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November 28, 2017
PEACE 550 Reflection Paper

Introduction

“You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give.” – Winston Churchill

This quote has always seemed to impact me in many ways, but it has touched me the most by illuminating what “living life” really means. To me, living life and being happy is giving to others, without wanting anything in return. Volunteering at the Family Scholar House, I have learned a lot of valuable lessons, but for me, the most influential was learning how to give continuously without wanting anything in return, which brought a wealth of joy to my life.

Throughout the course of completing the service learning project, I had the chance to critically think about various experiences and questions that may have arisen, integrate learning from past experiences of my life, and also connect course concepts to these experiences in order to formulate core principles of Peace, Justice, and Conflict Resolution. The purpose of this paper, will be to draw connections between volunteering at Family Scholar House with the required and elective courses taken, to obtain the certificate. I will discuss the service learning site, share my responsibilities as a volunteer, illuminate various challenges and opportunities faced, while sharing the expectations and realities of the service learning project. I will also integrate course preparation and realities encountered with my reflections and personal growth as a person, while finally, sharing my career plans after graduation.

Service Learning Site

The service learning site that I decided to complete the required eighty hours was at the Louisville Family Scholar House, whose sole vision is to transform lives, families, and

communities through education. This facility is located next to the University of Louisville, in the heart of the inner city. Family Scholar House's mission is to "End the cycle of poverty and to transform the community by empowering families and youth to succeed in education and achieve life- long self sufficiency." (Family Scholar House, 2017) FSH fulfills the needs of many impoverished individuals from all over the United States, while also filling in the gap by acting as a family to those in need. This facility incorporates a housing component, by allowing single parents who have kids and are on the verge of facing homelessness, a place to live. The Louisville Family Scholar House's main objective is to emphasize the importance of education, while also helping to provide the basic necessities of those that may not have had the best of life.

Because Family Scholar House is a facility that incorporates education into their mission, there are certain requirements for being able to utilize this facility. The participation qualifications are not too invasive but do illicit a responsible response to those that are planning to take advantage of this opportunity. In order to be a resident at their facility, you have to be single parent, have a child or children, meet the qualifications of low income housing, have a high school diploma or GED, and have the desire to pursue a college degree. The educational assistance that can be obtained while living here is a bonus to this awesome opportunity, as well as a requirement.

The participants that are seeking a residential status at the FSH can enroll into colleges of their choices, in order to be on the right track for obtaining a bachelor's degree. They will help individuals with seeking out financial assistance to help pay for tuition and books. FSH also helps to find scholarships that can allow participants the opportunity to go to school full time. With other services that are offered, like aid in the scheduling of classes, work- study guidance, and tutoring services; family scholar applicants and participants have no other choice but to succeed. There are

so many opportunities that FSH has access to, which helps to aid in the well being of future residents.

Once an applicant is made aware of these qualifications and meets them, then that is when various steps will be taken for one to become a permanent resident at the Family Scholar House. Once an initial intake is completed, which is basically an interview between an interested participant and a FSH employee, the next step will be to attend an orientation that addresses and reviews the basis qualifications and ties up some loose ends. Now, just because you attend an orientation does not necessarily mean you have obtained a spot at the FSH. There are a lot of people on the waiting list, for an opportunity to reside here. Once FSH informs the participant of the specific documentations that are needed, along with outlining the other requirements such as enrolling into college courses and fulfilling other obligations, the responsibility is then placed onto the participant. At the end of every orientation, Family Scholar House makes sure to inform the participant that fulfilling the requirements, will go at their pace and that if they are eager enough about becoming a resident at FSH, then they will work hard and diligently.

When you become a resident, there are other resources that become available that can be of great use. One of these resources is Family Support Services, which is a way for residents to feel supported, not only with education, but also within the confines of their home. These services offer assistance in applying for welfare programs, childcare, and the improvement of parenting skills such as time management and independent living. Family Support Services incorporate regular meetings with residents, with the goal being to create a support system with the involvement of counseling and the setting of goals. In becoming a resident, there are also opportunities to be involved with peer support and community activities. As you can see, there are a lot of great resources that residents and future residents would be able to make use of while being

involved with the Family Scholar House. Even those who do not live on the FSH campus, can still utilize some of the family support services and educational resources as well. These individuals are considered non residents and are still regarded as part of the family at FSH.

