

Introduction

“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson). My time spent at the Clark County Youth Shelter fulfilled Emerson’s vision in this quote. My 89 hours of service learning was spent enriching my life and opening my mind to many issues that our local youth face. Being of service both to the staff and the children at the shelter led me be able to integrate my knowledge from different classes and experiences in an effort to process them in a meaningful and reflective way, as outlined through the various ways in this course.

Service Learning Cite and Responsibilities

Service Learning Site

Choosing a site to explore as part of my service learning was an extremely daunting task for me. I had worked as an intern before at Just Solutions for a year and had grown very comfortable with my position there. I wanted to find something that I would be just as comfortable at, but would still continue to challenge and stimulate me. Having mental stimulation is important to me in a working environment. I have worked at the same place since high school, and I often find myself engaging in different tasks to change things up so that it is more stimulating. When looking at the list of sites offered in the syllabus, I found myself looking up most of the sites to learn more about them. I made a mental list of sites that would fit into a “no”, “maybe”, or a “yes” category. Clark County Youth Shelter was one of the few that fit into that “yes” category. I liked the fact that it was close to my house and still close to campus. I looked up their website to read all about what the shelter does for the community, and

I thought that it seemed like a good fit. I really like knowing about the community, and I wanted to engage in something that I thought would directly benefit the community. I sent the Executive Director of the shelter an email, explaining a little bit about my class and what I was looking for in regards to service learning, and then I came in for an informal interview. I talked with her and the rest of the staff about what I was looking for from a service learning site. They were very helpful and welcoming to me at that first meeting, and I made the final decision to serve Clark County Youth Shelter through my service learning.

Clark County Youth Shelter is located in downtown Jeffersonville, Indiana about five minutes away from downtown Louisville. I have lived in southern Indiana my entire life and am pretty familiar with Jeffersonville, but I was unaware of where the youth shelter was located. The shelter itself is a pretty modest home with a lot of add-ons. The older part, which is the more traditional home, is where the kids at the shelter stay. There is a kitchen and a recreational room that leads to a 2 story office, consisting of about seven small rooms that the staff members use. The infrastructure of the shelter is overall pretty nice, but it could definitely use some updating. As is the case with many things that are funded through the state, the funds that the shelter receives are limited. The shelter is always participating in fundraising events, and there is one staff member who is dedicated to writing grants in an effort to receive more money for the shelter. This was nice to witness first hand, because it shows me that the staff members of the shelter are taking responsibility and action for the children.

“Serving youth and their families in a caring environment,” is the mission statement of the Clark County Youth Shelter. This is done in a variety of ways. For such a relatively small area, Clark County Youth Shelter provides a lot of different services. They house long-term residents who might be there for several months or even years. During my time there, there was

one boy who had been at the shelter for over a year that was recently allowed to go back to his family. There are also a few there now who have been there close to a year. Besides having long-term residents, the shelter also provides services to short-term residents. These short-term residents might have been referred to the shelter by the local jails (known as JDAC- Jefferson Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center) or DCS (Indiana Department of Child Services), just to name a few of the most common referrals. As stated by one of the staff members, Clark County Youth Shelter is seen somewhat as a “melting pot” for children.

The shelter also accepts people who are known as Safe Place victims. In Southern Indiana there are many signs in businesses that say Safe Place on them. Children are taught in schools to seek out these signs and go to places that display them if they are in trouble. If someone goes to a Safe Place location and says that they are there due to Safe Place, the employees are instructed to call a Safe Place representative. One of our staff members organizes all of the Safe Place organizations in this area. She is constantly on the phone with businesses about doing things like giving a presentation on the need for Safe Place or trying to get businesses to display a Safe Place sign.

The amount of children at the shelter can vary a lot. Usually they have at least six residents and no more than 11 or so. However these numbers vary a lot for no predictable reason. The amount of children at the shelter can vary a lot too based on the time of day. My schedule varied a lot at the youth shelter, but what I tried to stick to was being there one day during the week (usually from about 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM or so) and then Sundays because that is my only day off work from my paid job. When I would be there during the week, there was usually just one, maybe two kids there during the first part of my time spent there at the beginning of the year. This can be explained by the fact that most of the kids in this age are in

school. Towards the end of my time spent at the youth shelter in March and April, there were more kids during the day, because some were older and out of school. On Sundays, everyone was usually there unless one of the kids was approved for a home pass, which must be approved by the counselor.

