

CO-OP FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AT BRUYÈRE SAINT-LOUIS RESIDENCE

A story of experiential learning and setting-up for success

Bruyère Volunteer Resources at Saint-Louis Residence provides the opportunity for secondary school cooperative education students to enhance personal growth, develop skills and explore career options through hands-on experience providing services to, and getting to know, residents. In collaboration with interprofessional team members at Saint-Louis Residence, students improve the quality of life of residents through compassionate and ever-improving care.

Before joining the team, students take part in a screening process through an in-person meeting, to determine if they are a good fit for Saint-Louis Residence. Competencies that the home looks for include:

1. Respect and compassion
2. Sensitivity to special needs and diversity
3. Communication and social skills
4. Initiative and resourcefulness
5. Dependability and responsibility
6. Attention to detail
7. Teamwork



Figure 1 - Co-op students at Saint-Louis Residence

Before beginning their placement, students are given a site-specific orientation to the home and those they will be working with. When they begin their placement, students are given a daily schedule (created by the Volunteer Coordinator) which provides them with a variety of experiences, including:

- Engaging residents in meaningful activities tailored to their interests and abilities, individually and in small groups
- Accompanying residents to and assisting with facilitation of recreational activities
- Providing administrative support
- Providing mealtime assistance
- Supporting the integration of residents who are new to the home
- Creating personalized music playlists for individual residents
- Providing feedback and suggestions to their supervisor regarding any opportunity for learning and/or improvement to care

What makes co-op for secondary school students successful at Saint-Louis Residence?

1. Consistent communication

While it is beneficial to establish and maintain positive collaboration with all team members in the workplace, it is essential to have a particular team member assigned to organize, oversee and manage co-op students. Mariama says that, when a placement supervisor is in place “the program runs more smoothly, and both the organization and student benefit from such a commitment.” There must be

regular communication between both the placement supervisor at Saint-Louis Residence and the co-op student, as well as between the placement supervisor and co-op teacher.

2. A comprehensive orientation

Mariama Diallo, the Volunteer Coordinator at Saint-Louis Residence, says that “preparing a site-specific orientation is extremely important for students to feel comfortable with the people they will be working with, and it helps the students to feel more confident in their ability to perform when there is some structure and boundaries in place”. The orientation secondary school co-op students at Saint-Louis Residence receive includes:

- An overview of the types of tasks and responsibilities they would have
- An introduction to key personal students can approach to refer their questions and/or concerns
- A tour of the home
- Training on health and safety issues and policies within the home
- Clear instructions on policies regarding the home mission statement
- Privacy and confidentiality considerations
- What to do in the case of various emergencies, including site specific emergencies, and who to report to in case of an accident
- Who to speak to and the best way to get in touch with that person should they be absent due to sickness, an appointment or another legitimate reason
- Clear expectations on a consistent start and finish time for their placement, who can sign log sheets and when

3. A clear outline of tasks and responsibilities

Mariama identifies that “having a daily schedule of tasks and responsibilities is a huge benefit for the team members, to be aware of where students should be at any given time, and it is extremely beneficial for the students to help keep them focused and be exposed to the real-life routines and responsibilities of the work-force.” She also suggests that best-practice would include a bi-weekly meeting between the student and their placement supervisor to review their schedule and determine if changes should be made to support team members and residents or to support the student with future growth opportunities.



How were challenges overcome?

A concern expressed by several students was that, among some team members, there was a lack of value exhibited toward them as students. While some team members supported their growth, students feared they were disliked or perceived as a burden by other team members. In order to mitigate this challenge, before introducing co-op students it is important to prepare all team members by educating them about the student’s value and what their role will be, as well as unique needs they may have in the workplace. Training or information sessions are one way to do this. It is also important that team members know who they can connect with if they have concerns about the co-op student.

Although Mariama has found that most students are honest and reliable, there have been times when student absences became an issue, for example, there have been incidences of co-op students giving

their placement supervisor a seemingly legitimate reason for needing to be absent, but indicating to their school that they would be at Saint-Louis Residence. Team members at Saint-Louis Residence have found that notifying co-op teachers of student absences, especially at the beginning of the placement, can help to identify concerns with student attendance early-on and prevent future attendance issues.

