

Collaborative Interprofessional Work as Means to Prepare Better Healthcare Professionals



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Over the past few years, I've had the honor to represent Pathways to Housing PA in the interprofessional collaborative work with JCIPE on the project called ESHP (Enhancing Services for Homeless Populations).

This partnership opportunity was as much exciting as it was needed. Many professionals in the healthcare field have the driving compassion and desire to improve someone's life; after all, staying healthy is one of the most important aspects of life. While many who choose to work in a health profession strive to deliver the best services, young healthcare professionals have very little practice and/or knowledge on how to best engage some of the most stigmatized, vulnerable, and "invisible" individuals – the homeless. This is partly due to the curricula composition. Feldman, Stevens, Lowe, and Lie (2020, p. 1) recognize that "While educators have focused on exposing their trainees to a variety of vulnerable populations... less attention has been paid to other marginalized groups such as the homeless and the incarcerated." Fine, Zhang, and Hwang (2013) state that some studies showed homeless individuals' sense of being unwelcome in healthcare settings and that lack of appropriate trainings for medical professionals served as a major barrier to homeless individuals seeking medical care.

The ESHP project was designed to address just that: equip future health professionals with knowledge, skills, and practice to enhance their work with homeless individuals. ESHP allows interprofessional teams of students to use a virtual world platform, to simulate (in real time) situations they may face when working in community settings, such as a street, a medical clinic,



ESHP students from Cohort 5 of Spring 2020 engage in the "Jeff Case" simulation. Here one student has assumed the role of Jeff, who has made their home in a tent in back of an abandoned warehouse. The other student is part of a team from a Housing First organization that does mobile outreach. ESHP provides students the opportunity to simulate an intervention and debrief with each other and a faculty facilitator.

and transitional housing. As I recall our collaborative work with JCIPE, Helen Keller's extraordinary work comes to mind, as her belief that more can be achieved when working together proved true for us (Lash, 1980). Pathways to Housing PA was the expert in our work with people experiencing homelessness, and JCIPE was the expert in interprofessional education. Together, the two forces created the virtual simulation world, where future healthcare professionals would effectively engage simulated homeless individuals and provide them with medical care and support. Students have an opportunity to apply what they learn into practice, and do so in the most constructive way, while embracing one of the three roles they'd play: that of the healthcare professional, the homeless individual, and the observer. While you may wonder if one can learn as much by observing, I'd argue the opposite: the "observer" can learn the subtle cues (language tone, speech rate and language, body gestures, etc.) one must be aware of in order to effectively engage the homeless individuals.

The virtual world simulation is undoubtedly a miracle of today's technology, but the opportunity to participate in direct observation and engagement was a pivotal part of this project. Pathways to Housing PA served as the site for direct observations and proudly supported healthcare students in completing this process in person prior to the pandemic.

We know that the human brain can push through many limits, no matter the size. While the human race can claim credit for the progress of civilization, no ONE person can do so. Some of the greatest achievements were reached through partnership, collaboration, and interprofessional teamwork and alliance, regardless of the profession. There are no limits to what we can achieve through skillful collaboration, as through collaboration we learn from each other and share what we know (Jones-Stine, 2000). One of the greatest American playwrights, Tony Kushner, recognizes the rewards of collaboration, and helps us remember that no great work is created in isolation. Kushner elaborates on how his

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Members of the JCIPE and Pathways to Housing PA teams presented at the 2019 Collaborating Across Borders VII conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.

work was most successful when working with other people and states "The fiction that artistic labor happens in isolation, and that artistic accomplishment is exclusively the provenance of individual talents, is politically charged, and in my case at least repudiated by the facts...Had I written these plays without the participation of my collaborators, they would be entirely different—would in fact never have come to be" (as cited in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 4). Similar to the artistic work that Kushner describes, the work of ESHP was a true collaboration of many professions from two different settings: healthcare education and human services/social work.

While Pathways to Housing PA played an important role in this process, bringing to the table the most hands-on experience and

knowledge on how to best engage homeless individuals, we also recognize the benefits this partnership has brought to Pathways to Housing PA. Some of the many reasons we were excited to collaborate with JCIPE on the ESHP project was for the opportunity to build working relationships with students and potentially recruit them for our endeavors. Our work with JCIPE on the ESHP project gave us the privilege to help shape future healthcare professionals. The idea of expanding our professional network was even more appealing when we started this collaborative work. I was honored to be a part of the JCIPE presentation team at the CAB VII conference in Indianapolis, IN in 2019.

As with any great work, this collaboration came with challenges, which mostly related to coordinating schedules and exercising a

great amount of flexibility; but like any great teams would do, we worked through them with much success.

We are proud to have been a part of this journey and contribute to the shaping of our future healthcare professionals.

I am hopeful that the ESHP program will be an inspiration and a change force in other professions, such as the Criminal Justice system, where we can make a difference and improve the lives of many people beyond the healthcare field.

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