

Foundations Community Partnership's "Summer Youth Corps" Connects Students to Communities Through Service Learning

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DISRUPTIVE INNOVATIONS

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Foundations Community Partnership's (FCP) Summer Youth Corps is much more than a typical summer internship. Launched in 2008, the program melds community service, non-profit collaboration, academics, and experiential education for college students returning to Bucks County for the summer. Since FCP's inception as a philanthropic grant-making foundation, the Summer Youth Corps has become an integral part of its mission to support the behavioral health and human service needs of children and young adults in Bucks County.

As described by the National Commission on Service Learning, "service learning combines service objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service ... by combining service tasks with structured learning opportunities that link the tasks to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills and knowledge content."¹ It differs from volunteerism in that it ties service with study, providing a framework for learning through direct involvement in the community. In the Summer Youth Corps, student interns spend 10 weeks becoming vital working members of human service organizations throughout Bucks County, with a portion of every week "in the classroom" with their summer cohort.

The 10-week, 400-hour program is comprised of orientation sessions, service at a non-profit host agency, and academic and training activities supervised by a licensed psychologist, a graduate-level field supervisor, and an associate professor at Bucks County Community College. The academic portion of the program includes goal setting, journaling, research, a final paper and presentation.

Before beginning their service period in the non-profit organizations, interns participate in instruction on child abuse reporting requirements, working with special needs children, cultural diversity training, and physical disability sensitivity training. FCP also provides agencies with the thorough human resources documentation necessary for interns to work with client populations immediately. "FCP's goal is to have the interns

fully vetted and prepared to assist their agencies from day one,” explains Ron Bernstein, Executive Director of FCP. The interns’ salary is also provided by the foundation, making the trained interns an incredible asset to the nonprofit agencies.

“The Summer Youth Corp program is a win-win-win scenario,” says Mandy Mundy, Director of Education for NOVA (Network of Victim’s Assistance), a long-time host agency. “Bucks County nonprofits benefit from smart interns, the interns benefit by gaining work experience and exposure to the real world, and FCP benefits by continuing to support local nonprofits – all in all working to make Bucks County a strong community. We couldn't have accomplished dozens of projects over the years without interns working through the Summer Youth Corps.”

Colleen Brink, Volunteer & Outreach Director for Habitat for Humanity Bucks County, notes “Our current Summer Youth Corps intern is majoring in Business Marketing and has been able to apply her knowledge in a real world situation with us. The results are increased outreach efforts which have helped us grow our volunteer engagement.”

The YWCA Bucks County has hosted interns since the program’s inception. “Each year, we look forward to interviewing and matching potential students with the mission and goals of the YWCA,” says Kristin Chapin, Associate Director. “It is amazing to see the personal growth that the students experience, and the connections made with the organization that extend beyond the 10-week program.”

While County nonprofits benefit from bright, motivated students on staff, the interns have a unique opportunity to learn about themselves and others, and the needs and strengths in their communities while serving mission-driven organizations. In addition to engaging in a “summer of service” and earning a paycheck, student interns also earn college credit through a partnership with Bucks County Community College.

“Through our relationship with Bucks County Community College, we are able to offer the full service-learning experience, where students help solve community problems and achieve real objectives for children, youth and families in our community while earning college credits,” says Dan Weldon, Ed.D., a Licensed Psychologist and Senior

Consultant for Program and Educational Services for Foundations Community Partnership who worked collaboratively with Bucks County Community College to develop a curriculum for the Summer Youth Corps.

“The Summer Youth Corp program creates a synergistic connection between students and organizations which, in turn, accelerates community development and helps to keep Bucks County such an outstanding place to work and live,” says Deborah Sedik, Associate Professor, Psychology, Bucks County Community College.

Focusing on non-profit human service agencies providing services to children, youth and families in Bucks County, the Summer Youth Corps is a game-changer for college students looking for meaningful work.

“Not only do local non-profit agencies benefit from having highly qualified students assisting their organizations, but the students are also gaining significant work experience with organizations that are really making a difference in the community,” says Bernstein.

Students enrolled in colleges all over the nation and in numerous majors participate in the Summer Youth Corps. The 2017 cohort includes interns studying Human Development and Family Studies, Political Science, Nursing, Gender Studies, Engineering, and Speech Therapy at colleges such as Purdue University, Temple, University of Pennsylvania, Penn State, and Vanderbilt.

Non-profit host agencies participating in FCP’s Summer Youth Corps represent a variety of human service organizations: Ridgecrest, which serves medically fragile children with developmental disabilities; Libertae, an organization that helps both single women and mothers with children recover from addiction using gender-responsive treatment; Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA), which supports, counsels and empowers victims of sexual assault and other serious crimes in Bucks County; and the Cancer Support Community Greater Philadelphia, which provides free social and emotional support programs to men, women and children with a cancer diagnosis, who have a loved one with cancer, or who have lost someone to cancer.

Non-profits in Bucks County clearly benefit from their interns but the students accepted into the program have learned valuable lessons, too.

“Through my experience at the Churchville Nature Center, I felt that this service learning internship is not only creating future leaders, but also individuals who strive to better their community,” says Cornell-student Sanjana Sundaram, who spent the summer working at the Churchville Nature Center.

“It is one thing to read about an experience in class, but it is another world entirely to experience it first hand through volunteering or internships. Through my summer at the Aark, I realized that learning is never a one-way street because the people that I helped also taught me an array of valuable lessons that I will forever carry with me,” says Emily Wolcott, an intern at the Aark Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center and student at Delaware Valley University.

“The combination of the internship hours, academics, and supervision solidifies the importance of the work I did during the program and how it can apply to education. Within this service-learning internship, I have not only learned my value as an individual, but also as someone who can achieve more when working with others,” says Jason Miller, Mercer Museum intern and West Chester University student.

“FCP’s Summer Youth Corps not only helps students broaden their knowledge and skills while serving the community, it offers them the opportunity to learn from those they serve,” says Bernstein. “Our service learning program goes beyond a typical internship because it enables students to become more informed citizens, develop their critical thinking skills, as well as ultimately promoting the development of civically engaged individuals.”

¹Fiske, E. B. (2001). *Learning in Deed. The Power of Service-Learning for American Schools*. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.