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Introduction

Peace is something the world hears about often in many ways. We hear about how it is needed, where it is lacking, and even sometimes in silly slogans printed on the front of shirts. When one thinks of peace, people like Mother Theresa, Mahatma Ghandi, and Martin Luther King Jr. come to mind. These are people who made history through their quest for peace. They displayed humility and grace in their nonviolence and made major changes that made the world a better place. Peace is often seen as these big movements and historic events, but can also be achieved in little ways. Each person can achieve peace growing in their own ways whether it is newsworthy movements that change the way a country is run, or whether it is small services that help another person have some peace in their lives. This second form of peace is what I was hoping to spread through my service work at the Center for Women and Families in Louisville, Kentucky during the Spring semester of 2017. The service was a requirement for a class, but that should not undermine what it meant to spread a little peace to the people that I helped serve, both as members of the staff and as clients who came to the Center in a great time of need.

Service Learning Site & Responsibilities

The service learning site that I chose to do my service with was the Center for Women and Families. The Center is located in Downtown Louisville and offers a large variety of services to men, women, and children that have or are suffering from any form of abuse whether that be physical, sexual, mental, or any combination. This place serves a great number of people in very effective and needed ways. Some of the service offered at the Center include legal counseling, therapy, group and individual counselling, sexual assault forensic exams, and education for those who come there as well as educational programs that reach out to people both young and old in

the Louisville area about abuse, rights, and what you can do to help. The most in depth service that the Center offers is Emergency Shelter. This is where women or men and their children are housed in the Center when there is a serious threat for the safety, many times to the point where they are sent there by the court with an order of protection. In this situation, these people stay within the main building, which used to be a hotel that was refurbished. The main building is extremely secure with an entrance designated just for clients, which is located in the back for both privacy and security. The whole purpose of the Center is to keep people safe, informed, and build them back up with the services they offer.

I chose the Center for my service learning site because of their work with abuse. I have had domestic abuse impact my family in a major way when my aunt was killed by her husband several years ago. I understand the importance of places like this and how there need to be more. I also am especially passionate about the work this place is doing because I recognize through my studies how domestic abuse and sexual abuse are major problems in society today, and any organization that is working whole heartedly to combat it is an organization that is driving our society in the right direction. This is the type of organization that works to change people's lives for the better. The employees take men, women, and children out of a tragic and terrible situation and not only possibly save their lives, but rebuild their confidence and sense of self-worth through group counselling that reassures them that they are not alone, and that they can rise out of this situation. The Center's goal is to help their clients go back out into the world, and that is done over time and in a certain way that does not alienate, but helps them become more confident in themselves and the fact that they deserve a better life than the one they had before entering the Center. This is why I chose to do my work here.

The Center for Women and Families offers a range of opportunities for volunteering including administrative work, helping out in the kitchen, working the main entrance desk, legal counselling, hospital advocate, and child advocate. For my service, I chose to help out with administrative work, working the main desk, and helping out in the kitchen. I would have liked to do the child or hospital advocate work, but it required extensive training that I did not have time to complete within the time limit of the semester. I worked the kitchen at least 8 hours a week, while coming more if I could and helping out with the desk or administrative work anytime they needed it and I was not in class.

My main form of service was working in the kitchen. The kitchen at the center serves the clients who live within the Center every day. They serve a continental style breakfast, hot lunch and dinner with the choice of soup or salad and a fruit option. My job as a volunteer was to help out the kitchen staff in any way they needed. The staff often was only made up of one or two people for the day that had to take care of making all the food, cleaning up the dining room before and after meals, washing dishes, checking that all appliances were in working order weekly, keeping the kitchen clean, and restocking any of the food that was out in the dining room full time for the clients to take when they wanted. Needless to say, any help they can get makes a big difference. My main responsibilities would be to wipe down tables and chairs before meals, help serve food during meals, then break down the salad bar and wipe, sweep, and mop the dining room after meals along with anything else the staff needed.

