OSSE ADULT AND FAMILY EDUCATION
ACTION RESEARCH DISTANCE LEARNING (ARDL) PROJECT 2019-2020

Agency Name:	**Academy of Hope (AoH) Adult Public Charter School**
Problem Statement:	Despite not having a secondary credential, 75% of AoH evening students are working full-time day jobs. These jobs, however, are often hourly and pay minimum wage. While these evening students come to AoH to pursue a secondary credential in order to provide security and/or opportunities for advancement in their current jobs, the secondary credential alone will not likely launch these students into high-paying careers. To assist the AoH evening students to advance along their chosen career pathways, we needed to offer career development courses; however, due to scheduling issues, offering career development opportunities, without displacing time in the academic classes designed to prepare students to earn a secondary credential, posed a challenge.
Research Question:	How can Academy of Hope use blended learning to enable evening learners to participate in a career development and advancement course?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	We designed a 10-week blended Career Development and Advancement class for evening learners, with the class meeting in person on Tuesdays from 6-7:30 p.m. Learners completed assignments for two hours outside of class. The class was structured using a Google classroom portal, with activities from Virtual Job Shadow and other online resources embedded within the Google platform.
What were your findings?	Qualitative and quantitative findings revealed that participants valued getting to learn more about themselves and their career interests; all participants strongly agreed that the blended pilot class helped them to better understand career pathways and options. In addition, all participants showed academic progress as measured by their pre- and post-CASAS scores, with 80% making Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains.
Please share one of your reflections.	This study provided insight into how to use blended and distance learning to infuse Integrated Education & Training (IE&T) services into evening programming, allowing AoH to realize a long-term goal of supporting our working evening students to advance along their career pathways. Vital to the success of this pilot program were supportive, flexible, and cooperative evening instructors and administrators.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	Our original plan for this pilot program was to work with evening instructors to create distance learning academic assignments to ensure that students could make up any work missed while attending the pilot class. However, we did not have the time needed to plan this appropriately. This is a goal for our next iteration.
Contact Information:	Sasha Lotas, Director of Research and Evaluation, sasha@aohdc.org, (202) 269- 6623 x145

Agency Name:	**Briya Public Charter School**
Problem Statement:	Input from Briya's Medical Assistant (MA) employer advisory board, as well as research from practitioners across many fields, encouraged Briya to further strengthen MA workforce development skills, yet the existing program is content dense and fully utilizes all in-class instructional time.
Research Question:	Does a blended learning approach that focuses on workforce preparation increase an adult learner's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), readiness for work, and placement in a job as a Medical Assistant?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	Students were first introduced to the blended learning pilot during their extended orientation. Students were engaged in the project for 13 weeks. They learned about the main platform, WIN Learning Soft Skills Courseware that served as the basis of their work. Students also participated in activities that combined MA clinical skills along with their workforce development skills in the Flip Grid angry patient activity as well as Google Classroom message boards. At the end of the pilot, students answered several questions in a survey regarding their thoughts on WIN Learning and the other activities that were part of the pilot.
What were your findings?	Overall, a combination of the WIN Learning modules, Flip Grid videos, message boards, and various MA clinical skills nights significantly improved students' knowledge of Effective Communication and Professionalism as well as their ability to use these skills within a clinical setting. Students' professionalism and communication skills were positively impacted as measured by post-test scores: Communicating Effectively Module:87.5% of students improved their score from pre-test to post-test. Based on WIN Learning's criteria, 14 out of 24 students passed Communicating Effectively (80% or higher on the post-test) and 12 out of 24 students passed Conveying Professionalism. The blended learning curriculum, along with interactive clinical activities, improved students' knowledge: 57% of students agreed the skills of professionalism and communication gained during this pilot have made them more employable and 100% of students found skills nights and SIM Labs either "helpful" or "extremely helpful" in improving their professionalism and communication skills.
Please share one of your reflections.	We introduced our Action Research Distance Learning project to the MA students during their four-day orientation at the start of the year. During this time, we facilitated important sessions that would prove useful for implementation and data collection analysis. To prepare learners, we had an entire evening devoted to logging into and practicing using WIN Learning. All students logged in for the first time together, face-to-face, with two staff members rotating for troubleshooting. Any problems or questions regarding the platform were able to be addressed then. On this evening, students also took a NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment - Microsoft Word test, and logged on to their Google Classroom and Google Drive for the first time. We also conducted a needs assessment during this period.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	One additional implementation to the plan would be incorporating more pre- and post-test data for our activities that were part of this blended learning curriculum. In the pilot, students took a NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment pre-test, but they were not post-tested. Now that NorthStar provides coursework for the students to practice and track progress on these skills, we would gain better insight into their digital literacy needs.
Contact Information:	Beth Kushner (bkushner@briya.org), Elizabeth Winn Bowman (ebowman@briya.org), Reena Gadhia (rgadhia@briya.org)