The age of the kids varied quite a bit as well. This proved to be quite challenging at times, as I will elaborate on in the next section. The shelter is only licensed to serve kids from ages 10 to 18. Anyone who is younger than that, the shelter must get special permission to accept. When I first started at the shelter there was a nine year old boy who had been there since August. He was still at the shelter when I left but is being adopted soon. There is another kid there now who is eight. However these cases are overall considered to be unusual. There were also a couple kids that were 19. These children are in a special program designed to give them adult privileges, but still help them to work on things that the kids are expected to do, like obtaining their GED. I will discuss my thoughts on these different programs under the challenges and opportunities section below.

There is a wide range of staff at the shelter as well. The children are never alone and are always being monitored by a youth worker. The youth worker is responsible for filling out paperwork on a daily basis saying everything about the kids, such as what they have been doing, have they been participating in chores, have they been doing school work, and have they been taking their medicines, just to name a few. The youth worker also has to cook meals for all of the kids. This job is one of the lower jobs in regards to pay, but it is also one of the most important and demanding jobs and can require quite a lot of skill. There were also four full-time management employees at the shelter: the Executive Director, the Assistant Director, the Youth Work Supervisor, and the Counselor. I really enjoyed working with all of them; they were

always very welcoming to me. I worked most closely with the Youth Work Supervisor and the Counselor. They were the two main people who would tell me what tasks they needed me to do each day.

My responsibilities varied quite a bit. Being that I am an undergraduate student and not actually employed by the youth shelter, there were some things that I could not participate in. For example, today at the youth shelter, the counselor was having a meeting with DCS workers and other therapists to discuss a particular boy's case. She told me that they have these meetings a minimum of every three months and that she wished I was able to come to the meeting. She said that the meetings are initiated by DCS, so she does not have any say in who can and cannot be there, the DCS workers do. This is something that I wish I was able to participate in, since I am wanting to possibly do case work as a career.

There were some other things that was limited from doing. Since I was not considered a paid staff member, I was not ever supposed to be in a position where I was held responsible for the children. We stretched this rule a little, for example if I was with the children and the youth worker had to get the phone or go to the bathroom, I would be with the children by myself for a few minutes. Thankfully this never caused me any problems.

Responsibilities

My responsibilities varied a lot. When I was working with the management staff members, sometimes I would do administrative things like make copies of intake sheets and mail out invitations to fund raising dinners. I did not mind doing tasks like this at all. They might sound trivial to some, but I like to feel helpful and needed by them, as well as liking to do things that I know will help with the well-being of the shelter.

Another thing that I did when working with the management staff was helping to create a resource guide. This was something that I enjoyed doing immensely. During my spring break, I wanted to make up some extra hours that I had missed due to the snow days. Two of those days, I spent at the shelter typing up a resource guide. This guide contained over 30 pages worth of material with information about where parents could get things like assistance for their bills, food from food banks, a daily hot meal, medical and pharmaceutical help, and clothing just to name a few. Not only did I like doing this task because it was something different, but it was also very eye-opening to see the different types of resources that were available to these people. These resource guides that I helped to create will be distributed to parents at the adult education classes that are hosted by the youth shelter. Before I created this, there was not one ultimate guide that was given to the parents. They would often call the shelter, but there was not really any universal referral sheet for them. It is quite comforting to know that I will now be a provider of this information to people.

Another thing that was part of my responsibilities with the kids at the youth shelter was to hold group sessions and to prepare for them. In group sessions, I would show a short video to the kids and then we would talk about them. These videos focused on topics and issues that teenagers might be facing. Some of the topics included titles like “peer pressure,” “lessons on love,” “dangers of drugs,” “weapons and violence,” and “suicide.” Over the course of a few days, the counselor at the youth shelter asked me to watch all of these movies that she had in her office that had been left there from the previous counselor. Some of these were quite dated and almost as old as I am. She wanted me to scan through these and sort them into categories of whether or not the kids would like them or just sit there and make fun of them and their “old clothing”. Once I sorted through these, she would have me pick out a few that I found

appropriate. On days that I did these group sessions, we would watch the video together and then discuss it for a little while afterwards. Sometimes it would be hard to get the kids to discuss with one another about the videos and they would just make comments like “That video put me to sleep.” Other times they would actually discuss them. I would try to come up with questions that would provoke discussion, and that usually stimulated some responses with the kids. After I would hold these group sessions with the kids, I would tell the counselor the topic of the video and what we discussed. She would then write a note for each kid that was there at the time of the discussion with the topics that we talked about, I would sign it, and it would go in each kid’s file. The kids participate in something called *Independent Living*, in which they record their hours in a log of things that they do such as participating in particular classes, discussions, or learning a skill. These discussions fall into something that can be categorized on their *Independent Living* log sheets.

