



Health Equity Case Study:

Speech-Language Pathology and Social Work Students Help Migrant Children With Literacy and Social-Emotional Skills

Summary

A major grant allowed Nazareth College and the Migrant Ministry of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester to collaborate on serving migrant farmworkers and their families. Thanks to frank conversations with community members about their needs, Nazareth's School of Health & Human Services developed a suite of educational, therapeutic, and wellness services for the migrant community.

Nazareth's School of Health & Human Services developed a suite of educational, therapeutic, and wellness services for the migrant community.

Meet The Team



Social work faculty



Social work graduate students



Local church leaders



Community members



Speech-language pathology faculty



Speech-language pathology graduate students

Understanding How Best to Help

Nazareth College's School of Health & Human Services programs are known for their interprofessional work and engagement with the local community in Rochester, New York.

Staff members from the Diocese of Rochester and the director of Nazareth's Center for Spirituality brought together Nazareth's staff and faculty to provide health, wellness, and educational services

for migrant workers and their families in two rural upstate New York counties. These agricultural workers are employed on farms or at canning factories. Most are originally from Mexico, Central America, or Haiti.

The new partnership's first step was to speak with community members and identify the issues that they wanted to address.

"We didn't know up front what we needed to do. We needed to sit down with community members to talk about what services they need," said Cathy Rasmussen, interim dean of the School of Health & Human Services at Nazareth College and a speech-language pathologist (SLP).

She attributes the program's success to the initial time spent developing relationships with the migrant community members. An interprofessional team of Nazareth College faculty and staff did an extensive needs assessment, which included frank conversations about what was needed instead of "parachuting in." The result was a suite of educational, therapeutic, and wellness services for the migrant community in two rural New York State counties.

Addressing Literacy Skills Alongside Social-Emotional Learning

During this discovery period and needs assessment, some parents voiced concerns about their children's language and literacy skills as well as their social-emotional learning. This developed into the Summer Migrant Education Program. Nazareth graduate students from both the social work and speech-language pathology programs collaborated with faculty members to develop curriculum that would address the migrant students' needs.

Working together, the speech-language pathology and social work students developed activities to help the migrant students grow their vocabulary—a goal of the SLPs—while also focusing on social-emotional skills—a goal of the social work students. To address both aims, the graduate students selected activities like emotional storyboarding and story retelling. For example, in addition to simply reading a story to the students, the graduate students asked the children to identify and explain the characters' feelings at different points throughout the story.

"It was very much done as a team," said Rasmussen. "We aren't looking at language issues and social-emotional issues separately.



"We didn't know up front what we needed to do. We needed to sit down with community members to talk about what services they need"

Cathy Rasmussen, interim dean of the School of Health & Human Services at Nazareth College and a speech-language pathologist (SLP).



In addition to simply reading a story to the students, the graduate students asked the children to identify and explain the characters' feelings at different points throughout the story.

We are looking at how we can address them working together.”

The migrant students weren’t the only ones who learned new skills from this interprofessional experience. The program gave Nazareth’s graduate students a chance to learn from and about other professions.

“Once we specialize in different areas, we don’t see other professions that much. So having this opportunity helps increase that spirit of collaboration,” said Sharon Redondo Polo, a Nazareth speech-language pathology graduate student who participated in the 2021 program. “When I heard a social worker reflecting on their professions, it help[ed] me understand them better.”

The program gave these future professionals a better understanding of how systemic barriers like racism, discrimination, trauma, and poverty affect communities. It also provided growth opportunities for bilingual students who are specifically interested in working with migrant children and families—as well as for English-speaking Nazareth students who have a strong interest in social justice and working with historically marginalized communities.

Ongoing Collaboration

The program returned in Summer 2022 for a second grant-funded year. The committee overseeing the program continues to meet regularly. A new member, a bilingual professor of social work with extensive experience in this area, has joined the team and has helped to expand the provided services. The team of social work and speech-language pathology graduate students who will be working together this summer is currently completing onboarding and cultural humility training.



COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS

“Once we specialize in different areas, we don’t see other professions that much. So having this opportunity helps increase that spirit of collaboration...When I heard a social worker reflecting on their professions, it help[ed] me understand them better.”

Sharon Redondo Polo, a Nazareth SLP graduate student who participated in the 2021 program