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Agency Name:	**Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington**
Problem Statement:	The goal of the Green Construction Action Research Project was to incorporate a blended learning model of instruction to meet the needs of Catholic Charities (CC) participants in the Green Construction Integrated Education & Training (IE&T) program in order to improve their digital literacy skills. Prior to the research project, 50% of CC students tested below a fifth grade reading level. At the beginning of the program, on a scale from 1 to 10, the lead instructor ranked herself as a "3" in terms of her comfort with technology. Our project design aimed to accommodate the needs of participants with low literacy skills and further the professional development of our instructors while maintaining the integrity of the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) pre-apprenticeship curriculum.
Research Question:	Will the implementation of blended learning increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the students with low level literacy skills in the Green Construction Program?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	Student attendance and engagement in the Green Construction program increased as a result of the blended learning project. Additionally, the communication between the student and the instructor outside of the classroom increased. Our instructor would call and email students at least once a week if she noticed they were not completing assignments. The instructor would also send positive reinforcement to the students working online. The instructor could measure their progress outside on the work being completed outside of class prior by using the management system within the instructional software. We believe that the increase in communication created more accountability with the students.
What were your findings?	Pilot 1: 100% class attendance 75% students made 1 level gain in math - Level 5 student made a 12-point gain in math 50% made a gain in reading - Average homework score was 92.78% 50% of students stated that struggled with time management Pilot 2 - Similar results to above - Due to the addition of a time management class during orientation, students did not report challenges with time management. 7% average score increase on NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment - Basic Computer Skills
Please identify one reflection.	The Catholic Charities team had three key successes: enhancement of the instructor's skills through the professional development opportunity; expansion of instructor's and students' technology skills; and an increase in student engagement. For our instructor, the professional development received was invaluable to her individual growth. The increase in confidence and her growth as a team member is something that cannot be measured. We also saw an increase in student engagement as reflected by our classroom attendance. Speaking from the perspective of program implementation, the project gave us the clout to push forward our program development more quickly than might otherwise occur in our large nonprofit. We also increased our technology in the classroom with a Smartboard and two new laptops, making this the first-time technology was used every day in the Green Construction classroom.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	The survey we provided for our students was limited in that we asked several yes or no questions and used an ordinal rating scale. We realized that this actually limited the quantitative information we were able to gather from students. We wish that we had gathered student feedback qualitatively as well by convening a focus group or conducting individual interviews. The ARDL Project has prepared us to continue to serve our students during the current pandemic and for this we are so thankful!
Contact Information:	Bridget Maley, Program Manager, bridget.maley@cc-dc.org, (240) 630-0465 Melida Chacon, Lead Instructor, melida.chacon@cc-dc.org, (202) 939-2400 ext. 938

