

Internship with Aids Community Resources

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This summer I was fortunate to gain a valuable experience working at AIDS Community Resources in Syracuse, New York. I learned about the summer internship at AIDS Community Resources through an email I received from Debra Eischen, the Director of Career Services and Experiential Learning in the School of Information of Studies. The email contained a list of internships available in the Central New York Area. I contacted all the companies that were in reasonable distance for me to get to, as I did not have a car. A problem I faced was that I had to find an internship that was open for the second half of summer as I was taking summer courses and working on campus the first half of summer. The two companies that got back to me were AIDS Community Resources and the Bank of Alliance, NA. The internship position at ACR was unpaid while the internship at the Bank of Alliance, NA was paid. The contact person, Kevin Relyea got back to me to setup an interview. However, the contact person at the Bank of Alliance did not get back to me to setup an interview, so I only had one option and that was at ACR. I didn't have that many options for internships because of the time I was planning on starting the internship and after my interview with Kevin, I found out I could set my own hours and days to work, which was one of the main reasons I chose this one. The opportunity to work for a not-for-profit interested me and so I was optimistic about the internship.

AIDS Community Resources (ACR) is a not-for-profit, community-based organization providing prevention, education, and support services to those infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. ACR was created in 1983, and is financially supported by both public and private funds. ACR is an organization that consists of a variety of individuals who are all trying to stop the spread of, prevent, and/or cure HIV/AIDS. At ACR locations across Central New York, research is being conducted studying the impact of HIV/AIDS and how to stop the spread of the disease. At ACR in

Syracuse, there are various programs held in different neighborhoods to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and to help residents of these neighborhoods understand how to protect themselves and their loved ones. Throughout the various programs, data is collected based on different demographics including age, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location and income. Based on this information programs are created which target teenagers or adults or people who've had more than five sexual partners or whose income is below ten thousand dollars. Using this data, the Prevention Division of ACR can concentrate on those areas that are most at risk of contracting and spreading the disease. Sometimes there's free HIV testing available to neighborhood residents and free condoms are issued. Among other things, pamphlets and other literature are given to individuals to help them better understand the disease and how they can protect themselves by practicing safe sex and limit the number of sexual partners they have.

I gained valuable knowledge and insight into the not for profit world. My internship at ACR was nothing short of a learning experience. My supervisor, Kevin Relyea, was very open-minded and he created an atmosphere where we worked as a team. Kevin's leadership style was different from others I have encountered. Kevin was not one of the dictatorship kinds, where he assigned me a task and expected it to be done right away without showing me first how it was done. He was very patient and made sure I understood exactly what he was asking me to do and gave me sufficient time to complete the task or tasks that he had assigned to me. He was very open-minded and encouraged me to ask questions and he often asked for my input and ideas on certain projects. As the person in charge of all the office computers and electronics, Kevin encouraged his fellow employees to ask questions and contact him whenever they had an issue. He was quite organized as far as generating the reports and helping the other employees in an efficient manner. Kevin was very quiet in the sense that he came to work, did what he had to do and mainly engaged in conversation with individuals who were directly connected to his tasks such as generating the reports. He was very polite and from what I

gathered was very well respected and liked in the office. From working with Kevin, I learned that I prefer to work with a supervisor who is sensitive to the needs of their employees, who gets to know their needs and help them in ways that are conducive to their success, and to that of the company. I prefer to work with someone who has an open-mind and allows for a margin of error. Someone who compliments their employees whenever they do well and encourages them to do better when they make mistakes. I prefer to work in an environment where people are willing and eager to help others and are not constantly thinking about themselves or how they can advance their careers or get in good with the boss. I prefer an easy-going atmosphere where people are not competing with each other but instead helping one another to advance and do well. Where the various levels of management and staff can work together to create a stress-free, learning, environment.

