

Op-Ed

Nonprofits With Limited Resources Should Share Resources with Others to Thrive

Posted November 1, 2021 | By Dr. Betty Patten | Director of the EAGLES Program

It is not a lost concept that nonprofits do not make as much money nor have as many resources as for-profit companies. According to studies done by [Bridgespan Group](#) and the [Patterson Foundation](#), upwards of 90% of nonprofits are now engaging in collaborations with other nonprofits. Many nonprofits are now choosing to band together to increase efficiency and improve effectiveness. ([Philanthropy News Digest](#)). Above all, they are collaborating in order to implement broader social change, which at the end of the day is most important to nonprofit work.

The Education to Accomplish Growth in Life Experiences for Success (EAGLES) Program at Auburn University is a specialty program for students with intellectual disabilities to experience and learn in a college environment. The program provides post-high school educational opportunities for students to engage in a two-four year campus experience. ([EAGLES](#)). The program's participants are non-degree seeking, meaning that it is just on Auburn's campus to learn.

The program focuses on "academic enrichment, health and wellness, personal and social skills, independent living skills, and integrated work experiences" ([EAGLES](#)). These skills are important for everyone to learn, especially those with intellectual disabilities. It will allow them to live semi-on their own in a college dorm with an intellectually capable graduate student as their roommate. Then the students are equipped to live on their own after graduation from Auburn.

However, with all of the good that the EAGLES Program does it does not have enough academic help to continue.

As the Director of the EAGLES Program, I have seen how much this program can change a person's life. We are able to educate students with intellectual disabilities so they can live independently and thrive in the adult world. Our resources are vast but our help is fleeting. Over the last year, our team has shrunk to five ([EAGLES](#)). This is making us put a lot of pressure on our Warmhearted Individuals Nurturing Great Success (WINGS), our volunteer peer mentors.

The EAGLES curriculum has classes like Pillars of Health and Wellness, Financial Literacy, Career Readiness, and Transition to Independent Living. However, professors who specialize in these topics are hard to come by and the EAGLES teachers are being stretched thin to cover the missing professors for these classes. These topics clearly align with the programs at the Lee County Literacy Coalition.

The Lee County Literacy Coalition is a non-profit that provides programs free of cost to its community. It has programs such as health literacy, financial literacy, and digital/workplace literacy, the LCLC is teaching skills necessary for community members to thrive and succeed in life and the business world ([LCLC](#)). However, it is struggling to find new learners.

The EAGLES Program would benefit from partnering with the LCLC in order to teach our students various forms of literacy through the programs that the LCLC already offers. The benefits do not stop there. The LCLC will also benefit from this partnership because we will be able to provide more volunteers and locations conducive to holding this program. Our peer mentors are a wonderful resource for our EAGLES students. These mentors will be able to aid the LCLC with the running of programs in the partnership. The EAGLES program also has state-of-the-art classrooms complete with students with resources such as laptops and textbooks.

While some organizations may collaborate with hesitation, an organic and correct partnership can be very successful.

To have collaborations thrive, nonprofit leaders must align on the following efforts: the “why,” the “how,” understand the core competencies, and know each organization’s limits ([Philanthropy News Digest](#)). The EAGLES program and the LCLC align on these values. Both “why’s” are to help eager learners thrive independently. The “how’s” are to teach people through tutoring and traditional learning on topics such as health, finance, career, and wellness. The organizations bring different competencies to the table; the EAGLES program has great resources and eager students and mentors, while the LCLC has experienced teachers and great lessons. The two also have different limits; the EAGLES program is lacking teachers and the LCLC is lacking students.

For the greater purpose of having both programs prosper and helping students learn more about literacy, this partnership would be great for both parties.

The collaboration will be beneficial to both programs, and even more beneficial to the learners who will remember these lessons in the future when they are living independently.