Every weekday that I went to the youth shelter, I would ask whichever staff person that I saw first whether or not they needed me to do anything. Sometimes they would say yes, and other times they would say no. On the days that they said no, I would go to the kids who were usually in the recreation room and spend my time with them. Also when I went to the youth shelter on Sundays, I would always spend all of my time with the kids and the youth worker, because the administrative staff does not work on the weekends. My time spent with the kids could mean a variety of different things. I did a wide range of things with them such as playing board games with them, playing the Wii with them, helping with homework, watching TV and movies with them, playing basketball with them, helping them with chores, going outside and drawing chalk with them, and simply just talking with them, just to name a few things. I never had two days that were exactly similar. Most days varied quite a bit. This was due to many

factors, like the activity that we were doing, what kids were there, and what youth worker was at the facility working.

I had a few other various activities that I took on responsibility with at the youth shelter. One was to help set-up for a National Safe Place event. National Safe Place week was a little over a week ago, and organizations and businesses that are affiliated with Safe Place were recognized. There were also people from the home office of Safe Place that came to the shelter to talk and thank us. The coordinator for Safe Place in this area is one of the part-time employees at the shelter, so she spoke a little bit about the organization. There were some well-known people in the community at this event: the mayor of Jeffersonville, some judges, some of the Clark County Youth Shelter's board members, and a few others as well. I helped with the set-up for this event, by helping to clean and get the rooms ready and get the food ready. This was a neat event to me, because I really did not know a lot about Safe Place even though I see the signs almost everywhere I go. Hearing the different representatives talk about Safe Place was very beneficial to me.

Keeping all of this in perspective, the composition of the shelter and my responsibilities, are both essential for critically synthesizing and drawing conclusions from my experiences. The composition of the shelter, both in terms of the different types of people that were there as residents and staff members played a huge role in this. My responsibilities and tasks that I was assigned each day would vary quite a lot, but having this variety led me to having a wide range of experiences while I was at the shelter.

Challenges and Opportunities

When I first began my time at the youth shelter, I was called in for an informal interview. In this interview the Executive Director asked me if I had a lot of experience working with kids.

My mind went somewhat blank, being that I was a little nervous over the idea of an interview. I gave a generic answer about having a fair amount of experience with kids. In reality, I do have a lot of experience working with kids of this age range. I have been a manager working with kids that are the same age as many at the youth shelter for almost five years, and at my previous job I worked as a lifeguard and watched kids at the pool, some of which were my age. Back to main point, the Executive Director told me that working with the kids here is a lot different than how it is in many other situations. She told me that, "It's not like Girl Scout camp where everyone sits around and gets along. You might be cussed out by a kid one day or witness lots of demeaning things. How do you think you would react?"

This question has stuck with me since day one of my time at the youth shelter. I was never cussed out by a child, but I did witness them cussing out other kids at the shelter, as well as staff members that were working. This was pretty uncomfortable to me to witness at first, but as my time at the shelter progressed, I began to internalize it in different ways. I realized that a lot of the kids did not find the words as severe as I did. Also as the counselor of the shelter pointed out to me, you have to be able to go with it. She uses the opportunity when kids say demeaning things to draw a connection and be able to find other things out about them. She will frequently turn it into a joke or a situation. She told me that you have to be able to think creatively to figure out things about people. She said that getting angry over it is what the kids expect you to do. I practiced this skill a little bit. When the kids would make comments about others, I would often try to make a little comment and turn the situation back on them. They did not expect this from me, but I was still able to talk to them a little bit. I think that this skill is something that is a challenge, but probably something that you get better at with time.

As stated before, this particular youth shelter was seen as a melting pot. This is done in two ways, by the types of people at the shelter and the variety of programs at the shelter, as explained below.

Different Types of People at the Shelter

During my time at the shelter, which was only three months, I worked with a fair amount of children. I did not count all of them, but I would say I probably encountered about 25 different children. These children were not there all at the same time. The youngest one who was there was eight, and the oldest one was 19. Working with an eight year old is quite different from a 19 year old. Adding on another layer of complication is the different types of problems that these kids face. Some were there due to detention violations, like running away from home. Others were there due to failed stays in foster care situations. Others might have legal charges that they were facing like drug and alcohol violations.

Often times I did not know the backgrounds of these kids. Sometimes the counselor would fill me in on the details of their lives, but often times when I would talk to her, she has not even been able to look at the file, and therefore did not know the situation of the kids. This was both a challenge and an opportunity. It was a challenge in that sometimes I did not know what would be considered appropriate to talk about in group sessions when we would watch videos. If we watched a video that talked about the dangers of drugs, I often would find myself wondering if this video applied to any situations that the kids might have faced first hand. Also it was a challenge in that it became difficult to be able to relate to the kids at some points, especially if I did not know the backgrounds of their situations.

