

Building Blocks: Building Up Staff Resilience and Wellbeing at VAV

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Community Site: Voices Against Violence

- ▶ Founded in 1995 by Mr. Richard Carrington in response to concerns about ongoing issues of community violence.
- ▶ Overarching goal: empower youth & the community affected by violence and reduce interpersonal conflict through educational activities and mediation
- ▶ This year, a special part of the camp experience was remembrance of loved ones, especially Mr. Rich's son who recently passed away

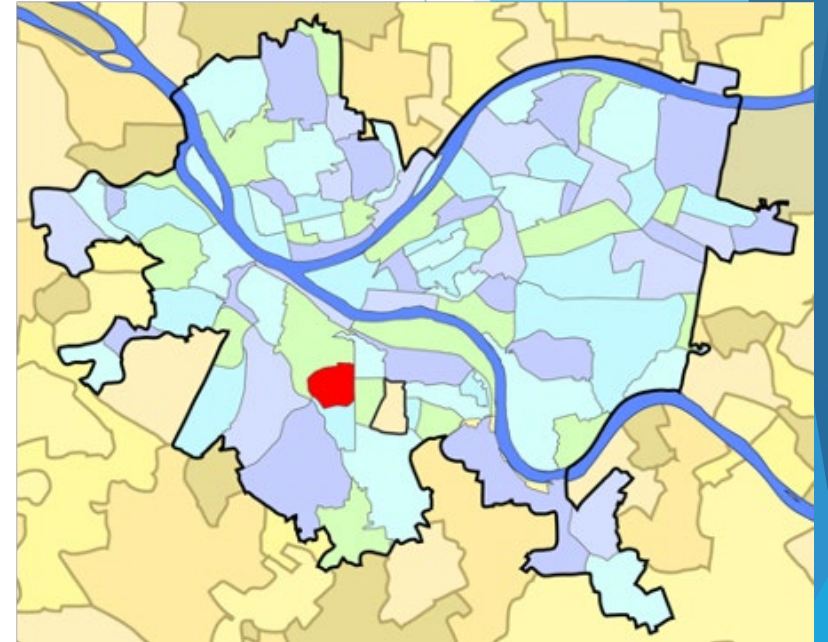
Offers multiple services:

- ▶ Antiviolence and restorative justice programs
- ▶ Street violence intervention and conflict resolution
- ▶ Free after school program
- ▶ Free summer camp
- ▶ Neighborhood revitalization efforts and resources



The Beltzhoover Community

- ▶ VAV's summer camp takes place in the McKinley Park Community Center and the surrounding park area in Beltzhoover
- ▶ Beltzhoover is predominantly an African-American neighborhood
- ▶ There are many reported incidents of gun violence in the neighborhood every year. Children and staff members at VAV have lost their loved ones due to this. VAV staff members have also been lost to gun violence.
- ▶ Neighborhood revitalization efforts are in the works



Source:

<http://www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/cp/maps/pittsburgh.html>, Public Domain

Summer Camp at VAV

- ▶ **Summer Camp Goal**
- ▶ Engaging children and adolescents in healthy, meaningful activities during the summers
- ▶ Various activities provided including:
 - ▶ Literacy
 - ▶ Dance
 - ▶ Art
 - ▶ Coding
 - ▶ Sports
 - ▶ Field trips
 - ▶ Self care and wellness
- ▶ **Our campers and staff**
- ▶ Senior Staff: about 25, ages 19-30s
- ▶ Junior Staff: about 20, ages 14-21
- ▶ Campers: about 150, ages 3-14
- ▶ Majority from African American families living in South Pittsburgh (Beltzhoover, Mt. Oliver, etc)
- ▶ Low income households: majority of participants qualify for free or reduced lunch program