My responsibilities were much different when I was working the front desk. Unlike with the kitchen, I did not have scheduled days working the front desk. The head of volunteers, Allison Brown, would just email me when she needed someone to work the front desk, and most of the time I would accept. Front desk responsibilities would include letting people in the doors,

receiving packages and donations, calling employees within the building when someone was there for a meeting, answering the phone, and directing people to the right locations within the Center. One of the important parts of working the front desk is directing people who come in with orders of protection or that come from the hospital to the client entrance where they can be helped or treated. Along with this there are the administrative duties that are just what anyone in the building needs at any time to free them up to do more important things. This could include scanning files, making awareness packets, or even making buttons.

Although my responsibilities at the Center do not seem very stimulating or important on the service, I have been able to see that they are important. Not only am I helping the people who come there for help or live within the Center, but I am also helping the employees who work very hard, especially in the kitchen where there is sometimes only one person to do all the work that can take hours to do alone. I have found out since starting my service at the Center for Women and Families that helping the employees is as important as helping the clients, because without their hard work what the Center does would not be possible.

Challenges and Opportunities

My service at the Center for Women and Families had both challenges and opportunities that, looking back, helped me grow as a person and make use of skills that I have learned throughout my classes required for the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation Certificate Program. This is not an easy-going place to be all the time. These women are away from home and going through a very tough period in their lives, and being a part of that period offered both challenges and opportunities for me in helping them in any way I can. I will start with some of the challenges that I faced in my work. The first challenge I faced on arriving at the Center for

volunteering was figuring out how I fit into the equation in terms of interacting with the residents of the Center. Some of the volunteer positions at the center involve extremely hands on work with the residents, and for that there is extensive training for emotional situations. For the work I did in volunteering in the kitchen and administration, it required less direct interaction with residents at highly emotional or vulnerable times, so I did not have to receive the same extensive training. Therefore, going into the kitchen work, I was not sure how I should interact with the people I was serving. I was very nervous about saying or doing the wrong thing due to, what I assumed, would be very fragile women. My challenge was figuring out how to associate myself with the people I was serving. I soon found out that my place was to be a friendly face that helped out. I often talk to the women when I am cleaning up or serving their food and the more I volunteered, the more comfortable we got with each other.

A second big challenge I faced with my work was not being judgmental or shocked with the behaviors or physical condition that the women at the Center displayed. The first time I saw one of the girls come in with severely blackened eyes, I was extremely shocked and saddened by her condition since she had been at the Center for some time before this happened. At first I struggled with not reacting to this when she walked into the dining room, but I knew that I had to keep my shock internal and not show how I was really feeling. This has become something that has become less challenging over the weeks. It is especially common to see new residents with these kinds of injuries since they are most likely fresh out of some kind of abusive relationship. It was also important to remain emotionally calm on the surface when working the front desk for the main entrance of the Center. Multiple times women with orders of protection or in need of a sexual assault exam would come through the main entrance. No matter how sad or distressing I

found this, I had to remember to keep a neutral and supportive attitude to let those women know that they were in a safe place that could help them as I was directing them to the proper services.

Keeping my shock under the surface became a lot easier after the initial shock, but a much more challenging aspect of my work at the Center was being non-judgmental. In this case, it was not judgment of their situation or what they had been through, but how they acted within the walls of the Center. The most prominent example of a situation where I had to be non-judgmental is when the women get frustrated and lash out at the kitchen staff, and even me at times. Sometimes they will get frustrated they that cannot get more food or have an extra plate and act, at times, completely rude and entitled. These were challenging times because I had to remember that these women have been forced to live a very limited lifestyle in order to be safe, and sometimes stay alive. The stress of all of that can weigh heavy on a person, and sometimes the easiest outlet is the person who is not giving you all the food you want. At times when someone is being especially moody, I would just take a deep breath and remember where I was and what these people are going through and put a smile on my face and continue what I needed to do to help.