Not knowing the backgrounds of these kids did allow me to not have any biases, both consciously and unconsciously, towards the kids. For example, if I thought that the idea of

having a detention violation and therefore being considered a runaway was irresponsible of the kid and simply just an act to get attention, I might have thought of them differently. Without having this knowledge, I was able to treat everyone objectively.

Throwing into the mix of the different backgrounds and of the kids, was the different personalities of the kids. These personalities could vary in a wide range of ways, such as whether or not they were on drugs, if they suffered from any mental illnesses, and the overall behaviors of each individual kid. While I was there, there was almost always at least one resident who was sent there due to a drug and alcohol problem. In one particular situation, there was one fifteen year old kid who was sent to the shelter based on abusing meth. He had been exposed to meth at a young age from both of his parents, and he began smoking it when he was 12 years old. This was extremely sad and hard to believe. At 12 years old, I was just a young innocent child in middle school. It is hard to believe that someone could be using heavy drugs at that age. When he first arrived at the shelter he had been clean from drugs for three days. The counselor, who has extensive drug and alcohol treatment background and is certified in this field, told me that day three is often the worst. That is when they experience the worst withdrawal symptoms. This particular kid ended up being hospitalized for a little while. He came back to the shelter after being stabilized by the hospital.

To add complication to this particular incident with the kid, he did not fit my schema of what I would consider a typical drug addict to be. While we should not hold stereotypes because they can lead to false judgments and accusations, I think that most people do have them, simply as an effort to categorize people. This kid was one of the best behaved at the shelter. He got along very well with the other kids and staff, and he also was very well-mannered.

Mental illness was also a factor that played into the different types of kids that I worked with. Some kids were diagnosed and on medication for their illnesses and others were not officially diagnosed, but the counselor suspected that many of them suffered from different illnesses. When I was there at the shelter I saw a wide range of different disorders. The eight year old that I worked with was extremely autistic. He required a different type of attention than the person who was diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Notice that I said 'a different type of attention' and not 'more' or 'less' attention. I think it is important to make this distinction. My interactions with each child individually varied a great deal. Some I would have to have a much more hands-on approach, and others I would have to think about my wording and phrasing a lot more with when talking to them. Almost all of the residents probably faced some mental illness, some that affected them a lot more than others.

Dealing with the different types of behaviors of these children could be extremely challenging due to the previously mentioned factors like addictions and mental illness. There were other unnamed factors of their behaviors as well like looking at the interactions between the kids. Being a sociology major, I am always interested in looking at how people act in groups in regards to conformity and social interactions with one another. Some of the kids would act quite different around some residents as opposed to others. They would often tell me what they did and did not like about other residents and use this as justification for how they would interact with each other. Recognizing these reasonings, whether or not I agreed with them, was essential to my understanding of the interactions of the kids. For example one of the 19 year olds was quite different when he was talking to one of the kids who was closer to his age then he was to the young eight year old with autism.

Variety of Programs at the Shelter

This area is blessed with the availability of many different types of programs that are available at the shelter. There are many residents who are there on a short term basis, as well as some that are there on a long term basis. Being at the shelter on a short term basis, can be as long as four months or as little as a few days. Long term is indefinitely or until they turn age 18. Each of these two categories can be further complicated, as explained below.

Short Term Residents

Short term residents are referred to the shelter in different ways. Some of these include a referral from DCS. Referrals from DCS might come in a wide range of ways, like a report that a child was abused, had run away from home, or in an unstable environment. These kids would have an assigned caseworker, whom they would contact frequently. This caseworker was concerned by the overall well-being of the child. They would try to find the facility that best meets the needs of the child. They might also look for foster care or potential adoptive placements for the child.

The short term residents can also be there as a result of violating the law. This could be done in a variety of ways, like possession of drugs or alcohol. These residents would be at the shelter for a while until they had a court date. At the court date, the judge would make a ruling, based on any people that were involved, including the parents, the attorney (often a public defender) and the youth shelter. The ruling would be to either stay at our facility, go to a different facility, or go home and possibly be on probation. A lot of times these rulings were pretty predictable, and other times it was not.

Short-term residents can also be at the shelter as a result of Safe Place. If someone goes to a Safe Place site in this area, Clark County Youth Shelter is often contacted. The kid will go

to the youth shelter and be there for a little while. There are specially trained staff to provide crisis intervention to the Safe Place referrals.

There can also be short-term residents who are referred to the shelter by their parents. During my time at the youth shelter, I did not witness any cases like this. This is a beneficial service, but I do not think that a lot of people know about it in this area.

