

Gopen Fellowship Quarterly Report

January 2015

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Fulfilled or Projected Performance Measures

The Spectrum Skillshare project has fulfilled a number of Federal Performance Measures, including cross-cutting measures, informal community supports, and quality assurance, and in the future, the employment and education measures. By meeting with mentors to help them map their goals, mentees benefit from informal supports that increase their engagement with their community and connect them to other services. While the mentoring component is still in its early stages, we hope the mentoring partnership will lead to improved employment and educational outcomes for our participants.

Current Progress

After October, the focus of Spectrum Skillshare shifted from recruitment to vetting candidates by speaking to references and conducting background checks, preparing resources for the general public based on the materials shared with participants, and matching mentors with mentees. In November, all the applicants—two mentors and five mentees—were selected to participate, and we started scheduling meetings. Finally, in December and January, participants finally started meeting with their mentors to start planning activities that would help them work toward their goals. I have been helping one mentee with her résumé and cover letters; she is currently applying to volunteer as a research assistant in a cognitive-science lab to gain academic and work experience before she goes to work on a master's degree. She had been having difficulty receiving responses with her first cover letter draft, but after I helped her identify what makes a cover letter more successful and worked with her to edit the cover letters, she received five responses to her letter, either to immediately offer her a position as a volunteer research assistant or to interview to become one. Another mentee wants to improve his work skills and study habits to become a stronger student, while another one is looking for help adjusting to adult life after having been in the school system until the age of 21. Still another is looking for guidance to map his educational and occupational path while navigating the complexities of new parenthood, and finally, the last one has recently moved to a new state and is looking for work that incorporates her ethical stances and her abilities.

This is not to say that the project was not without its challenges during this reporting period, however; it took several months longer to match mentors and mentees than I had initially expected because of state background checks for the two mentors living in Massachusetts, people going out of town in November and December, and scheduling conflicts between mentors and mentees. After mentors and mentees had their first meetings, there were a few cases in which mentees' parents took a more active role in their participation than I had anticipated when creating the program. This resulted in parents directing meeting times, being present during meetings, and offering suggestions for mentoring topics. In one case, the parent's wishes often directly contradicted those of the mentee. Because this program is designed to increase self-determination and empower self-advocates, sustaining this level of parental involvement may not be helpful if it continues at the same level it does at the beginning. This is not to say that family involvement is not helpful, but increasing autonomy can be helpful to mentoring participants.

Plans for the Following Reporting Period

The skill-sharing workshops will start toward the end of February, with the first one being one focused on job-hunting skills, entitled "Moving Toward Career Success." Specifically, this workshop will discuss crafting a résumé to put job-seekers in the best light, creating a cover letter that will maximize their response rate, doing well in job interviews, and identifying, building, and maintaining a network that will connect them to career opportunities throughout their working lives. The mentor-match program will continue as it has, though there will be more of a focus on goals, as opposed to going through initial introductions.

Timeline

Completed

July and August - information-gathering and publicity

August and September - information-gathering and publicity

September and October - recruitment and publicity

October and November - recruitment and orientation

November and December - mentor/mentee meetings

Ongoing

December and January - mentor/mentee meetings; planning for first workshop

January and February - mentor/mentee meetings

February and March - mentor/mentee meetings; planning for second workshop

March and April - mentor/mentee meetings; second workshop

April and May - mentor/mentee meetings; planning for third and final workshop/presentation

May and June - wrapping up, final workshop and presentation