Responsibilities

While completing my service learning hours at the Family Scholar House, I was able to take on several different responsibilities over the course of time that I was there. Because education is so important to FSH, they place a high standard on their residents to stay in school and to graduate with honors. This is one of their highest expectations for most of the individuals that live on their campus; they have started a tutoring program that allows for individuals who are struggling with various classes and subject matter, to come and receive help with their studies. At the start of the semester, before I could volunteer, I had to fill out an entrance form that asked about my availability (the days I could volunteer and the times) and if I would be interested in tutoring; and if so, what subject. Because of the days that I could work and the hours that I was available; it turns out that my schedule fit perfectly with the tutoring schedule they had initiated before I started. While I was there, the main responsibility that I had was to tutor two kids that were there on Mondays and Wednesdays, for an hour. This ended up being a real joy to me, because I was able to be involved with this program, by tutoring high school teenagers with their mathematics. This ended up to be an eye opener because it taught me a lot about myself.

Other than the tutoring, I was also responsible for various other projects like making inspirational quotes for parents and kids who lived in the housing units at FSH. I personally thought this was a wonderful idea, and I cherished the thought of being able to pick out quotes to give to those families because I knew that it would brighten their day. Another responsibility that I had was working in the intake office and performing preliminary intakes on potential residents. For

me, this was one of the most thought provoking experiences I had while I was here. The intake office is the most important room at FSH because it is the first place that those in need of stable housing and resources go, in order to be scheduled for an initial orientation. Because I had the privilege to assist many people in need while working in the office, it made me think about the kind of impact I had on the individuals that I helped. I also had the responsibility of answering various phone calls, filing applicant's documentation into the correct folder, and assisting with the copying of a variety of paperwork that allowed participants to move along in their process of becoming residents, while in the intake office.

I also had the privilege of shouldering some of the workload of other employees that worked there, by making phone calls to residents, checking in on them, and editing residential letters that needed to be sent out to non residents and potential participants. This allowed me to see the behind the scenes work that goes into the foundation of the Family Scholar House. I had the responsibility of speaking with donors that were willing to donate clothes that included costumes for Halloween, pampers for babies, food, money, furniture, and other various items that benefited participants of the program. All donations that were given went to residents, non residents, and potential participants to aid in the assistance of family support services. As you can see, I had many responsibilities while I was at FSH that impacted the thoughts I had about what it meant to truly volunteer, versus just obtaining service hours.

Challenges & Opportunities

There were some challenges that I faced while volunteering that aided in my overall self awareness and my growth as a person. My first day there was quite interesting because at first, I had a difficult time tying up loose ends like what day I would be starting. Also, getting everything together with being able to volunteer, like my background check and what I would be doing once

I was there, was a long process. The difficult part about getting the service learning set up was the communication. I would send emails and make phone calls that no one would respond to, at first. Then, as time moved on and I kept being persistent, things started to pick up and I was eventually able to get the ball rolling with setting up my first day.

A challenge that I faced while completing my service learning was being aware of other individual's job positions and personality types. For me, this was a challenge because I am very goal oriented and ambitious, so coming into the FSH and seeing how others worked was astonishing. There were other volunteers there, that had been working with Family Scholar House longer than I had, and I think when I started volunteering it may have startled a few. The reason I suspect this is because I am very aggressive when it comes to obtaining goals, while some of them were lackadaisical in their job responsibilities. So for me, the challenge was to overcome differences that I had with other volunteers and to remember why I was there, with the goal being to help those who are underprivileged. Like I said, this was a challenge to overcome because some of them may have felt as if I had stepped on their toes or made them feel inferior with how ambitious I was. I learned a lot from this challenge because I was able to self evaluate myself and work on my eagerness to perform different roles that may have been the roles they were responsible for.

Another challenge that occurred while at the FSH was trying to figure out who was going to complete my service learning evaluation when I finished completing my hours. This became a challenge due to the fact that at first, I knew who was going to be completing my evaluation but by the third week of me volunteering, this person left FSH because she found another job. So, it was left up to me to figure out what I needed to do to catch the other superior employee who was going to be evaluating me, up to date with the different jobs that I was doing along with my

attendance thus far. It was a complicated ordeal only because I wanted to be as honest and upfront as possible about the expectations that were asked of me before this challenge arose, and also to inform this person, of what exactly they needed to evaluate. Once expectations were discussed and duties were assigned, this challenge was soon eradicated.

As stated above, one of the responsibilities I had as a volunteer was assisting with homework help for two kids whose mother insisted they receive tutoring. This was an awesome experience in itself, but a challenge did arise from this as well. Every Monday and Wednesday, I would help these kids with their homework and often times, we would practice math problems if they didn't have any homework on the days they came. My tutoring sessions would last an hour on those days and sometimes even shorter if there was no homework for me to help with, so I would allow them to leave early. Unbeknownst to me, they received their report cards a month after I had started working with them, having grades that were very poor considering how much I tutored them. Their mother ended up coming into FSH asking to speak with me and to get some clarity about the process of my tutoring sessions. She ended up finding out that her kids weren't bringing much homework to tutoring and that they were leaving early because of a lack of honesty put forth on their part for math help. There became a challenge with trying to get her two children to bring an adequate amount of homework and to honestly inform me with what they needed help with. Eventually, the kids started opening up to me, allowing me to assist them more thoroughly which led to a positive impact on their grades.