Project: Tai Chi and Life Skills Courses

- ▶ We consulted with our mentors as well as the VAV staff to get a better idea of the needs of the community and how we could help
- ▶ It seemed like the staff needed **more tools for wellbeing and resilience** since many were dealing with trauma and stress from violence and other issues in the community
- ▶ Our mentors expressed interest in **Tai Chi for the senior staff to increase their mindfulness.**
- ▶ They also expressed interest in a **life skills course** for the junior staff to make them more **effective support to the senior staff** and to **give them skills for their future endeavors**

Main Project and Side Projects

- ▶ **Main Project:** Tai Chi and Life Skills Courses
- ▶ **Side Projects:**
- ▶ Staff training on building relationships
- ▶ Self care and mindfulness activities with the children

Main Project: Tai Chi Course

- ▶ **Goal:** improve physical and mental health, reduce stress, enhance inner peace and harmony, and foster resilience through Tai Chi practice
- ▶ **Course overview:**
- ▶ Eight-Methods Five-Step Tai Chi: Focus on foundational movements and postures
- ▶ Health Qigong Dawu and Baduanjin: Complementary exercises for holistic well-being
- ▶ **Course Schedule:** Tuesday and Thursday at 8:30am, 15 minutes
- ▶ **Location:** Open lawn in front of building, accompanied by soothing music



Main Project: Life Skills Course

- ▶ **Goal:** provide training and guidance to junior counselors in preparation for careers and life situations both at and past VAV
- ▶ **Topics:** self care, work ethic/professionalism, financial literacy, communication, goal setting, and education/career paths.
- ▶ **Course Structure:** short presentation, related activity(s), exit survey
- ▶ **Course Schedule:** originally planned for Tuesday and Thursday, 9-9:30am



Main Project: Life Skills Course Presentation Example

Life Skills Workshop

Week 1, Lesson 2:
Resume and Cover Letter



Editing the Resume

The top, bottom, and side margins should be 0.75 – 1.00 inches

Make sure that your heading is easily readable. Your name must be a larger font than any other part of the resume. Also, be sure that your address is complete, notice we are missing a zip code. A column heading would be more appropriate. Click [here](#) for example headings.

Al Kahalic 1515 Gator Lane Gainesville, FL 352-392-1601 ineedajob@unemployed.com

Objective A want a good job that pays lots of money! The objective should be a concise statement regarding the type of position you are seeking. Click [here](#) for examples.

Experience 1985–1990 Ferguson and Bardell Southridge, WA
District Sales Manager

- Increased regional sales.
- Managed 250 sales representatives in 10 Western states.
- Made training course for new recruits — speeding profitability.

The second part of your resume should be your education.

1990–1994 Arbor Shoes Southridge, WA
National Sales Manager

- Increased sales from \$50 million to \$100 million.
- Doubled sales per representative.
- Suggested new products.

The experience section should list job titles, dates, organization, location and description. Use action verbs and write in the past tense. Be sure that each statement refers to either skills you gained, thing you were really good at, and impacts you had in the job. Avoid using non-descript fragments and emphasize transferable skills. Click [here](#) to view a possible example.

1975–1980 LitWare, Inc. Southridge, WA
Sales Representative

- Expanded territorial sales by 400%.
- Received company's highest sales award four years in a row.
- Developed a training course.

Be sure that your experiences are listed in order of most recent.

Main Project: Life Skills Course Manual

Lesson 1: Communication and Active listening

Goals:

- Improved Communication between Junior Counselors with Executive staff (if necessary), senior staff (their supervisors) and campers.
- Junior Staff are able to effectively express their needs in the camp setting
- Junior Staff are effectively communicating with their supervisors and others to maintain a safe environment for staff and campers
- Junior Staff gain knowledge on appropriate communication and communication channels

Time Allotted: 30 Minutes

- 10 minutes for presentation
- 15 minutes for scenarios and discussions related to communication
- 5 minutes: exit ticket to reflect on what they learned in the lesson

Materials Needed: Projector for Presentation

Presentation Outline

- Slide 2: Goals of the Presentation
- Slide 3: Ask why communication is important. The goal of this is to get the junior counselors thinking about why communication is important and how it impacts both themselves and those they're working with. A few examples of why communication is important are listed.