Mariama identifies that there is an ongoing challenge related to finding opportunities for the students to shadow team members providing direct medical care, such as nurses and PSWs, due to confidentiality restrictions. Students are still able to support these roles by participating in non-clinical aspects of these roles (such as, relational care, mealtime assistance, and administrative tasks). Mariama has also found that education sessions, virtual simulations, and simulated scenarios have been successful ways to facilitate opportunities for students to learn more about these roles.



Testimonials

“Every day I go to my placement excited to learn and to interact with the residents...The nurses especially have taught me about kindness. Their whole job is to help people and seeing them work has really inspired me. The residents have also helped me see the kind of person that I want to be, they have showed me that I want to be a person who helped other[s] and who is compassionate and caring. One of the most rewarding things has been seeing the residents change from when I first met them to now. At the start of my placement many of the residents wouldn't even talk. They wouldn't smile and they seemed very sad. After seeing them and having visits with them every day, I have seen a dramatic change. The residents are more talkative and I can often even get the[m] to laugh. This is the most rewarding part of my whole co-op is being able to see that I am making a difference in someone's life.”

- *Former co-op student at Bruyère Saint-Louis Residence*

“Looking back on my experiences here at Bruyère Saint-Louis Residence, it has truly been a learning experience. You can nearly learn anything from a book: biology, anatomy, chemistry; anything you would most likely think essential for a doctor or a nurse to know. Nevertheless, you can only learn empathy and compassion from being with people... In forming connections with residents, you learn about a person who has lived their lives to some of the fullest extents... We can learn so much from these people that we so often overlook as a society and yet we tend not to even realize it—and this is what I believe to be one of the most important lessons I've learned from my experiences here.”

- *Former co-op student at Bruyère Saint-Louis Residence*

“Our grade 12 student had a rich and positive experience while working at the residence. She formed strong and positive relationships with the residence and the staff. Furthermore, Mariama provided the student the opportunity to research and present to staff and other Co-op students. Our student had an excellent opportunity to gain independence and autonomy while at Saint-Louis. We hope to continue our relationship with Saint-Louis and the St. Matthew Co-op department for many years.”

– Co-op teacher

“It’s now been nearly three years since my COOP placement at Saint-Louis and I am back as a volunteer at the Residence. Going back, I had the chance to see how much bigger the COOP program at Saint-Louis has gotten since I first started... I really hope these COOP students get to gain experience and develop an identity within the Residence like I did. I also hope they get to determine a career path based on the learnings they have done throughout their semester ... I have said that the Saint-Louis Residence has made me grow as a person, but in fact the residence has made me grow into the future/potential nurse I hope to be one day.”

– Former co-op student at Bruyère Saint-Louis Residence; Nursing Student at University of Ottawa

“I have learnt so much about this beautiful place... this placement has sure opened my eyes and new doors as to what I want to choose in the near future...during my experience at my co-op, I have learnt many varied skills and have been informed of many different activities that can enrich the lives of the residents, for example...helping the residents get an appetite by assisting them to eat their food...transporting the residents to church and other activities like the choir all while trying to inspire the residents to be as active as possible.”

– Current co-op student at Bruyère Saint-Louis Residence

“Saint-Louis Residence provides a unique placement that allows students to both gain experience within a professional workplace, as well as further their education in various components of health care. Furthermore, Co-op students are given the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities within the assisted living environment; including, working one-on-one with residents, resulting in hands on experience and building on a multitude of skills that will undoubtedly benefit them in their future pathway.”

– Co-op teacher

“Experience is the best teacher and the student co-op program at Saint-Louis Résidence provides a valuable opportunity for young people to explore possible career choices while still in school...My mother has been a resident at St Louis for over 3 years now...Recently, her situation changed and she is now confined to a wheelchair. In spite of the setback, she wants to keep moving. She certainly appreciates the students fulfilling this desire by taking her for walks in her wheelchair. She is someone who loves company and very much enjoys her time with the students. As a family we are certainly thankful for the students taking the time to spend with our mother.”

– Family member at Bruyère Saint-Louis Residence