

Vital Link Intergenerational Partner Reading Project

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This project focuses on the integration of the Vital Link Adult Day Center clients with local elementary school classrooms through a mutually beneficial relationship rooted within the building of relationships between students and clients during school reading programs.

Introduction to Vital Link

Vital Link provides day programming for adult clients who need supervision and activity during the day while their primary caretakers (friends or family members) attend to their daily responsibilities. While the clients enjoy the programming of crafts, exercises, and meal times provided by Vital Links, they sometimes communicate the desire to engage in a greater level of activity and interaction. It is for this reason that Vital Link has approached the Ideals to Actions class to develop a solution.

The Need for Change

This social issue of elderly losing their sense of belonging, purpose, and fulfillment with their declining physical and/or mental capabilities is not limited to Vital Link; it is a problem faced by today's society. Accompanying this lack of self-worth is a feeling of self-doubt as well as a social stereotype and attitude that the elderly have little, if any, community value.

The Intergenerational Learning Center in Minneapolis utilizes intergenerational relationships to achieve goals of improving the quality of life for older adults. Their mission includes to "provide housing, health care, programming services, and interactions between the generations" to promote a new "community understanding and support between the generations."² These goals parallel those desired for this project to enable a more purposeful lifestyle for the Vital Link clients, while providing an enriching educational and life experience for the students and changing

Classroom Involvement as Solution

With little opportunity to visit friends outside their immediate family and the day center, Vital Link clients may feel somewhat isolated during their day-to-day routines. With this in consideration, supplementary social interaction is our primary objective outcome.

Integrating the Vital Link clients' desire to share with Northfield elementary students' need to learn will bridge two disparities to create an enriching reciprocal relationship between organizations. Depending on specific teacher preferences, children may be available for learning enrichment programs at any time during the school day, which happens to run during the same hours as the Vital Link day center. Logistically, this arrangement appears to offer the most feasible potential for inter-organizational activity, but it is also very likely that the inter-generational relationships developed will result in the most substantial level of social change.

Timeline

September 29:

First meeting with Vital Link staff at St. Olaf
- Discussed the nature and organization of Vital Link
- Outlined the program needs

October 12:

First visit to Vital Link and meeting with staff
- Observed the atmosphere at Vital Link
- Brainstormed general project ideas

October 20:

Meeting with Marija Crosson at the CEL
- Received advice from an elementary school education perspective
- First consideration of partnering with schools

November 1 – 18:

Project proposal created; sent to Vital Link for review

November 16:

Meeting with Julie Bubser, St. Olaf Off-Campus Work Study Coordinator
- Received a list of suggested contacts at Greenvale Elementary and Sibley Elementary

November 23:

Meeting at Vital Link
- Received confirmation to move forward with project
- Discussed upcoming steps in project implementation

November 30 – December 4:

Letters of inquiry sent to potentially interested teachers

December 7:

Follow-up via telephone calls

December 10 – 18:

Potential meetings with Vital Link staff and interested teachers
- Will solidify implementation plan logistics
- Will draft program curriculum

January 2011:

Trial implementation of partner reading program

February – June 2011:

Full implementation of partner reading program

Expected Outcomes

Immediate Benefits of Students and Clients
Expectations include seeing improved reading abilities of the students selected for participation, friendly relationships developing between these students and their reading buddies, and an increased quality of life for the clients of Vital Link. It is not often that children are able to interact with the elderly outside their own extended families, and we are confident that building such relationships will enhance students' interpersonal maturity. Likewise, elderly individuals are generally very enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve as mentors. This program will undoubtedly provide Vital Link clients with the social stimulation needed to make their time feel much more worthwhile.

Broad Organizational and Societal Benefits
Regarding the organizations involved, we expect to see increased inter-organizational communication such that future collaboration will appear far more accessible. It is our hope that this program will receive ample attention from the community such that similar projects may develop. If other institutions serving the elderly population witness the success of this program, they may be spurred to consider the greater potential for their own programs. While the Vital Link program will be small in scale, it will hopefully cause greater community

Program Sustainability

To promote the most effective and viable program solution for Vital Link, the project has been planned on a minimal budget, using little more than the resources already available to Vital Link. This will ensure the ability for the project to be sustainable only relying on the health partnership between schools and Vital Link and not on monetary or resource availability.

