

Service Provider Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Partnerships and
Collaboration

The Arc of Westchester: Creative Partnership with Mercy College

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Background

The **Arc of Westchester** benefits from an agency culture that values innovative partnerships. In fact, an agency leader explained that the organization “will work with anybody who is willing to sit and talk.” This collaborative spirit led to a creative endeavor with **Mercy College**, a four-year school offering degrees in Business, Education, Liberal Arts, Health and Natural Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Within Health and Natural Sciences are departments such as nursing, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and nutrition. The Arc of Westchester partnered with these departments to form a mutually beneficial relationship, creating opportunities for both college students and individuals transitioning out of the workshop.

Implementation

Leadership at the Arc of Westchester realized that individuals who had been employed long-term in their workshop would benefit from building healthy living skills, since healthier people are more likely to get hired and to keep their jobs. The Arc of Westchester funds Mercy College to support supervision of students who provide a range of supports to individuals transitioning out of the workshop. This included occupational and physical therapy, nutrition, and other health-related training.

Mercy College students worked with individuals one-on-one to provide therapies and also taught classes on topics such as cooking and nutrition. Whenever possible, employment would be integrated into the work. For example, speech therapy students creatively integrated employment and interviewing skills into their therapy sessions. In another example, new social connections emerged. A student in nursing and nutrition supported several women with making healthier meals, which translated into a cooking club.

As one staff person from the Arc noted, the “student has since graduated but she’s created a relationship with these three [women] and what they do is every Saturday they cook together and freeze dinners for the week.”

As part of the supports provided, the college students also conduct assistive technology assessments to understand what accommodations would increase each individual’s likelihood of success.

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Impact

The partnership is mutually beneficial, as all parties gain from what each other has to offer. Students at Mercy College get field-based experience specifically with individuals with disabilities for course completion and as part of licensing requirements.

In a recent presentation by the president of Mercy College to the board of the Arc of Westchester, the value of the experience to their students was highlighted. Several students went on to publish findings in peer-reviewed journals, and decided to pursue work in the disability field.

On the other side of the partnership, the Arc of Westchester gained valuable access to inexpensive resources to build the health and well-being of individuals seeking to transition out of the workshop. And the individuals themselves got excellent training in healthy living skills, which will be valuable to them in all their future activities.

Suggestions for replication

- » **View collaboration as a core value.** The Arc of Westchester's open-minded approach and willingness to think creatively about local partnerships made this relationship work.
- » **Invest in supports that build human capital.** The Arc of Westchester realized that if individuals leaving the workshop were healthy, they were more likely to get employed and stay employed. This led to the emphasis on nutrition, cooking, and other health-related classes.
- » **Seek out win-win relationships with professionals in your community.** Mercy College realized that their students would benefit from field-based training with individuals with disabilities, while providing invaluable supports.
- » **Think creatively about low-cost, high-gain opportunities.** Both parties realized this was a collaboration that would create benefits on all sides.

For more information on this practice contact thinkwork@umb.edu



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