

Inclusivity in Action: Supporting Individuals with Disabilities at Misericordia Home

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Background on the Social Justice Internship

The Social Justice Internship course is offered by the Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship at Loyola University Chicago. Thirteen students are chosen through a competitive application process to partake in social justice work with one of five Chicago-area non-profit organizations. Selected students in the cohort engage in community building, professional development, and a classroom learning component. Students receive a grant and are enrolled in a designated section of EXPL 390 allowing them to earn 3 academic credits for their internship involvement.

Internship Assignment

I was paired with Misericordia, which is an organization in Chicago that cares for individuals with mild to profound developmental disabilities, and many of whom are also physically challenged. This internship site aligned well with my prior experience, background in public health, and future career interests. I serve specifically as a Developmental Training (DT) intern. The Developmental Training Programs at Misericordia supports residents by aiding with the development of life skills, learning experiences, vocational skills, and employment pursuits. Although I interact with many different residents and employees on a day-to-day basis, I specifically work closest with McGown Residents.



Pictured above is the McGown Home on Misericordia's 37-acre campus

My work with McGown residents occurs in DT, where I assist with day-to-day programming, enrichment opportunities, and educational experiences. Residents come to the classroom in both the morning and afternoon to work on various tasks and participate in important projects that help the residents engage in community. These activities help residents utilize both their mind and body to the best of their ability. This often looks like working on puzzles, discussing current events, physical activity, and creating art projects that are auctioned off at Artist and All, which is Misericordia's annual fundraiser in May. My role in the classroom specifically is to assist residents with these tasks, help empower their sense of agency, and work to keep residents on track with their projects and deadlines by offering support in any way I can.



Additional Projects and Tasks

This semester I also took on a side project outside of my work in the classroom to offer support and new ideas to the DT programming curriculum. I have been working on:

1. Putting together an Excel database outlining potential venues for community outings with the residents. This has involved compiling details like the venue name, address, contact person, email, phone number, accessibility features, and so on. Then I have been organizing this information into separate categories for different types of venues and events.
2. Developing another Excel database, this time focusing on potential performers that DT programming staff members can invite to entertain residents at Misericordia. Similar to the first database, this effort has included compiling all the necessary information outlined in #1, along with any pricing packages available.
3. Establishing a volunteer database for individuals to sign up to volunteer for community outings, while also integrating information about venues that residents already frequent so there is some sort of background for prospective volunteers to read before committing to various volunteer experiences.
4. Initiating a discussion on data collection methods. I have been helping to brainstorm what kind of data would be most valuable for DT staff members to gather and track in relation to the community outings, programming efforts, and volunteer engagements that are required for staff members to complete as a part of their employment with each of their groups.

Main Takeaways

Empathy and Understanding: Working closely with individuals with disabilities has fostered a deeper sense of empathy and understanding in me regarding the unique challenges and perspectives residents have shared.

Adaptability and Flexibility: This work requires adaptability to accommodate varying needs and preferences, which in turn has helped me cultivate a more versatile approach to problem-solving and communication.

Strength in Collaboration: Collaboration and teamwork have become an essential skill I have developed, as it often takes a collective effort to provide comprehensive support and opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Advocacy and Empowerment: I have gained a heightened awareness of the importance of advocacy and empowerment, especially regarding advocating for the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Impact and Fulfillment: Finally, this experience of working with people with disabilities has brought me a profound sense of fulfillment and purpose, knowing that I am making a positive difference in the lives of others and the community I live in, which has further strengthened my passion for social justice.

Conclusion

My work with Misericordia is something I am so incredibly proud of, and I will always cherish this experience. Working with individuals with disabilities day in and day out has truly been such a meaningful, formative, and inspiring experience. I am so thankful for Jorion, my supervisor Mary Fances, Classroom instructor Miss Carolyn, and the entire Misericordia team for trusting me with this opportunity. I am so grateful for all the knowledge that has been graciously shared with me, the guidance and wisdom I have gained, and the support I have felt surrounding my future goals and aspirations. Through the classroom engagement portion of the Social Justice Internship, I have learned about how I can successfully incorporate social justice, community, leadership, and advocacy into my career as a public health professional.



Pictured above are some residents and staff members