My final challenge was one that was discussed in *The Call to Service*: burnout. This is discussed in the book as a type of loss of motivation or drive to do the work and service that one is participating in. For me, the burnout came during a couple weeks that were especially stressful either with a lot of school work, after graduation decisions, or a week when the residents were particularly moody. Most weeks I worked at least ten hours a week, and there were a couple weeks when I just was not mentally in the game. I felt tired and had a hard time getting into my car to head down to the Center. At these times I did one of two things: either I remembered how much more work the staff would have to do if I was not there, or if it was not too late I would

just let myself have a day off so that I did not start to completely loathe what I was doing. I think that the second strategy was especially important for me to overcome the burnout. I only allowed myself to do it twice, but it helped me overcome to challenge of burnout and come back the next day or week refreshed with a much better attitude.

Along with the challenges came to opportunities of doing my service with the Center for Women and Families. The most important opportunity was the ability to be part of such an amazing cause and working in a place that is unique in how much it does to combat domestic abuse and sexual violence in the Louisville area. It is incredible how many services the Center offers for people who find themselves in these types of situations. I cannot help but think what would happen if there were more places like this in the country and in the world. The opportunity to just be a part of such a noble cause is humbling. Through this opportunity, I have learned a lot about how people deal with these kinds of situations, and how to rehabilitate a person's self-esteem in the right way so they are stronger than they were when they came into to Center. I am so thankful for the opportunity to become part of the family that makes up the staff and volunteers at the Center, both within the kitchen and the Center as a whole. The opportunity to get to know some of the residents and hear some of their stories and receive their thanks has also been amazing. It feels good when one of the ladies asks about my day or school and hearing how they are doing and just trying to brighten their day a little with some conversation.

These challenges and opportunities have been a blessing in one way or another. The opportunities are what make me proud to say that I volunteer at the Center and push me to do as much as I can for them now and into the future. The challenges, at the end of the day, are what I think are most important. Through the challenges, I have been able to foster skills and grow in ways that will benefit me for years to come. Although they can be difficult to overcome at times,

the challenges are what this experience is all about. Going out there and spreading peace, even though it is not easy, and really getting something important out of it.

Expectations and Reality

Before I started my service at the Center for Women and Families, I wrote down my expectations of what my service would be like. I had already met with Allison, who is the head of volunteering, and I knew the general outline of what I would be doing, how often I would be volunteering, and overall what was required of me as a volunteer of the Center. The assumptions and expectations I had before beginning my service were more about what it would be like volunteering at a place that served the domestically or sexually abused. My expectations were what I expected the experience would be like as well as what the residents would be like and how they would act towards me and interact with me. This is what I wrote: I assume that the women that live in the center would be kind of skeptical of me at first because of the reasons that they are there as well as my race and socioeconomic status, but I hope they will warm up to me eventually and I will get to know some of them. I assume that the work I am doing in the kitchen and the administrative work will sometimes seem mundane and boring, but I hope I remember what all this is for and what good these little things do for not only the people who are residents, but for the people who work so hard and keep the center going. I assume my contact with the women might be limited since I am not doing any further training due to its length and the limited time I have before this class ends and I graduate, but I hope I can do everything possible with the volunteerism I am doing to help the women and families I will be working with in any possible way.

Some of my assumptions matched up with reality, while others were off of what it is really like volunteering at the Center. My expectation that some of the work that I was doing was mundane was pretty on track. It is not as mundane in the kitchen, as it is working the front desk or doing administrative work. Working the desk consists of 4 hours sitting at the desk, mostly alone, letting people in, calling people for meetings, and getting the mail. It is nothing very exciting, but I did not expect the people within the building to be so thankful when I am doing this overall easy job. Whenever I call someone to tell them their guest or person they are meeting has arrived, they always say thankful. One day, the president of the Center even told me how much everyone there appreciates us volunteers, which meant a lot and really put things into perspective that although mundane, it is important and really helps things out.

