



Living a Meaningful Life at Programs Employing People

Student Intern: *Alexandra Davidson, Drexel University College of Medicine*
Academic Preceptor: *Charlene Chen, MD, DipABLM, Esperanza Health Center*
Community Preceptor: *Beth Ryan, Director of Employment Services, Programs Employing People*



COMMUNITY PARTNER

Programs Employing People (PEP) was founded in 1969 by a group of parents who organized a summer camp for their children with an intellectual disability. Today, PEP is a multi-service agency that serves adults with an intellectual disability from the greater Philadelphia community. People with an intellectual disability can excel in many areas. PEP is determined to strengthen these capabilities by providing social, educational and employment opportunities.

<https://pepservices.org/>



PROJECT

As the Bridging the Gap student intern, I worked alongside the Direct Support Professionals (DSP) within the vocational program at PEP. I assisted with various activities including,

- Art projects
- Literacy class
- Fitness programs

Additionally, I worked with a small group of consumers in various integrated community settings such as,

- Metropolitan Area Neighborhood Nutrition Alliance (MANNA)
- URBN Headquarters
- Starbucks Coffee Company



PROJECT RESULTS

Since returning to PEP following an extended closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the individuals have slowly re-integrated into the community. They continue to participate in online classes to discuss important topics such as nutrition, personal hygiene and communication.

Employment exploration is crucial as many consumers are currently searching for a new job. Community outings tailored to the goals of each consumer is an opportunity to expand interests and skills. This could eventually lead to competitive employment within the community.

The ratio of one DSP to three individuals within the community creates a supported environment in which they are free to explore. The additional support provided by Bridging the Gaps program allowed for more individuals to engage in community outings.

REFLECTION

I am grateful I had the opportunity to serve as the first Bridging the Gaps intern at PEP. The consumers exhibited that they are capable individuals with a great deal to contribute to society as they exceed the expectations of those around them daily. Many of them hold a competitive employment position while continuing to develop their skills at PEP and maintain close relationships with friends. I will hold the unique relationships I formed with each consumer near as I continue with my professional journey. The consumers at PEP challenged me to be a better advocate for all my future patients, but particularly those with an intellectual disability. I am devoted to continuing the conversation in support of providing individuals with an intellectual disability the opportunity to create their own meaningful life story.