attendance, teacher requirements, health and safety screenings, financial responsibilities and various assessments amongst teachers and children. In addition to the PowerPoint, other materials such as a key takeaway sheet and a note taking template were included to help childcare directors better retain information from the presentation. With all these materials, directors at the partner sites should be able to retain and put the information into practice.

Dragon's Den Children's Self-Care Guide

Shruti Bhansali, School of Public Health, Genetics
Olivia Lohman, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences,
Communication Sciences and Disorders

Community Mentors: Ives Letzo, BA, Program Coordinator,
Dragons Den

Academic Mentor: Sharon Connor, PharmD, School of Pharmacy

Dragon's Den, Homestead

Homestead's historic St. Mary Magdalene Church now holds Dragon's Den, a bold, 501(c)(3) non-profit providing transformative learning environments through the use of a state-of-the-art, two-level therapeutic and educational challenge course, including a 160-foot zipline and 20-foot climbing wall. This course is designed to engage youth of diverse backgrounds and abilities to overcome challenges in themselves, their communities, and the world.

Website: <https://dragonsdenpgh.org/>

The Project:

The interns assisted their community partner by serving as supporting camp counselors. Responsive to site requests, the interns' project is a video guide for future summer camp counselors containing activities for the summer camp attendees centered around self-care. The guide includes multiple activities that can be done with the children, information about the importance of self-care for children and adults, and information regarding suicidal behaviors. The interns created additional projects including pamphlets for the parents with information about each week of camp, calling parents to ask about the barriers their children face surrounding attendance at the after-school program, and developing a guide for future university interns placed at Dragon's Den.

Highway to Health

Archisha Ghosh, School of Public Health, Behavioral and Community Health

Carla Medina-Gil, School of Pharmacy

Community Mentor: Allison Haley, LCSW, Program Supervisor, People's Oakland

Academic Mentor: Nina Markovic, BSDH, MS, PhD, School of Dental Medicine, School of Public Health

Peoples Oakland, Oakland

Peoples Oakland strives to be a premier recovery and wellness center that serves Allegheny County adults with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring disorders. All Peoples Oakland services and activities have a philosophy of recovery based on real-life experiences nurtured by peer support, hope, self-help, and collaborative relationships with professionals and are committed to holistic, comprehensive, member-driven recovery.

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

The Project:

Interns developed a project incorporating a health challenge for the members at Peoples Oakland. This consisted of a daily scoresheet where members could check off health activities that they did every day and earn points. These activities included brushing their teeth, drinking water, using the fitness room, etc. Based on points earned they received prizes such as gift cards and social outings. The final products include a scoresheet and a leaderboard poster.

“I was a bit apprehensive at the start, but every week my heart grew for these kids more and more. I learned not only how to talk with kids, but how to hold space for them to be vulnerable, how to teach them about tools needed to work through their emotions, and simply how to support a child who is living with so much trauma.”

- O. Lohman, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Communication Sciences and Disorders

“I see resilience, honesty, and assertion from the women I worked with, through their recovery path. Serving the disadvantaged area by joining the program really helped me open my mind and put thoughts to better deliver healthcare to people in need.”

-J. Xiong, Nursing

SOHO Family Cookbook

Jingyi (Jenny) Xiong, School of Nursing
Savannah Ballard, School of Public Health, Infectious Disease and
Microbiology

Community Mentor: Karen Upsher-Williams, MSW, Family Housing
Manager, Sojourner MOMS with Latresa Zak and Monica Philippone,
Sojourner

Academic Mentor: Patricia Documet, PhD, School of Public Health

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.

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

The Project:

While at Sojourner House/MOMS, the student interns developed a low cost, family cookbook. This cookbook includes a variety of different recipes for every meal of the day that are diverse, easy to make and budget friendly for any family. Through the many group sessions and discussions, the students discovered that many families do not cook their own meals and eat many processed foods. In addition to the cookbook, the student interns lead groups discussing the mental health benefits of cooking, nutritional benefits of different foods, family bonding, meal prepping and budgeting. In addition, the student interns led the clients in a cooking demonstration to make a healthy snack for both parents and children to create a space for community and creativity.

