

Fostering Student Work– Based Experiences through Service–Learning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study explains how a complete overhaul to the national high school equivalency test posed a significant organizational challenge to Grace Centers of Hope, a nonprofit based in Pontiac, Michigan in the United States. All adult clients participating in Grace Centers of Hope’s one-year drug and alcohol recovery program who are without a high school diploma or equivalent are required to take in-house adult basic education classes to prepare for taking the high school equivalency test. Faced with the need to completely redesign their existing adult basic education program, Grace Centers of Hope reached out to Designers for Learning, an instructional design and performance improvement consultancy that matches nonprofits with instructional design students in service-learning projects. The resulting 100% virtual e-service-learning collaboration among volunteer college students, their faculty sponsors, and other advisors provided Grace Centers of Hope with educational resources to support the organization.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Grace Centers of Hope is a faith-based outreach to homeless and disadvantaged individuals and families. They offer a full recovery and rehabilitation campus for homeless men, women, and children who been abused or addicted to drugs and alcohol. Grace Centers of Hope is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit and is classified by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a public charity with \$5.4 million in total revenue and support for the year ended 2012 (Grace Centers of Hope, n.d.). Their programs focus on total rehabilitation by meeting all of their clients' needs, including food, clothing, shelter, educational courses, daycare, job training, assistance in preparing resumes, substance abuse programs, medical care, and housing placement. Charity Navigator, a nonprofit organization that assesses the financial health, accountability and transparency of charities, deemed that Grace Centers of Hope exceeds industry standards and outperforms most similar charities, and recognized their exceptional status with the highest 4-star rating (Charity Navigator, n.d.). In addition, Grace Centers of Hope was acknowledged by Crain's *Detroit Business* as the 2012 Best-Managed Nonprofit (Welch, 2012).

Adult clients recovering from drug, alcohol, or other challenging issues who are without a high school diploma or equivalent are required to take Grace Centers of Hope's in-house adult basic education classes as a condition of staying in the recovery program. All learners enrolled in the education program live on-site in the Grace Centers of Hope shelter. Many in the program have minor children who also live on-site. While the learners range in age from 18 through adulthood, most are in their 30s or 40s.

The adult basic education courses aim to improve the learner's language arts, science, social studies, and math skills and knowledge for career and college readiness. Given the residency aspect of Grace Centers of Hope's recovery program, the adult basic education courses are held at their Pontiac location. The staff believes that completion of the education program provides their clients increased likelihood of passing the high school equivalency test, as well as obtaining a job or being accepted into college.

SETTING THE STAGE

U.S. Adult Educational Attainment

According to 2012 U. S. Census Bureau data, approximately 30 million adults over the age of 18 (13% of the total population within this age range) had not attained a high school diploma or the equivalent. To put this figure into perspective, the U.S.

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