Long Term Residents

Long term residents can be at the shelter for a variety of reasons as well. One reason might be that they are homeless and have nowhere else to stay. This was the case with one resident that was there when I was at the shelter. His mom had been murdered, and his dad was not in the picture. Another kid was essentially homeless as well, due to having an alcoholic father who is always in and out of rehab and a mom who is not in the child's life.

Another reason can be that they are awaiting a potential adoption. This was the case with another child that was there while I was at the shelter. He was born to a family of cocaine addicts and was placed under DCS's care for several years. He was in several different foster homes, but due to some behavioral problems none of the homes worked out. However, his story does have a happy ending to it. He is being adopted in a few weeks. Everyone involved in his case thinks that these adoptive parents and him are a good fit and will work out.

The shelter has a program designed specifically for the older long-term residents. This program is state-funded. The intention of the program is for the residents to get their high school diploma or their GED. It provides them with full-tuition for college. It also helps them with getting their first job, and helping them to pay for their first house or apartment. There are classes to help with these independent living skills that are necessary like how to shop for

groceries and how to balance a check book. These are skills that I feel like I frequently take for granted, but they are not as engrained to the residents' minds as they are to mine.

Right now there are three residents enrolled in this program. One is 16 and taking classes with a private tutor. He is severely behind in school. One of the others is 18 and enrolled in a local high school. The other kid is 19 and is working on getting his GED. The 18 and the 19 year old also work. Since these two are legally considered adults, they are given some privileges that others are not allowed. They are allowed to leave the shelter to go on walks and they are allowed to have their cell-phones at free-time. However they still face a lot of restrictions. They are not allowed to have tobacco products while at the facility, as well as any outside food. They are not allowed to have a car at the facility. They are still expected to follow all of the shelter's rules, and they stay with the other residents. When I was speaking with the counselor about this program, she told me that it is a good program in theory, but it does not really work out at this shelter. She said that in her time at the shelter, she has never seen anyone actually complete the program all of the way. She said that she thinks it is essential that these kids be treated as adults and have all of the rights and privileges of adults. She thinks that due to the infrastructure of our shelter, it is not the best placement for this type of long-term approach. This area of debate with the program seems to be a major challenge. If the program continues to not do well at the shelter and no one fully completes it, it will be interesting to see if they still continue to do it.

Different Youth Workers

Working with different youth workers was a major challenge. This goes along with seeing the differences in the residents in how they interact with each other. The residents also interact differently with different youth workers. The residents are more respectful to some

youth workers than others. The residents take some of the youth workers a lot more seriously than others as well.

After working with the different youth workers a few times, it became quite obvious about who was driven and cared about their job. Some of the youth workers were really passionate and interacted with the kids a great deal. One particular youth worker really stood out to me. She told me that the job can be extremely stressful but was also very rewarding. I told a few of the management staff members that I liked working with this particular youth worker a lot, and they agreed with me by saying that she has a great personality for working with kids. There were a few other youth workers that I heard great things about, but I either did not work with them at all or worked with them just one time due to the different hours that they worked at times when I was not at the shelter.

Unfortunately there were a few youth workers who did not appear to me to be as dedicated to their jobs. One in particular seemed to mostly want to babysit. On Sundays that I would be there, they would watch TV for hours, even though they were not supposed to. The youth worker did not seem to be interested in engaging with the kids at all. When we would all be eating together, she would not talk to the kids and they would often eat in silence. She was frequently on her phone a lot. On the last day that I was at the shelter, she was on the computer applying for a different job. This showed me that she really was not dedicated to working at the shelter.

However, I am trying to remain from coming off as being judgmental by saying this. I do not know her total situation. I only know what I have observed. It is possible that she was applying for a new job simply because she was not making enough financially. I know that the youth worker positions are not very highly paid positions. Perhaps she was also going through

other things on a personal and emotional level. I attempted to keep all of this in perspective, by simply telling myself that I did not know her story.

Being that I was not a paid staff member, I struggled a lot with how to handle this situation. I did not really feel like it was my place to suggest an activity to do, because I was not in charge. If there had been horrible or unethical misconduct going on, then I believe that I would have reported it to a management staff member. I did not share my thoughts on how she was interacting with the kids, but if asked, I probably would not have hidden them either.

This differences in the dedication of the different staff members was also shown in how they chose to discipline the kids. The youth worker mentioned above that I thought seemed to interact very well with the kids was not always liked by the kids at all times. Just because she interacted well does not mean that she did not demand respect from them. If a child was behaving inappropriately she was quick to discipline them. The youth worker that did not seem to be as dedicated to her job often let a lot of things slide that I did not see other staff members accept.