An assumption that somewhat lined up with the reality of working at the Center was the way that the residents interacted with me. First, there did not seem to be any hesitation because of my race or socioeconomic status that I had expected or assumed. I soon found out that the interaction between the women and me was not as rocky as I thought it was going to be. I had assumed that it would take a little while for the residents to warm up to me, but it was only a couple days before the ladies would talk to me and ask me how my day was. These conversations and greetings also dispelled one of my other assumptions that I would have limited contact with the residents. I was a lot more in contact with the residents than I thought I would be. I figured out that some residents are just more outgoing and talkative than others, and that when new residents come in they are a little weary of everyone, not just me.

The reality of the Center for Women and Families has multiple facets. One is that it is kind of a family in ways. There is a lot of support the women have for each other that is shown in multiple ways. Many times, I see one woman bringing down someone else's children down to

the dining room during dinner time. This shows a willingness to help each other out when someone needs it. I also see some of the older women at the Center taking the younger women underneath their wing. There is one lady who has taken a younger mother under her wing and is helping her take care of her child, but also how to be a stronger mother. Some of her ways are a little unconventional and tough, but this shows how the residents come to form a family and help each other out and care for each other. I not only see them help each other out, but also laugh and talk with each other when they are having a good day, but also when they are having a bad day. They spend time in therapy sessions sharing their stories and helping each other get stronger, and these affects can really be seen in the dining room during dinner time.

Another reality of the Center is that things are not always happy and fun. One can see that these women are going through tough times in their behaviors and body language. It had been important in my experience to be able to react accordingly to how someone is acting. Sometimes it is good to ask how someone is, but sometimes it is best to serve them their food and that is it. There have been days when there are blowouts between residents, but this is not unexpected when they are often time together so much and have so much stress weighing on them. These bad days do happen for the residents, but there are good days too, which is very inspiring. Seeing these women still smile and laugh with all that have gone through is a testament to the resiliency of the human spirit and inspiring for me to see.

At the end of the day, the reality of the Center is so much more than I ever would have expected or assumed. Although sometimes it is not always, I find the overall atmosphere of the Center positive. These women were strong enough to get away one way or another and are working on becoming stronger for themselves, for their children, or sometimes both. I have grown attached to the ladies as well as the people who work in the Center, especially the kitchen

crew. Even though I just serve food, clean up, answer phones, and receive mail, I am extremely proud of the work I do at the Center for Women and Families. I would have never expected that I would be so sad to leave and not be volunteering there as much, but I have planned to still volunteer when I can even though I am moving back home to Northern Kentucky after I graduate. Overall, the reality of the Center for Women and Families is that it is an outstanding organization who do amazing things. The residents are inspiring and the staff are hard-working, incredible people who I am happy I have got to work with and get to know.

Future Plans – Career and Others

Although my career plans do not directly involve Peace building and spreading, I think they do hold some form of peace that I will try to spread any way I can. My ultimate career plans are to become a Clinical Psychologist. I do not have any plans to specialize in any type of disorder now, but that may change in the future. I will achieve this career goal by attending a graduate program where I will earn a Ph. D or Psy D. in Clinical Psychology. Before I start graduate school, I am taking a year or two off, depending on if I get into a program after my first year off, in order to get some experience, make some money, and travel as much as I can. During this year off I will hopefully be working in some kind of clinical job with people who have mental illness of one kind or another. I will also be working on getting research experience. I would really like to work in a lab that researches how mindfulness works in the therapeutic realm and how to develop successful mindfulness therapies for different mental illnesses.

Some of the other future plans I have include spreading peace through more volunteer services. I have enjoyed my experience at the Center for Women and Families so much that I would love to keep giving my time to the organization and more organizations like it. I will be

moving out of the Louisville area and will be unable to dedicate so much of my time to the Center, but I still intend to try to make it down to the kitchen once a month to see the staff and give my time. The Center in Louisville is also connected to a similar organization in Covington, Kentucky which is only a few minutes from where my permanent residence will be. I am going to try to get involved in this organization in some way to keep my volunteerism in the realm of helping victims of domestic and sexual abuse, being a cause I am particularly passionate about. My original plan for my volunteering was to work at a crisis center phone line, which I would still like to do if I have the time to and if there is one at the Center in Covington. My ultimate goal for the future in terms of spreading peace would be to do a trip for Doctors Without Borders. There is a need for psychologists in third world countries, especially those with significantly turbulent pasts. I would love to eventually use my graduate degree to help those who have little access to doctors, especially doctors of psychology. This is something I hope to do before I die to spread peace to the world.