I had a lot of opportunities while I was completing my service learning project that involved being able to conduct myself in a professional way when dealing with the challenges I had. One of the most important lessons my father always taught me when I was growing up, was to be professional at all times when working in a professional environment. In handling each and every

challenge, I had to make sure and remember my father's philosophy and to self evaluate myself to make sure I was being professional when dealing with the kid's mother, informing my superior about the expectations that were established, and also in dealing with other volunteers who might have felt I was stepping on their toes. In each situation, I was able to exercise my communication skills to advocate on my behalf. I had to learn the proper way to speak to people, handle situations, and interact with other who are different from me.

Expectations and Realities

Going into this service learning experience, I had many expectations for how I thought the experience should go. One thing I did have to learn, very quickly while completing my hours, was that things didn't always go as planned and you have to learn to adapt. Because of this, I had to learn how to go with the flow at FSH despite some of the expectations I had previously before starting. One expectation that I had before starting, was having a set job duty while I was there. I expected to have a set job responsibility everyday that I volunteered, so that I knew exactly what I would be doing on the days that I was there. I volunteered with Family Scholar House four days a week, on an average of two to four hours a day, and the reality of this was not really what I had in mind. Even though I tutored for an hour on Mondays and Wednesdays, the rest of the time that I was there my duties changed on the bases of what was needed for that day. So, having a set schedule was not the reality I faced while working with the FSH, and that is why I had to adapt to this change.

Another expectation that I had while I was there, was having a set person to report to everyday who would sign my log sheet. For me, this was one of the biggest expectations I had because I am the type of person that likes to do things right and to have structure and consistency everywhere I go. This was something else I had to learn to adapt to because when I started

volunteering, this was definitely not the case. While I was there, a different employee would sign my log sheet because the other person who was evaluating me might have left early or was in a meeting around the time I had to leave. The reality of having someone different sign my sheet, most of the days that I was there, was an adaptation that I had to cope with and learn that not everyone is on my time.

Because Family Scholar House impacts people who are suffering from poverty and are single parents looking for opportunity, one of the expectations I had going in was that I would be able to sit in on some of the important interviews with future residents discussing participation qualifications. This would have given me the opportunity to actually understand the process of evaluating who gets to live on FSH's campus and who does not. It would have also allowed me the opportunity to learn how to make impactful decisions that affect other people's lives, and how to deal with the emotions that come from the aftermath of those decisions. Ultimately, this was not the reality. Although I did get to do a lot while I was there, I didn't really get to shadow or sit in on this process of evaluating future participants. I mainly assisted with mini projects that consisted of drawing Halloween placemats for the children of residents, working in the intake office answering phone calls and occasionally talking with eager participants, filing, and tutoring. I am grateful for being able to do that much, but I would have loved to have the opportunity to assist in the interviews with participants.

Course Preparation and Realities Encountered

While volunteering at the Family Scholar House, one of the realities that I noticed was more African American women are subjected to utilizing this program more so than other races and sexes. This caught my attention when I was working in the intake office and had to preform several preliminary inquiries, which are referred to as intakes. Essentially, these intakes asked

several questions about the individual but also inquired about the race of the individual who just so happened to be interested in joining the housing program at FSH. In Intro to Sociology, I learned of several different concepts, but the ones that are sticking out to me are ascribed status and subordinate status. “Ascribed status is essentially the status or class that you are born into, while subordinate status is putting one thing below another.” (Schroeder, 2014, slide 6) African Americans have the highest rate of low income households, which I personally believe is due to a number of different reasons, but mostly stems from systematic forms of oppression that overwhelmingly cripples their economic and ascribed status.

The systematic constraints that I am referring to, eliminates any upward forms of achievement, most of the time, on the basis of race. These systematic forms of oppression can be overt or covert, but give rise to a glass ceiling for most African Americans living in poverty. Because of this, it enables this community to be defined as having a subordinate status that makes it difficult to gain any upward mobility within statuses or economic class. The reason more African American women are subjected to utilizing Family Scholar House is because most women in general, if they are not married or in committed relationships; the responsibility of caring for a child is shouldered onto the woman. In this case, it is African American women carrying the load of raising a child while also combating oppressive constraints that limit room for growth. The kids that I tutor every Monday and Wednesdays, their mother, falls victim to this repressive reality as well. The cycle of ascribed and subordinate status that many African American women are born into, is ever revolving and is hard to break.