Expectations and Realities

Working with Residents

I have a fair amount of experience working with kids. However I do not have a lot of experience working with kids that are seen as being different from me, in that they do not have as many advantages as I do. The Executive Director's question of how I would respond to a kid cussing at me or possibly being violent was very eye opening from the beginning. It left me wondering how I would respond in this situation.

I was never directly cussed out, so I did not get to see how I would react. I witnessed kids cussing at each other and sometimes to other staff members. Most of the time I did not

respond. I simply observed the situation. In these situations I was never alone, so I did not feel like I really had to react in a way that would stop the behavior. Sometimes I would try to help the staff member talk with the kid that was having an issue. We were usually able to diffuse the situation.

Runaways and Lack of Services Available

I never expected to witness a child going AWOL (“absent without official leave”). However in the three months that I served at the shelter, two of the three times that a child went AWOL, I was there. I was told later that this was pretty unusual to have that many AWOLs in a short time span. One situation was particularly unusual. It was a Sunday that I was at the youth shelter and everyone was getting along great. We were outside drawing on the sidewalk with chalk. One child who had recently come to the shelter was outside moping around quite a bit. She said that she was not feeling well. She went inside for a little while and then came back outside and said she had just gotten sick. The youth worker could not give her any medicine because her mom had not approved her to take anything. The youth worker told me that she did not really believe the child was sick anyway.

Later that day we went inside and were sitting around talking. It was about time for the visitations to start. Another youth worker arrived to help the other worker with these visits. Sometimes these visits have to be monitored due to the discretion of the staff, so there has to be one worker present at the visit and the other has to watch the kids. When the other youth worker got there, they were talking and they said that they needed to monitor the girl who had gotten sick earlier during her visit with her mom. I also heard them say that they needed to schedule a doctor’s visit for her because they suspected that she might have a sexually transmitted disease due to a bad smell in her bedroom.

The girl seemed to be acting stable until her mom arrived for the visit. They went into the room for their visit with the youth worker present. They began to text back and forth on the mom's phone so that the youth worker could not hear what they were saying. The youth worker cut the visit due to this. The mom and daughter both caused a scene in the kitchen where everyone, including the other residents and myself, could see. The mom said that she needed to take her daughter to the emergency room because she was having a panic attack. The youth worker assured her that we would handle the situation when she left. The mom started cursing everyone out and eventually left. Meanwhile the girl started screaming and acting very dramatic. The youth worker tried to calm her down, but did not have much success. The girl threw herself on the floor, and then got up and ran out the door. Police and on-call staff were immediately notified.

The police eventually found the girl and took her to the hospital because she demanded medical attention. We later found out that she had smuggled drugs into the facility in a bodily crevice and that was what was causing the smell from her room. The girl was released back to her mom via a decision made by the court. I also found out later that the girl's boyfriend was much older than her and he made meth for a living. The girl's mom had introduced the two of them, and she thought that the boyfriend was a good match for her daughter. Given these facts, I along with all of the staff at the shelter, do not feel like releasing the girl back to her mom was the best choice. It sends a message to the other residents that if you smuggle drugs into your room and run away you can go back home. I did not expect to face this unfair reality.

The other AWOL case that I witnessed was not as dramatic as this one. It involved a boy becoming violent and escaping out the window. However this scenario did lead me to observe another reality that was different from my expectation. This boy was the first resident that I met

when I went to the shelter. We played cards and talked together on my first day. I could tell that he suffered from a mental disorder. Later I found out that he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder. His oppositional defiant disorder seemed to be extremely severe. This disorder is defined as a pattern of disobedient, hostile, and defiant behavior toward authority figures. The child definitely exerted the symptoms of having this disorder. Unfortunately he slowly deteriorated until he had a huge melt-down that caused him to act in the aggressive way he did. This melt-down led him to be taken to a local mental health facility. He spent a couple weeks there. One of the staff members told me that she thought he should have been there longer, but Medicaid would only pay for so long. He also was only medicated after this incident. If he had been medicated before, this incident, which of course caused him to be disciplined at the shelter and looks bad on his file, might not have occurred. It is sad that it was the reality of this incident to get him the help that he desperately needed.

Flexibility

In my interview, I was told to accept that I would need to be extremely flexible. This service learning experience would not be good for someone who likes an extremely rigid schedule. The Assistant Director told me that in her job description there was a bullet point that says “Any other tasks as needed.” She told me that a lot of her job falls into this category. I expected to be very flexible in doing whatever task they needed me to do.