Ultimately, my career is not going to involve making peace through policy or protest, but I think I will be able to bring peace to individual people with mental illness, which is a population that is very stigmatized and in need of peace. By helping these people come to peace with their illness and learn how to deal with it and live with it, I hope to bring some form of peace to their lives. I hope to spread the more traditional forms of peace through volunteering through different organizations, especially those who work with bettering the lives of women and families that have gone through the hardship of abuse. Working with the Center for Women and Families has made me realize how important the cause is. Ultimately, I hope to spread to peace and alleviate conflict with what I have learned in my courses and electives through the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation Certificate Program here at the University of Louisville.

Course Connections

PEAC 325

I took PEAC 325 the Fall semester 2016 after deciding that I would like to complete the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation Certificate Program. This class was my first introduction into what peace really meant. Beforehand I had known peace as the absence of conflict and what everyone should naturally want since it would make the world a better place. In this class, I learned that it is not just the absence of conflict and that although it looks like a lot of people want it, that assumption is not necessarily true. This class was the basis of learning about peace, justice, and conflict transformation and what these concepts really mean, how they interact and exist in our world, and how they can be obtained and what needs to be done to make that happen. We learned about the difference between positive peace and negative peace, the thoughts of philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau on realities of human nature, we learned about injustice, inequality, and violence, and ultimately how to promote peace within our own lives and within a bigger social context through peaceful resistance in action such as sit-ins, die-ins, and product protests just to name a few of many.

PEAC 325 and the concepts I learned related to my service at the Center for Women and families in several ways. One was the idea and learning about justice. I can think of no better example of justice as these victims of violence having a place where they are safe from their abuser where they can learn, grow, and become a stronger person if they choose. Another concept that applies to my time at the Center is the idea that you can spread peace in many different ways. I always thought spreading peace needed to be a large scale project that involved ending war and changing national policies that oppress groups of people. Through this class I learned that peace can be spread by small acts that affect small groups of people. This is the kind

of peace I spread during my work with the Center. I spread peace through helping out an organization that helps end violence in individual lives, while also fighting it through education in the Louisville Metro Area. I also tried to spread peace through just being a friendly face in the kitchen with the hopes that a smile and a hello could help out someone's day in some way.

The concept that resonated most with me and related most to this experience was the idea of mindfulness. Throughout my life, I had never come across this idea of mindfulness and becoming one with yourself. From the beginning, I knew that this was a special concept that a lot more people should know about. The ideas of mindfulness like slowing down to really be in the moment and recognize where you are at and what you are feeling are very important and are needed in today's society of constant moving with little attention to what is really going on right around us. We learned about mindfulness through the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh as he walks his readers step by step in how to be mindful and stories where mindfulness was successful. For me mindfulness is something that I tried to practice during my time at the Center. I really tried to pay special attention to where I was, what I was doing and those who were around me. Thich Nhat Hanh said, "When we hold back our feelings and ignore the pain, we are committing violence against ourselves." (16). I think this quote relates greatly to how the Center allows their residents a safe place where they can express their pain in order to rebuild and find the peace they have been denied through their experiences.

PEAC 350

PEAC 350 is the introduction to mediation class, but it offers much more than an introduction. This class completely trains you in the art of mediation. Through learning how to mediate a conflict in a formal setting, I also learned a great deal of skills about communicating in

general. The skills and characteristics that are required of a good mediator are skills that a good communicator has in general. These include being mindful, patient, respectful, and authentic which are important in someone who is trying to mediate a serious conflict or someone who you are just trying to have a conversation with. These qualities lend to a sense of listening and understanding in a communicator. We also learned how to be an empathetic listener. Empathetic listening involves several skills that center around being the most effectual listener possible in order to fully understand all the information being presented as well as making the speaker feel like they are heard and that you as the listener fully understand what they are saying to you. Empathetic listening is especially important in mediation in order to build good and balanced relationship with the parties, as well as to fully understand where each party stands and to unravel and get to what the real motives are behind the conflict.