- Slide 4: a chart that is reviewing the different types of communication styles
- Slide 5: Passive communication. This is not the communication style that we want to aim for since it means a person is not confident in expressing their needs. This slide also goes over some signs for counselors to recognize if they are a passive communicator.
- Slide 6: Aggressive Communication. This is not the communication style that we want to aim for since it expresses that our needs are more important than

Activities for the Lesson: Communication Activity

- Slides 9 and 10 have a communications activity. There are 2 screenshots of transcripts of 2 different candidates interviewing for the same job.
- The goal of this activity is to have them identify strengths and weaknesses for both of the candidates from the information communicated. They should also think about how the candidates behaved in the interviews and their language choices.

- While both of them have strengths, the first candidate also communicates a body language cue, lounging across the chair, that they should pick up on and should be discussed.
- Lead a discussion about how our body language and appearance silently communicates things about ourselves and our motivations outside of what we actually say.
- Ask them to think about what image they think they are projecting here at VAV and also in their daily lives at different settings (school, home, another job, other activities they're involved in).
- If you have extra time, consider having them roleplay as the candidates.
Photo of the activity included below

Side Project: Staff Training Presentation

- ▶ Our community mentor expressed interest in us making a **staff training on building relationships**
- ▶ She mentioned past issues with staff connecting with kids and each other
- ▶ 3 part presentation: building relationships in general, with coworkers, and with children
- ▶ Introduced foundational information and included activities, discussion and roleplay pieces for the staff

Side Project: Staff Training Presentation

Why is Building Relationships Important?

- Having good relationships enhances your life
- It can make you feel happier and increase a sense of belonging
- It can also give both of you the confidence to try new things because you know that you have support
- We need relationships to get through life



Setting Boundaries in Relationships

- Boundary setting is an important and healthy part of relationship formation and maintenance
- Boundaries can be thought of as limits we put in place to protect our well-being
- It helps our communication
- It also makes us feel safe and respected

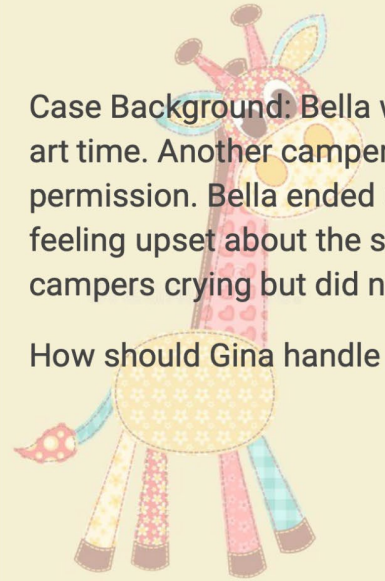


Side Project: Staff Training Presentation

Roleplay Practice

Case Background: Bella was happily drawing a purple giraffe during her group's art time. Another camper, Lily, decided to paint her giraffe yellow without his permission. Bella ended up yelling at Lily which made her cry. Now, both kids are feeling upset about the situation. Gina, a counselor, noticed the two 6 year old campers crying but did not see the situation happen.

How should Gina handle this situation with the kids?



Activity on Communication

- Fists Game
- What did we learn from this game regarding communication?
- How did your perception of getting your task done change knowing the instructions that your partner received?