My reality was pretty much as I expected it to be. I would always ask what they needed from me each day, and I would complete the tasks. The counselor told me that her job is extremely flexible too. For example, yesterday when I was at the shelter, when she first arrived, there were about 150 pints of Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream that was donated. She immediately

began bagging them up so that we could put some in our freezer and others to be donated to other places. A few minutes later she had to go to a meeting with DCS to discuss the progress of one particular child. So she was essentially going from acting as a grocery bagger to a therapist. Working in this kind of environment, you have to be willing to handle whatever situations arise that need attention first.

Limitations That the Kids Face

I expected the kids to face a lot of restrictions. I just did not realize the depth of these restrictions. For example the kids are always monitored, even at night time. During the night shift there is a youth worker who checks on the kids every 15 minutes. For me, personally, I am a very light sleeper, and I would hate to know that someone is looking at me every 15 minutes.

The kids are not allowed to have cell-phones, with the exception of the ones who are legally adults, and even they are only allowed to have them during free time. This was not a huge shock to me, being that if they had cell-phones they would be able to have contact with people who are not on their approved lists. It made me realize how fortunate I am by having things like a phone that I can use at my discretion.

There were also many other little limitations. For example the kids always have to eat with sporks due to the sharpness of knives and forks. This is not something I would have expected, but it makes sense when thinking about the nature of some of the kids. The kids always have to ask for everything, like permission to go to the bathroom. I did not really think about all of these limitations, but in reality I understand why they exist.

Course Preparation and Realities Encountered

Peac 325

In my Introduction to Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation class one of the first topics we discussed was restorative justice. Restorative justice attempts to engage the offender of a crime by having them recognize their wrong doings and finding some way to restore peace or justice to the victim or their family. Restorative justice “views crime first of all as harm done to people and communities. Our legal system, with its focus on rules and laws, often loses sight of the realist that crime is essentially harm” (Page 33 of Course Reader). This process of restorative justice allows both the offender and the victim to make exchanges in an effort to collaborate together.

Thinking about some of reasoning behind why the kids are at the youth shelter makes me wonder if the restorative justice approach might be better suited towards the kids as opposed to criminal justice. It leads me to try on and reflect on their actions by asking questions like “Whose obligations is the victim serving?” as opposed to “What did they deserve?” I think it would be interesting if our criminal justice system used a more restorative justice approach with kids in an effort to transform their lives. Unfortunately this is not a reality in much of our current judicial system.

A later topic that was discussed in this class was peace-making and peace building. One of the readings, *Can My Good Intentions Make Things Worse?* by Mary Anderson left me extremely reflective on my actions at the youth shelter. I truly do not feel that I made anything worse at the youth shelter, but it could be possible. A significant quote from this reading “Peacebuilders need also to be aware of the implicit ideas and attitudes they convey by the way they act” (143) summarizes this attitude. I always made an effort to act positively around the

victims and the staff. I enjoyed my time there and I wanted to make sure that I expressed that commitment and did not want to come off as feeling like it was just an assigned obligation.

Peac 350

I did not take the Introduction to Mediation class at University of Louisville. I got a waiver and counted my mediation class that I did as part of my internship at Just Solutions for this class. This class was an extensive 40 hour training that I did over my spring break last year focusing on family and divorce mediation.

I learned many things during this training. Focusing on mediation at Just Solutions, they use a facilitative approach with six phases. The second of these six phases is called the information sharing phase. During this phase each party shares their perspective of the situation. The mediators listen to and paraphrase each party individually and ask clarifying questions after they speak each time. This may sound trivial, but I try to do this skill a lot, especially in situations similar to being with the kids at the youth shelter. Being able to paraphrase is a skill that can be difficult to learn and do naturally. However it is essential, especially in mediation, to show that you are listening.

We also talked a lot about language in this class. Language can be both extremely beneficial and also a barrier. It is beneficial, because you can really connect with someone. However it can be a barrier if you are not able to understand the person's accent or native language very well. Luckily at the youth shelter, I did not really face a lot of barriers in regards to language. We also talked about body language. At the youth shelter, I would pick up on a lot of cues from the kids based on their body language. If they were looking down at the floor, they were usually not interested in engaging in conversation. If they were looking me directly in the eye, they usually seemed to be paying attention.

Psyc 407

Psychology 407 is a community internship class taught by Dr. Lora Haynes. I took this class two times, once during the spring of 2014 and once during the fall of 2014. Both times I interned at Just Solutions. As not to echo from my experiences in the family and divorce mediation training, I will discuss some things that I observed at Just Solutions.

One activity that I participated in at Just Solutions was called Meeting of the Minds. At Meeting of the Minds, many organizations in Louisville partner together to host this event in which middle school kids who have undergone a mediation training partner with another trained mediator, such as someone like myself who went through the training at Just Solutions, mediate a kid's dispute. This activity was a lot of fun, both for the kids and the adults. It really showed how necessary of a skill mediation can be for people having disputes.