I used multiple skills from my PEAC 350 class in my service at The Center for Women and Families. The first skill from mediation that I brought to my service was being nonjudgmental. This was an extremely important skill with my service due to the sensitivity of the population I was working with. I want to clarify that the residents were not necessarily sensitive people, but I did not have to display any judgments that would upset any of the residents or make them feel uncomfortable. Sometimes the residents would be rude to the staff members, but it was important to not be judgmental because within the bigger picture these residents have a lot of struggles and stresses. The rudeness is often times probably the results of having an exceptionally bad day and the staff is just an outlet for other frustrations. I also used the skill of empathetic listening in my time at the Center. Listening when one of the residents is telling me a story or something about their day and letting them know that I was listening and understanding is important in building a comfortable relationship with the people there. They

often seemed to appreciate my attention to them and respond positively. These skills of mediation translated well to my experience at the Center and helped me be successful in my interactions with the residents and staff that I was helping.

Elective: PSYCH 408

For my elective for the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation Certificate Program I chose Psych 408 which is the international service learning and research trip to Northern Ireland. This elective was my first experience with peace and conflict transformation. During my time in Northern Ireland, I was first introduced to the idea of conflict transformation through the work we would be doing with the Ulster Project. The goal of our time there and the work that the Ulster Project does every year is to deal with the Conflict within the country through bringing together the youth from both Catholic-Republican neighborhoods and Protestant-Unionist neighborhoods. Our job while we were over there was to both take surveys asking about the conflict and what fuels the continuation after so many years, and lead cooperative game play workshops. The cooperative gameplay workshops consisted of us leading games that focus on the group working together to accomplish a task rather than competing against each other. We worked in small groups that were selected by counting off in order to make sure there were a mix of people in each group. On the surface, these workshops just looked like fun games that we were leading just to have fun, but these games work at building the relationship between these kids that often times lasts a life time and further ties together the two sides of the conflict in the hopes that it will one day end.

This experience was my first exposure to peace building and the idea that real peace can be achieved on a smaller scale than stopping wars between countries and saving large groups of

people from oppression or genocide. I took this knowledge into my time at the Center for Women and Families. This helped me adjust my mindset and make my service experience more rewarding. I felt like I was doing something important and making difference doing the small tasks of serving food and answering phones. Another thing that I took from my experience in Northern Ireland and applied to my time at the Center was interaction with people in conflict. The conflicts were much different, but being aware of how to interact with the people within conflict is important and something I became aware of during my time in Northern Ireland. Contact at the center is a little more sensitive because the conflict that the residents experience is very direct and violent, but working with people beforehand helped me adjust to the situation at the Center. Both experiences were very life changing and I appreciated the opportunity to grow and spread peace in two different ways.

Conclusion

My time working through the steps involved in completing the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation Certificate Program have given me so many skills and experiences that I will be able to use and look back on in the years to come. I am graduating in three weeks, and I know that the classes I have taken during the time spent in this program have taught me valuable techniques in how to approach communication and peace building that I can take forward into my professional and private life. Specifically, the time I have spent at the Center for Women and Families has been very influential on me. I have learned that it is important to get involved and volunteer at places like the Center because they do extremely important work that helps the entire communities and at the end of the day saves lives. My passion was serving an organization that helped fight domestic and sexual abuse, and I think I will try to help out the Center in any

way I can, even with the 100 miles that will lie between us in the future. Peace is not an unattainable concept that only world leaders can promote and achieve. Peace is something that one can spread everyday with kind actions, words, and services to others. It can be achieved through major protest, boycotting brands, effective communication, international research, or just serving food to women and men who are in a really tough situation. We are all capable of achieving peace and spreading it in our daily lives, and that is the number one thing I am taking out of this experience as a whole.