Agency Name:	**Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation (CHCTDC)**
Problem Statement:	At Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation (CHCTDC), we observed that barriers to participation, such as housing insecurity, were keeping students from consistently attending class. So, we wanted to provide options for students with barriers who may not be able to attend class as regularly as the students and instructors would like.
Research Question:	How can the use of technology, including instructional software, when used outside of the classroom increase student engagement for students with barriers to participation?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	Throughout the ARDL Project, CHCTDC staff engaged with participants by using the following communication methods: • Email communication • Online discussion groups • Google Hangouts • Face-to-face meetings • Feedback on student progress provided on a regular basis • Technical support from the instructor and the Student Success Coach
What were your findings?	In the pilot, we found that: 1. Attendance and Education Functioning Level (EFL) gains are directly correlated; 2. Participants who used Essential Education outside of designated class time and/or during open computer lab time exhibited increased mastery in math skills; and 3. Participants who experienced barriers to attendance and who had limited access to technology outside of the training facility exhibited limited mastery in math skills.
Please share one of your reflections.	We learned that it is acceptable to have high expectations of adult learners. Initially, the participants were reluctant to buy into the use of technology. When we stated that this was a workforce program and the technology skills they gained would be transferrable to college and careers, they got very interested. As time went on, the participants started spending more time working on their online lessons in the computer lab or at home, the more they understood the correlation between technology and workforce training and to college and careers.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	In the next action research distance learning project, CHCTDC would consider purchasing a portable computer such as a Chromebook and/or a mobile device for each participant. By providing the technology tool(s) that a participant needs to engage in online learning, we believe that this would increase participation in online learning, while also serving as an incentive to remain in the program. Additionally, because of our finding that attendance and completion of online learning assignments directly correlates to student progress and performance, we believe that we would continue to see increases in the development of students' math skills as well as increases in EFL gains.
Contact Information:	Troy Shockley, Director of Human Capital Development, troy@chctdc.org, (202) 528-0865 Darryl Robinson, Student Success Coach, darryl@chctdc.org, (202) 539-6641

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Agency Name:	**Four Walls Career and Technical Education Center**
Problem Statement:	We found that limited technology skills might be keeping students from participating in individualized online instruction that could improve their academic skills.
Research Question:	How will the integration of instructional software with lessons that students complete outside of class enhance instruction and improve student progress and performance?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	Each participant was provided with a laptop computer to use at home to complete online assignments. for the ARDL Project Additionally, participants used Open Time Clock to sign in and out when engaged in online learning at home. The instructor monitored participants' time spent engaged in online learning by using the Open Time Clock software.
What were your findings?	After providing participants with laptops to use at home, we found the following: 1. Participants' technology skills improved by having a greater opportunity to use technology and to use it at their convenience at home (as opposed to time limited use at libraries); and 2. Participants' confidence in their technology skills increased.
Please share one of your reflections.	One of the wonderful occurrences in the project was to see the peer teaching that occurred – and to see the participants using technology tools to provide this assistance to one another. Participants kept in contact with one another via cell phones, Facebook and other social media platforms. The participants who had mastered a concept and/or learning objective assisted peers who were grappling with that concept and/or learning objective. Participants often called one another to work through online material.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	To enhance the Four Walls ARDL project next time, we would develop lessons that address varied learning styles and also include opportunities for peer-to-peer teaching and learning into the design. Additionally, we would develop instructional videos and post them on YouTube that students could watch for just-in-time support; these videos would be viewable on a laptop or on a smartphone. In addition to our own instructional videos, we will identify free instructional videos that have already been developed and can be included in our blended/distance learning plan.
Contact Information:	Wynnetta Jackson, Instructor, wjackson@fourwallsctec.org, (202) 332-8022 Tich Nichols, Program Director, tnichols@fourwallsctec.org, (202) 332-8022

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Agency Name:	**Opportunities Industrialization Center of DC (OIC-DC)**
Problem Statement:	A number of the participants in OIC-DC's Integrated Education & Training (IE&T) Home Health Aide program were not fully completing all of the program components.
Research Question:	In what ways can the integration of blended learning into the IE&T Home Health Aide program decrease participants' barriers and increase program completion?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	OIC-DC staff engaged ARDL participants using the following strategies: • Additional hours of digital literacy instruction • Weekly face-to-face meetings with the instructor
What were your findings?	Major findings of the ARDL Project included the following: 1) Increases in CASAS scale scores by implementing WIN Learning to complement the face-to-face literacy instruction; 2) Development of Quizlet study materials tailored to the Home Health Aide textbook and e-chapters enhanced student success in mastering learning objectives, which in turn resulted in an increase in participants' weekly grades; and 3) Increases in participants' digital literacy skills.
Please share one of your reflections.	One of the benefits of OIC-DC's participation in the ARDL Project was the collaboration and teamwork that developed between the nursing staff and the literacy instructor. Additionally, OIC-DC staff increased their knowledge regarding the implementation of blended learning while also learning more about the instructional platforms and e-learning resources that are available in the Home Health Aide program.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	In implementing future ARDL activities for the Home Health Aide program, OIC-DC would ensure that adult basic education and literacy standards are fully integrated with Home Health Aide competencies by blending HHA face-to-face skills instruction with online platforms such as: Google Hangout Video Calls and online Home Health Aide demonstration videos.
Contact Information:	Dr. Jessyna M. McDonald, Coordinator, jmcdonald@oicdc.org (202) 373-0330 Mrs. DyAnne Little, Director of Adult Education, dlittle@oicdc.org (202) 373-0330

