

August Tuggle

Service-Learning Interview Blog

Interviewee: peer support program coordinator at Bluegrass Council of the Blind

Date and approximate length of interview: February 8, 2024, 37 minutes

Interview questions:

1. I saw on the BCB website that there are peer support meetings for blind and visually impaired adults. What happens during a typical meeting? What are the goals of these meetings?
2. What topics do blind and visually impaired adults bring up during peer support meetings and other BCB events?
3. What services and methods of service implementation have you found to be most successful and accessible to BCB clients?
4. What have you found to be barriers for blind and visually impaired adults when accessing BCB services?
5. What needs have you noticed among blind and visually impaired adults that could be more directly addressed through a new service or an addition to an existing service?
6. What, if any, new services or service additions have you considered or are currently considering?

My service-learning project will involve providing music-based services for blind and visually impaired adults through Bluegrass Council of the Blind (BCB). I interviewed BCB's peer support program coordinator with the goal of learning more about the organization and potential needs that could be addressed through music.

As a result of this interview, I discovered that many blind and visually impaired adults receiving services through BCB lost vision later in life or are in the process of losing vision. As a result, a key need of this population is to have a space where they can explore disability as a new identity. Adjusting to new roles, adapting to a world that relies on vision, and various perspectives on disability were identified as recurring topics during peer support meetings. In my experience, having a visual impairment in such a visual world can feel quite isolating. Being in community with people who share the same disability can help even those who have been blind from birth or who lost their vision decades ago to feel less alone and discover new resources and life perspectives.

During the interview, the peer support program coordinator told me that many people receiving BCB services have a music background and there have been conversations about starting a choir. After additional conversations with the interviewee following the initial interview, the choir may not be able to start this semester. However, a choir would be a wonderful way for blind and visually impaired adults to be in community with each other through an activity they enjoy. I could potentially help with the choir this semester by sharing resources that they could use in the future, including information about where to find backing tracks and how to maintain vocal health. Another music-based service that I could realistically provide this semester is leading a music therapy activity or activities during a peer support meeting. I could facilitate in-depth discussions about identity, disability, and change by singing a song containing relevant themes and asking guiding questions about the lyrics. If I were to lead a

full session, I might open with an activity where each group member represents their current emotion or something about themselves on percussion instruments and end with the group playing along to the song that was discussed during the session on those same instruments. I could also utilize my research background to give a lunch and learn presentation on the benefits of support groups and engagement in music activities for blind and visually impaired adults.

Regardless of the specific music-based services I provide, I will need to ensure that I am helping to facilitate community-building and identity exploration for blind and visually impaired adults. Based on what I gathered during the interview, it seems that verbal feedback is a common method for testing the impact and accessibility of services. I could prepare two or three questions to ask the group at the end of my activities and take notes on their responses as a form of gathering data. I could also explore options for surveys that are accessible for screen readers and other accessibility programs. Accessibility will be the most important aspect of any service I provide for BCB. If my services are not accessible to people with varying levels of vision, they are useless. Lack of accessibility, especially lack of reliable transportation, was identified as a barrier during the interview. Before implementing my activities, I will need to gather resources on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and alternative means of representing visual information. I will also need to brush up on my knowledge of facilitating sessions virtually and making high-quality recordings for any in-person services that I provide so that people without transportation can still participate.

It was wonderful to meet BCB's peer support program coordinator and learn more about an organization whose mission is meaningful to me. I am excited to continue learning more and to discover ways that I can support such a great organization.