Side Project: Self Care and Mindfulness with Campers

- ▶ Each week had a theme relating to mental health

Week 1: Ice Breakers and emotions and coping skills

- ▶ 4-7: hot potato introductions and craft to teach about deep breathing
- ▶ 8-11: introductions and my emotions wheel/discussion on emotions

Week 2: Physical Activity

- ▶ Discussion on stretching and exercise
- ▶ 4-7: stretching, animal relay races, red light, green light
- ▶ 8-11: stretching, numbers game, blob tag, relay races, basketball
- ▶ 12-14: stretching, kickball



Side Project: Self Care and Mindfulness with Campers

Week 3: Oral health and continuation of emotions/coping skills

- ▶ Discussion of oral health with all groups
- ▶ 4-7 teeth coloring sheet
- ▶ 8-11: marshmallow mouth flossing activity
- ▶ 12-14: coping skills fortune teller, DIY stress balls, oral health kahoot

Week 4: Nutrition and Healthy Eating

- ▶ Discussion of nutrition and healthy eating
- ▶ 4-7: myplate coloring sheet
- ▶ 8-11: recipe: yogurt parfaits



Cultural Community Wealth Model

Aspirational Capital: the overarching mission of VAV, the activities and services provided to the community, support and funding of camper ideas



Familial Capital: the overall family vibe at VAV. Many staff members are actually family and everyone in the community is willing to help out however they can



Cultural Capital: VAV is working on promoting a culture of healing. They have talked about building up and reclaiming their history and neighborhood. They offer cultural dance classes, music and other activities. They also plan to paint a mural dedicated to the community.

Project Evaluation

- ▶ Life Skills: Junior Counselors fill out exit surveys after each lesson
- ▶ Future BTG interns: review life skills workshop and implement during training week. Gather qualitative feedback from senior staff about junior counselor professionalism and participation at VAV
- ▶ Tai Chi: pre- and post-program surveys, focus group discussions, and program feedback from site mentors.
- ▶ Criteria for evaluation include participant satisfaction, resilience enhancement, and qualitative feedback.
- ▶ Future changes to both courses can be made based on the evaluation results.

Recommendations to VAV

1. More training sessions with junior counselors, including implementing the life skills workshop during training week
2. Creating a schedule for training week and camp to better organize counselors for camp situations
3. Getting input from groups about activities to create more tailored programming and stronger involvement
4. More collaboration with other organizations around Pittsburgh to broaden youth's view of the city

Reflecting on Our Experience

- ▶ Our time at VAV been a very meaningful and significant learning experience for both of us.

We were involved with:

- ▶ Creating workshops for staff
- ▶ Staff training
- ▶ Building relationships with staff and children
- ▶ Helping with camper check and lunch
- ▶ Activity planning for each age group
- ▶ Assisting counselors in supervising children
- ▶ Interacting with campers who have special needs
- ▶ Seeing the impact of positive intervention efforts and social factors on a community



Personal Reflection: Mary

- ▶ I applied to Bridging the Gaps because I wanted to **experience and learn about a Pittsburgh community** that was different from where I was living and have a hands-on experience helping them. My time at VAV has been really meaningful and it really **challenged my perceptions of myself and my abilities**. I really enjoyed **getting to know the staff and had a great time working with the kids**. I was excited to tackle the new challenge of **designing my own workshop and making activities for different groups**. We were always busy and running around, but having the **kids want to talk to you or give you a hug really made the experience worthwhile and enjoyable**.





Personal Reflection: Mengjun (Kate)

- ▶ In these two months of experience, I have come to realize the importance of **educational resources**. Through interacting with children, I have gained a deep understanding of the **significance of patience and respect**. Collaborating with Mary has been gratifying, as we work together to **bring more assistance and change to VAV**. I believe I have achieved the **initial purpose of applying to be a BTGer**, which is to gain a **deeper understanding of American culture and communities**.

A Huge Thank You To...



- ▶ **Our Community Mentors:** Emmanuela Abraham and Richard Carrington Sr
- ▶ **Our Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Jamie Zelazny
- ▶ **Our BTG-Pittsburgh Team:** Thistle, Brandi, Sheila and fellow BTG interns
- ▶ **The supportive and welcoming VAV staff**
- ▶ **The amazing, friendly, energetic, brave, and resilient VAV campers**

We are grateful for the relationships built and the time we got to spend getting to know and work with this community!