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Agency Name:	**So Others Might Eat (SOME) Center for Employment Training (CET)**
Problem Statement:	We found that SOME CET's advanced students needed a supplemental math program that would challenge them if their skills were higher than the math curriculum being offered in the basic education portion of the Integrated Education & Training (IE&T) program.
Research Question:	How could the use of technology outside of the classroom increase student engagement and improve progress and performance, thereby preparing students for success in their college and career transitions?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	The students played an important role in the planning of the project. Student participation was a key element in determining the design of the project and the "buy in" demonstrated throughout the pilot. Their role began at the first face-to-face session where SOME CET staff introduced the WIN Learning program to participants and received their feedback on how the best ways for staff and students to collaborate on the ARDL project. The participants provided input on how they wanted to use the time they would allocate to reach either their career or college goals.
What were your findings?	Based on our research and experiences throughout the fourteen-week ARDL pilot, we saw promising evidence that participation in the WIN Learning College Readiness Courseware may benefit SOME CET students. 1. Participants who used WIN Learning made similar CASAS scale score gains as students who did not use WIN Learning; 2. Participants at CASAS Level C/D who used WIN Learning had a slightly higher point gain on CASAS GOALS post-test than students who did not use WIN Learning; 3. There was a strong correlation between hours of participation and Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains for participants who used WIN Learning College Readiness Coursework.
Please share one of your reflections.	The high level of student engagement is a strong indicator that advanced students welcome more challenging work, and will make time outside of class to take advantage of additional instructional resources such as WIN Learning or other another instructional product(s) to further develop their skills to prepare for transition to college and a career.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	We identified the need to expand professional development opportunities for blended learning to additional instructors and staff during the next phase of this project. Additionally, we would like to continue to develop support mechanisms specific to blended/distance learning that will allow the SOME CET team to be as effective as possible in supporting students' persistence with online tools outside of classroom time.
Contact Information	Lonnie Murray, Building Maintenance Service Instructor, lmurray@some.org, (202) 765- 1116