The ACR in Syracuse is not the only ACR in Central New York. There are locations in Utica, Canton and other cities in the Central New York area and the programs offered by ACR extend to many of the counties in Central New York. Although the various ACR locations span a large geographic area, they collaborate very well on programs and projects. Most often employees from the Syracuse location go to the other locations to see how efficient and effective the programs are working in the neighborhoods. For example, someone from the Prevention Division in Syracuse would go to Canton and look at their data and see if they reached their target goal for outreach programs. If there is a project that all the locations need to work on as one, various meetings will be conducted such as departmental meetings across all locations, an executive meeting or a meeting with a representative from each department. This way everyone from all the locations involved would know where everyone was and ensure that everyone was working on the same page. As far as how the operations vary in each location, I cannot really say because I worked exclusively at the Syracuse location and most of the data I worked with was pertaining to Syracuse residents. Once in a while, I would get data pertaining to Utica or Canton but I wasn't involved in the actual data collection. The same thing

applies for the communication between the different locations. There were times when my supervisor, Kevin, and others in the Syracuse location received phone calls or emails from employees at the other locations but it was mostly referencing programs or asking about particular data and sending information to each other. In that regard I think communication between the different locations was there and was conducted as needed.

At ACR, the atmosphere is very friendly, relaxed and laid back. I think the fact that they are all working towards a common goal (to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS) is one important factor that creates the relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Another important factor that contributes to this environment is that everyone from the volunteers and interns to the executives are all valued. They all want to make a contribution to the HIV/AIDS research and so they all put aside their differences to work for a greater good. Although there is a hierarchy that exists such as titles and positions, everyone who works there from the interns to the volunteers operate on a first name basis. Indeed, from an outsider's perspective it may appear as if ACR is a flat company without any specific leaders or executives and decisions are made based on the consensus of the majority instead of one person making the decisions or mandating certain tasks. This type of structure helps the organization by allowing all the employees to feel valued and as if their opinions count. It also helps the organization by showing that decision-making is not directed by one person or one department. Someone at the lowest level can make decisions depending on the needs of the situation. This type of structure can also help hinder the organization because sometimes when there is no real sense of leadership, decisions can be made irrationally or a sense of direction and what needs to be done can be lost. Sometimes in this type of structure, employees at the lower level tend to overstep their boundaries causing tension, negativity and chaos within the organization. Also when it comes to decision making and accountability, if there's no one designated person to be held accountable, it makes the organization and the executive of that company look bad. Sometimes, people may tend to take

responsibility for their own actions and draw the attention to themselves and not have the organization suffer for their mistakes and bad judgment. However, as a result of the atmosphere at ACR, individuals are able to seek help from their supervisors or bosses and they in turn are able to go to their employees and seek help. The atmosphere at ACR isn't "every man for himself" and cutthroat as it is in some other companies. The departments within ACR are all interconnected through the programs and services offered through ACR. Each department knows what the other departments are doing and what projects they are working on. They keep on the same page with each other by having staff meetings. These vary from time to time. They may be held two to three times per month depending on the amount and frequency of the material that needs to be reviewed or what needs to be addressed. At other times there may be just one organizational meeting per month to go over the schedules, projects and goals set forth by the directing agency in Albany. Sometimes there's an organizational meeting where everyone in ACR with the exception of interns and volunteers meet to discuss a project or a program and find out if goals set by the directing agency in Albany are being met. Other times staff meetings are held just for executives and or may consist of meetings with executives and one department or just the departments and no executives.

Sometimes departments work collaboratively on programs within the Syracuse location office and with offices in other locations. AIDS Community Resources is an organization that keeps every employee informed of what the other is doing. The reason for this is so in case the individual who is in charge of a certain project is not in the office someone else who is either working on the project or working in the office can answer questions for individuals. In so many other companies, what happens is that the individual in charge of a project or an assignment is out of the office and cannot be reached for whatever reason and someone who is not working on the project or assignment has a question but the question cannot be answered because no one has the answer. This is not the case at ACR. Everyone at ACR is well informed from the receptionist to the interns and volunteers.

Everyone in ACR uses email mainly to stay in touch with each other and find out what is going on. They also use phone messaging to communicate with each other or send information via email. Sometimes there may be one or two employees who do not receive the information in a timely manner because they may have outdated software or the computer they are using is running slowly and hence there's a delay in the time they receive information. Most of their information is collected using Microsoft Excel worksheets, Microsoft Access and a database program called URS, which is mandated for use by the directing agency in Albany. Everyone in the organization reviews the information and then a meeting is held concerning the information and any changes that need to be made. Sometimes if an individual finds an error or what they perceive to be an error in the report they will bring it to the attention of the person who generated the report.