Building Blocks: Building Up Staff Resilience and Wellbeing at Voices Against Violence

Mary Ross –School of Public Health, Epidemiology

Mengjun (Kate) Wang – School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Sports Medicine

Community Mentor: Emmanuela Abraham, Program Coordinator and Richard Carrington Sr., Program Director, Voices Against Violence

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

Voices Against Violence, *Beltzhoover*

The Community Site Description: Voices Against Violence was founded in 1995 by Richard Carrington Sr. in response to a need for holistic community-based programming that served youth involved with gangs, drugs, and guns in the South Pittsburgh area. The overarching goal of the organization is to reduce interpersonal conflicts and empower youth through activities and education focused on diversion and prevention. This organization also serves the Beltzhoover community and surrounding neighborhoods with anti-violence and restorative justice programs, street violence intervention, conflict mediation and resolution, school-based retention programs, facilitated parent groups, and managed summer employment programs.

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

The Project:

The interns at VAV created two different workshops, a Tai Chi Training and a life skills training, to address issues of staff burnout and professionalism that the community mentors had communicated. The Tai Chi course for senior staff was taught twice a week for 15 minutes and followed traditional Tai Chi Methods. The life skills course was created to lead away from paths of interpersonal violence and incarceration and provide education and self-advocacy skills to youth junior counselors. The interns at VAV created manuals for both courses for the community site to use and continue the workshops in the future. In addition to the workshops, BTG interns also created and implemented mindfulness and self-care programming for all age groups at the VAV summer camp.

Youth Apprenticeship Course

Sarah Nackman, School of Public Health, Behavioral and Community Health

Rose Sabatino, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Dietitian Nutritionist Program

Community Mentors: Dr. Deanna Sinex, PhD, Director of Research and Program Strategy, with Sarah London, Youth Enrichment Services

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

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:

The interns worked with the Summer Scholars who are between the ages of 14 to 15, enrolled in the Summer Learn and Earn program and beginning their freshman year of high school this fall. Interns worked with these students at a pivotal moment in their lives. The primary project consisted of the creation and implementation of two career readiness courses known as apprenticeships. The apprenticeship courses supported the academic preparation and career readiness program components while fostering the students' interests. At the end of the apprenticeships, the kids will have completed their respective final projects, a food blog or a musical showcase. The secondary project provided the YES administration with suggestions and resources to build capacity regarding emergency and first aid protocol and preparedness.

“My time at VAV has been very meaningful and it really challenged my perceptions of myself and my abilities. Voices Against Violence allowed me to gain a better understanding of how important and impactful early intervention efforts can be and see the effects of the social determinants of health in action.”

-M. Ross, Public Health, Epidemiology

“I’ve recognized the importance of reflection and listening to the members of your community to provide necessary resources and care for those around you. I will be able to carry the skills that I’ve learned here with me as I continue in my field.”

-S. Ballard, Public Health, Infectious Disease and Microbiology

“I have come out of this internship with a wealth of knowledge that I will apply not only in my career but also in life. I am beyond thankful for my mentors, peers, and YES students that taught me countless lessons that will follow me long into the future.”

-R. Sabatino, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

“I am humbled and privileged to have had this opportunity to listen and learn from the voices of our future. Even in the face of adversity, I witnessed the resolve and tenacity of the students who aspire to get that 'YES'.”

-S. Nackman, Public Health, Behavioral and Community Health

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

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Pitt School of Public Health, MPH Candidate '24

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Pitt School of Dental Medicine

Thank you

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School of Public Health, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, School of Pharmacy, School of Nursing, School of Medicine, School of Social Work, School of Dental Medicine

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Anonymous Public Health faculty
Anonymous Medicine faculty

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.