Having mediation training at an early age like middle school, seems to be like such a beneficial idea. The idea of it leads me to reflect as to if the kids at the shelter had undergone this training, would they be in the situation that they are now in? The kids at this event came from a wide variety of backgrounds, some of which were considered to be underprivileged, similarly to the kids at the youth shelter. Programs like these give me great hope for the future. I only wish that we could try to connect them with others more. Eventually over time, hopefully these will become more mainstream.

At Just Solutions I noticed a lot of clients that did not seem motivated. We would do intake with clients who frequently did not want to talk to us, because they felt like they were being forced into mediation as opposed to seeing it as an option to come to an agreement that would benefit everyone. They also did not seem motivated in that we charge their fee based on their income. If they do not provide their income information, then we charge the full fee of \$80

an hour. Many times clients would fail to provide their income information. This always seemed strange to me, being that most of our clients were on very limited budgets.

Some of the kids at the shelter seemed to not be very motivated as well. For example, one day I was trying to persuade one of the residents to let me help him study for his GED test. He kept saying that he was tired, and he did not want to do it. He also constantly would complain about having to be at the shelter and how we had too many rules. It would seem to me then that he should be motivated to get his GED, so he can try to go to college or get a better job and leave the shelter. Unfortunately, he did not see the situation the same way that I did.

This lack of motivation was disheartening. I wish that there were more resources available so both the people at Just Solutions and the youth shelter would understand that they had options.

Career Plans

I am very unsure of what I want to do as a career. I have thought about going to graduate school for two different fields, sociology and social work. I really enjoy sociology, and I think I would enjoy doing social research for a company. I also really like social work, particularly the idea of working one on one with individuals like at the youth shelter, advocating for them in court, and the idea of practicing marriage and family therapy. However I am also ready for a break both financially and in regards to the constant everyday stressors. I have paid my way through college with very little debt. I am very glad for this, as I often hear others talking about their enormous amounts of debt. By working full-time in college and going to school full-time, I have not had a lot of time for myself. I am looking forward to doing things like being able to socialize with friends more and actually reading a book for fun and not an assignment. With the option of graduate school, the earliest I would start would be the spring of 2016. I am going to

take at least a semester off to rejuvenate as well as trying to work quite a bit to pay for the financial burden of graduate school. I am also unsure of where I want to go for graduate school. I would really like to stay in this area, so I am still exploring my different options.

I have also applied at a place called Ireland Home Based Services. I heard about this agency through one of the youth workers at the shelter. I have applied for a case management position there. I think I would really enjoy getting to work with people one on one. I would be doing things like monitoring visits with kids and their foster parents, helping people look for jobs, and providing tutoring for kids. This job also has a lot of benefits as well, so I am really hoping that something works out. If I were to get this job or something similar and I am happy with it, I may opt out of graduate school.

When I was leaving the shelter yesterday, both the counselor and the youth worker supervisors offered me a PRN position at the youth shelter. I would be working as needed from 6:00 AM to 10:00 AM during the week and 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM during the weekends. The 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM shift would be available every day during the summer. I thanked them immensely for the offer and told them I would give it some thought. I mentioned that I was waiting to hear from my other application that I have sent out. They told me that the offer would always be open, and I was always welcome to come back. I like the idea of doing this type of work, but unfortunately I would not be able to make ends meet financially with this job. However, I am strongly considering doing for a while. There is always the possibility that another position could open up at the youth shelter, and if I had this position I would be a stronger candidate than someone who was applying from the outside.

Final Reflection on Contribution of Service Learning to Personal and Professional Growth

In conclusion, I am very glad that I took this class. Over the break between this current semester and the previous one, I had been thinking about dropping the class. I was really overwhelmed with trying to pick a place to do my service learning at. I was not sure I would be able to find a place that really worked with my schedule well, and I was not sure what exactly it was that I wanted to do. I am glad that I stayed with the class. Doing service learning at Clark County Youth Shelter was a great experience. I met many great people there.

In connection to my personal growth, my time at the youth shelter really opened my eyes to many of the issues that youth face. For example, the kid who started smoking meth at age 12 had quite a shock value for me. I did not realize to what a large extent things like that happen in this area. Experiencing it first hand was much more valuable than reading or hearing about it through the media.

In regards to professional growth, this has been a very wealthy life experience. I have connected with people and learned about careers that I did not know much, if anything, about. This has caused me to think of some possible changes in my post-graduate plans. Much of this knowledge has been enriching academically as well, because I am able to apply things that I have witnessed first-hand in the class room. Having these experiences is something that will always shape me as an individual in the future.