Throughout my internship I worked in the administrative wing of the office. The administrative wing consists of the Director, Assistant Director and their administrative assistants. My supervisor, Kevin Relyea, is the Systems Manager of ACR. He is in charge of all the computers in the Syracuse location as well as in Utica and Canton. I am not sure about the extent of my supervisor's background and I do not know if he is appropriately compensated considering his background. He is also responsible for generating quarterly and annual reports, which show the various programs that are offered by ACR and the amount of people those programs served or reached. The various departments within the organization and the director and assistant director then review the reports generated by Kevin and if all goals have been reached, the reports are sent off to the directing agency in Albany.

My duties as an intern were to help lighten the work load of the System's Manager who is in charge of generating reports for various departments and individuals and maintaining the computers in three locations. Although this may seem simple and easy enough for one person to handle it really breaks down into more than just the two tasks above. There are multiple subtasks. Such as generating the final report to be reviewed by the organization, it is a multi-step program. The overall task is

getting the data and extracting the required information needed also includes many steps. The subtasks include extracting the data from the mandated database, URS, and placing the data into Microsoft Access. After placing the data into Access, queries are done in order to generate reports, which show specific information that the directing agency in Albany is looking for. After the information is generated into reports, it is then placed into Microsoft Excel, where Kevin creates a spreadsheet with the necessary information such as the various programs which is the main heading, how many people attended, the target people they should've reached and the demographics which all make up the sub-headings on the final reports. He would input data using Excel formulas to generate percentages for the various sub-headings to see if percentage wise the target goal had been reached. In dealing with the computers and other office equipment, Kevin was in charge of ordering computers and software, installing the computers and setting them up with the necessary programs needed by employees. He was also in charge of maintaining the computers and other office equipment in Syracuse, Utica and Canton. For one person it was definitely a lot to handle and he was able to manage his impressive role but sometimes he got behind on other more important tasks like generating the quarterly and annual reports.

In the beginning of my internship, I worked on maintaining employees' computers who were out for that particular day. I would go check the sign in sheet and find out who was out for the day. I would then perform three basic maintenance tasks—Spybot, Ad-Aware and Disk Defragmenter. After I performed the maintenance tasks I would log them into a Microsoft Excel document which I created to keep track of the computers I performed maintenance on.

As I progressed through my internship, I started learning how to complete the reports and how to generate both the quarterly and annual reports. Kevin began showing me how he generated the reports using two databases—(1) Microsoft Access and (2) URS which is a database that ACR must use to help in generating the reports. I began working on the reports by changing the dates in a report

for the Director of ACR. Changing the dates took a while because I was changing the dates in about thirty plus queries in Microsoft Access. After I completed changing the dates in the report for the Director, I began working on breaking down the topics in the reports into subtopics. I worked on about eight different reports using Microsoft Excel. I started by breaking down the topics into subtopics or sub-headings and then went on to generating formulas in Excel to calculate the amount of people served through the various programs, including the quarterly projections and the amount of people that they have served. The reports allow the agency to see if they have reached the goal set by the directing agency in Albany.

I enjoyed working the most on the reports because I learned more in depth knowledge about Microsoft Excel and Access. I learned a lot from my supervisor, Kevin, and I know he learned from me as well. The atmosphere he created was one where I felt I was his equal and not an intern. The whole staff was quite friendly and I felt like I was working there forever and they made me feel right at home. I really enjoyed my experience and I value the knowledge I received while working there. With my internship I initially started off working five days a week but because of the rate I got my work done I ended up working four days a week. Physically the internship didn't impact me that much but it did take a little bit of a toll on me because I was also working my on campus job about four to five days a week. I would go into ACR from 9:30 until 1pm and then go straight to my other job at Goldstein Student Center where sometimes I worked until 5pm or 6:30pm. The other downside about the internship was that it wasn't paid and it was because it wasn't paid that I had to work a second job in order to have some form of income during the summer. Physically I was a bit tired. I met a few people and I wouldn't necessarily say that later on down the road I would have those connections for opportunities because chances are I might never see those people again or have any form of contact with them. I realized that I would not like to work for a not-for-profit because I think not-for-profits always run into the problem of not having enough resources and not receiving enough

funding which makes job security very unstable and insecure. Also no matter how extensive a background an individual has, I don't think it would help because their salary is fixed, and they don't have much room for growth. However, despite of all the downsides, ACR opened my eyes to another world and made me realize a lot of things about the kind of industry, field, and environment I would like to work in once I go into the workforce.