Eyes Wide Open:
Evolving Practicum Collaborations
S. Mayne Devine
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario

What is Practicum?
Practicum courses are a unique component of the Bachelor of Science degree for students in the Child Youth and Family Major and the Adult Development Major. Students take the practicum courses in both their third and fourth years of study. Third year students spend 12 hours a week for 12 weeks in placement while Fourth year students spend 16 hours a week for 12 weeks. Students are in the field in either the fall (Sept- Dec) or winter (Jan- Apr) semesters.

Student Contributions
The practicum experience provides students an opportunity to work along side professionals, receive ongoing feedback and supervision. It is this experience that enables students to integrate what they learn in the classroom with professional practice. Students contribute to the community organization by enabling them to extend their services to the community through the provision of services and the completion of a project.

Examples of Community Projects
• Create a resource binder
• Revise volunteer training manuals
• Design pamphlets
• Conduct a literature search on a topic area
• Create an evaluation form
• Work with clients offering one on one support and co-facilitate groups
• Develop and implement recreation programs

Placement Contributions
The practicum supervisor provides on-site supervision for the student and is vital to the success of the placement and learning for the student. The practicum supervisor provides an environment that supports student learning and, in collaboration with the course instructor, provides feedback to the student to enhance skill development.

Community Practicum Supervisors
• Support student’s orientation to organization
• Provide student with opportunities to participate in routine work activities
• Assign specific tasks/activities that the student will be responsible for such as plan, implement, and evaluate activities
• Meet with student to discuss progress and complete practicum evaluation form

Challenges and Strengths
The five developmental stages of a practicum reflect the challenges and strengths of the practicum experience from the student, course instructor (university), and practicum supervisor’s (placement setting) perspectives.

Anticipation Stage or “Where will I be placed?”
This stage occurs before the practicum begins. This is the matching phase where the student and community partners commit to taking a student and articulate their priorities. The practicum coordinator secures the placement for the student and community partners commit to taking a student and articulate their priorities. Students are informed of where they are placed and the student may:
• Become excited and begins to anticipate what it may be like.
• Become disappointed and begins to anticipate what it may be like.
• Experience some nervousness and ask themselves questions like “Can I handle this?”

Disillusionment Stage or “This is not what I thought it would be like”
This stage occurs when the student is in the placement. Disappointment occurs when discrepancies emerge between what the student anticipated and the reality of their placement. The larger the discrepancy, the greater the disillusionment.

Confrontation Stage or “Who’s motivating me?”
At this stage, students challenge themselves to take responsibility for their learning. The student may have to step outside their comfort zone and rise to the occasion. Students may also challenge the supervisor to ensure they have opportunities to learn

Competence Stage or “The 2nd half of the placement”
At this stage, students know what the expectations of the placement are and experience themselves as able to fulfill these expectations. They can demonstrate new levels of skill in their work with clients/patients. The student is proud of their work and builds confidence.

Culmination
At this stage, students are often sad to leave and may volunteer to stay on in order to see a project through or help out. People in the organization are sad to see the student go.

Community Partners
Some of our community partners that provide placements to the Students in our Child Youth and Family Majors and Adult Development Majors

Action Read
• Promotes and supports literacy amongst families and adults (19 and over)
• Provides information, material aid, and support to individuals with an unplanned pregnancy

Alzheimer Society
• Improves the quality of life for those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and their caregivers

DUNARA
• Provides 24 hour supportive housing facility for individuals in need of psychiatric rehabilitation

YMCA
• Provides continuing, palliative, and rehabilitation care as well as community outreach programs to various populations

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Guelph
• Provides healthy development of children and youth through a variety of mentoring programs

Endings
• Free, telephone based listening, support, referral and Crisis assistance

www.csahs.uoguelph.ca/pps