



Health Professions Students Engaged in Service Learning to Assess Harm Reduction in Hartford

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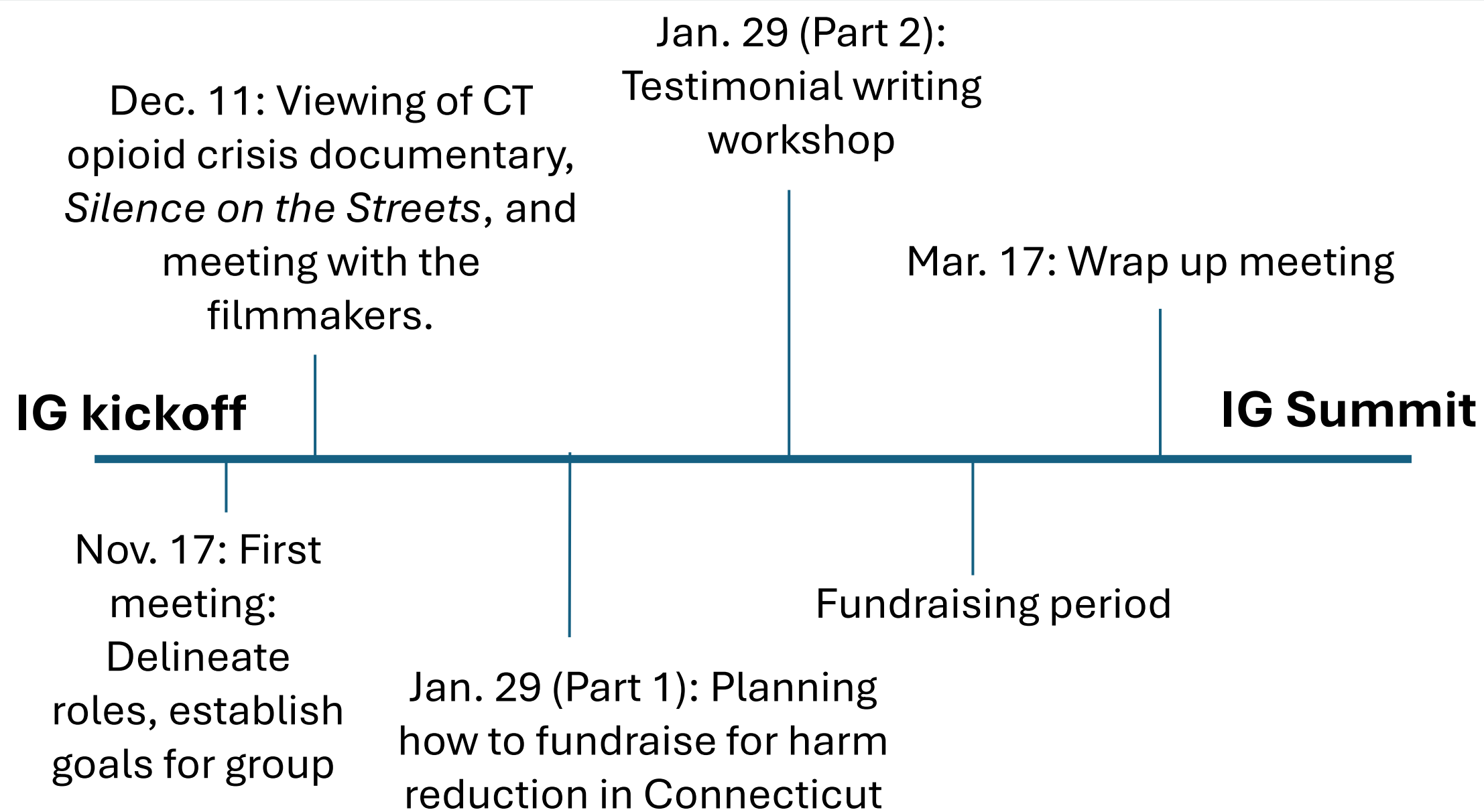
BACKGROUND

Substance use continues to disproportionately impact underserved communities, particularly in urban areas like Hartford where stigma, housing instability, and limited access to care persist, as highlighted in the documentary *Silence on the Streets* and discussion with its creators (Connecticut Overdose Response Strategy Team et al., 2023). The Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance (CTHRA), founded in 2014, emerged in response to gaps in low-barrier services. As Connecticut's largest naloxone distributor and a leader in syringe services and mobile outreach, CTHRA provides evidence-based, community-centered care. Harm reduction emphasizes dignity, safety, and meeting individuals where they are. Despite the efforts, funding and awareness remain limited (Connecticut Overdose Response Strategy Team et al., 2023). Interprofessional student engagement offers an opportunity to support these efforts through advocacy, education, and fundraising.

OBJECTIVES

- To engage in interprofessional learning to explore harm reduction principles, identify potential community partnerships, and examine pathways for advocacy and service learning
- To learn about Connecticut legislative priorities related to harm reduction and how students can engage in advocacy

METHODS



LESSONS LEARNED

Film screening of *Silence on the Streets* and meeting with the filmmakers:

- Increased student awareness of the opioid and fentanyl crisis in Connecticut.
- Strengthened understanding of real-world impact through community storytelling and discussion with filmmakers.
- Promoted critical reflection on stigma and barriers to care.

Legislative Advocacy & Testimony Writing Workshop:

- Improved student knowledge of harm reduction policy at state and national levels.
- Increased confidence in writing and delivering legislative testimony while encouraging active student participation in health policy advocacy.



Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance Partnership:

- Worked with CTHRA to create this experience.
- Increased awareness of resources such as naloxone distribution, HIV testing, and outreach services.
- Strengthened connection between students and community-based care models through a longitudinal relationship.

Fundraising & Outreach:

- Raised \$750+ to support harm reduction initiatives.
- Expanded outreach through social media and academic listservs.

IMPACT

Students:

- Learned about the impact of stigma on healthcare delivery and health outcomes, and the challenges stigma poses legislatively.
- Explored different harm reduction initiatives and how they can advocate for and implement harm reduction as students and in their future clinical practice.
- Engaged with community partners learning about professionalism and creating shared, achievable goals under time constraints while accommodating various schedules.
- Demonstrated a sustainable, student-led model that can be replicated to support community-based organizations.

CONCLUSION

Interprofessional student-led initiatives can effectively support community-based harm reduction efforts.

- Partnerships with local organizations enhance both student learning and community impact.
- Expanding and sustaining these efforts can further address substance use and health disparities.

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REFERENCES

References available upon request from jessica.link@uconn.edu.