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Agency Name:	**YouthBuild DC Public Charter School (YBPCS)**
Problem Statement:	YBPCS designed this Action Research Distance Learning Project to help address two challenges that the school faces on an ongoing basis: 1. A lack of consistent attendance; and 2. A lack of consistent engagement - students are often tired from working long hours, caring for children and family members, and/or from a general lack of resources (e.g., food insecurity, homelessness).
Research Question:	How can YBPCS more effectively use blended learning platforms to better engage students in our Integrated Education & Training (IE&T) construction program?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	We created and administered a technology survey to project participants (three cohorts of students) to gather information about the extent to which they had access to computers and online tools outside of school, as well as their use of technology. In order to formalize a blended learning approach at YBPCS, our instructor intentionally integrated targeted learning on blended learning platforms (Aztec and Essential Education) more frequently in her instruction. She also led mini-projects related to the subject matter, providing the participants with added opportunities to learn basic technology skills. Finally, we administered another survey at the end of the project to gather feedback on the impact of the pilot.
What were your findings?	For engagement purposes, we monitored in-seat attendance and periodically reviewed time on task/completion rates per instructional software platform. To gauge outcomes, quantitatively, we tracked and analyzed (1) in-seat attendance and (2) students' academic growth on CASAS and/or GED readiness. We found that there was not a strong correlation between simply implementing blended learning platforms in the targeted classroom and increased in-seat attendance. However, we did find a correlation between students' academic gains and in-seat attendance; most students showed growth on the CASAS assessment. Our findings suggest that barriers can be overcome, and that blended learning platforms, if used in combination with effective face-to-face instruction and wrap-around supports, can help personalize learning and boost student outcomes. Moreover, the survey responses showed that the students overwhelmingly valued the blended learning program, which has inspired instructors to find and provide more blended learning opportunities in the classroom.
Please share one of your reflections.	The project provided the instructional team with an exquisite opportunity to deliberate on how the school can more effectively use blended learning tools and online platforms, and it helped the team better understand that online tools are not enough to engage students in of themselves – that they are only one part of the instructional puzzle.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	We would have set the project benchmarks (for attendance and time on task) at the beginning of the project and established checkpoints with the entire project team. This would have also helped us analyze data in a timely manner, allowing us to make adjustments to the project as needed. Ideally, the team who participates in each "benchmark meeting" should consist of instructors, the data manager, and school administrators (such as the Academic Dean and/or ESL Coordinator).
Contact Information:	Beatriz Vargas, Academic Dean, beatriz.vargas@youthbuildpcs.org, (202) 319-0141 Komal Bansal, Data Manager, komal.bansal@youthbuildpcs.org, (202) 319-0141

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Agency Name:	**YWCA National Capital Area (YWCA NCA)**

Problem Statement:	YWCA NCA's previous distance education program struggled with retention and achievement, so we wanted to identify strategies to improve both with distance learning students. The Action Research Distance Learning project addressed several challenges:
	    1) That many students are unable to attend our face-to-face and blended classes but still need the services;
	    2) That students' persistence is impacted by life barriers, often causing them to stop-out of attending face-to-face classes; and
	    3) YWCA's goal to expand services to a new population.

Research Question:	How can distance learning help to increase the engagement, retention, and achievement of participants with multiple barriers?
How did you engage students as participants in the Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL) Project?	Participants were introduced to new content, and reviewed previously taught content, via an online notification. Participants were evaluated on their progress via attendance and dashboard tracking using the tools in Essential Education's GED Academy and Power School, both of which track learner scores and time on task. Additionally, participants' responsiveness to instructor emails and comments in discussion board and office hours were monitored by staff. Some students required additional follow up, which was provided on a face-to-face basis in the office, as needed. Google Hangouts, live embedded chats, virtual office hours, email, Remind app for texting, etc., were used to evaluate student progress and to provide feedback to students on assignments. At a minimum, instructors were to adhere to a two-touches-a- week rule for interacting with students and to respond to student work within 48 hours.
What were your findings?	Data confirmed that participants who followed the learning plan and completed all assignments were more likely to pass the GED practice test and, therefore, to achieve the goal of obtaining a GED.
Please share one of your reflections.	The ARDL Project has been an eye-opening experience in that it has allowed us to take the time to focus the structure of our distance learning program and refine the procedures for recruitment and screening. In addition, we have been able to focus on the actual educational and technological barriers that DC residents face and that need to be remediated for them to be successful in our programs. We have had the opportunity to assess, screen and analyze participants' scores on the NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment. YWCA NCA was able to identify technology barriers revealing that a majority of students need to develop basic computer skills before participating in distance learning.
What is one thing that you would do differently the next time you implement Action Research Distance Learning (ARDL)?	As the director of programs, it is clear that during the implementation of the ARDL Project, that it required much more attention, staff time and technology resources than anticipated. I suggest that a team of at least three instructors work together to manage the online classroom instruction with the students. These instructors would focus on academics and hospitality instruction. These instructors will need a strong background in teaching online courses or at least two years of experience with online learning. Additionally, a team of two administrators is needed to focus on recruitment, intake, orientation and administrative responsibilities.
Contact Information:	Dana Campbell, Director, Education and Training Programs, dcampbell@ywcanca.org, (202) 626-0700 Elsy Salas, Data Management Administrator, esalas@ywcanca.org, (202) 626-0700