As you can see, social injustices and structural inequalities breed dependency upon federal and state funded housing facilities and other forms of assistance like Family Scholar House. In PEACE 325, one of the most impactful concepts that I learn during the course of taking the class,

was a concept that in all of it's essence, sums up exactly what structural inequalities are and how abrasive and concerning it is. This term is referred to as structural violence which is, "The increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society, as contrasted with the relatively lower death rates experienced by those who are above them." (Vandenbroucke, 2016, slide set 4) With this being said, it's concerning to me as to why we are still facing structural violence in the year 2017, and why more African American women are having to utilize FSH more so than others. If this cycle keeps going, you will begin to see more African American women and other minorities having higher death rates and having to take advantage of these types of programs, in order to get their basic needs covered. Peace is a needed entity in its self that only comes to fruition when people take the time to look at the bigger picture and take in the world as it is, so change can begin to happen. Positive peace, which is another big topic I took from taking PEACE 325, discusses social harmony with the intention being the disappearance of direct and structural violence. (Vandenbroucke, 2016, slide set 4)

The service learning experience opened my eyes up to a social justice issue that means a great deal to me, considering I am an African American woman. I have always wanted to see change come in a way that ends the cycle of structural inequalities and structural violence which seems to be a covert form of oppression. In order for this to happen, a lot of work needs to be placed on individual responsibilities with the start being active listening skills. This is a core concept that I learned from taking PEACE 350, that centered around conflict management and resolution. People learn a lot about one another from simply actively listening to others when they talk about their problems and the life they are living. This would allow people the opportunity to empathize with others who are different from them, and would hopefully trigger an emotional response that would illicit action being done to combat structural violence.

The skill of active listening, learned from PEACE 350, gave me the opportunity to manage conflict within my own personal life, but also while I was at the Family Scholar House as well. Going back to the challenge I had of having to discuss with the superior employee who was evaluating me on my performance while I was there, allowed me the chance to put my listening skills to the test. I remember standing there with this individual, and having the urge to interrupt her while she was talking, but then remembering the skills I had learned while in class. This came in handy because I was able to listen to what she was saying, and once I did this, I soon realized that what she was saying was exactly what I was about to say. This made me giggle a bit, after the fact, but it really made me think about all the things that I had learned when it came to listening and how important this skill actually was. I think it saved me from looking like an idiot but also kept any conflict that could have risen, to the bare minimum.

One day, while I was tutoring the same kids that I always tutored, I had the chance to tutor a girl that was a freshman in high school. As I was tutoring her, she was very quiet and seemed as if she was very distracted by those around her. She seemed very smart and knowledgeable but it was as if she was not interested in what I was teaching. I soon began to get very frustrated with her because I felt like my time was being taken for granted and that she was not applying herself. After the tutoring session was over with, I went to get my log sheet signed and my supervisor informed me that the girl had a severe case of ADHD and a behavioral conduct disorder, which was shocking to me considering that was not how I perceived this girl. My assumption was that she was just not paying attention and was not interested in what I was teaching her.

Thinking back to what I had been taught in SOC 201, about the way in which individuals sometimes see someone or interact with a person, and we make judgments about someone's character without knowing their story. This is a form of stereotyping and without being aware of

it, I was making harsh critiques about her. Within the program of PEACE studies, we are taught to listen and to have patience with individuals before making judgments; to understand someone as a whole person before criticizing one, based on what we see when we first meet them. I guess this is why this was such a shocker to me when I found out she had these issues; I didn't take the time to have patience, listen, or understand her as a whole. I reacted in a way where I started thinking about myself and my time, instead of how she might be feeling or who she was.

Final Reflection of Service Learning to Personal & Professional Growth

Volunteering at the Family Scholar House has been very interesting and a time in my life that allowed me to grow into a better person. I have had the opportunity to be involved with a community of individuals who are all trying to reach for the stars, by bettering their circumstances. In completing the service learning project with the Family Scholar House, I have learned a great deal about myself and the world around me. I have learned how to adapt to different situations that may arise and what it truly means to be a volunteer. I have grown as a person, mentor, and friend because of the course preparation of having had the pleasure to take PEACE 325, PEACE 350, and PEACE 550. These courses should be made mandatory for every degree, major, minor, and even mandated as a general requirement within colleges and universities, across this Nation. These courses are so important in helping to resolve conflicts and they give insight into the many mistakes I've made when trying to solve conflict before taking these classes.

For me, this was a humbling experience and a chance for me to grow as a person; to be able to surround myself with other people who are different from me, who come from different backgrounds and walks of life. It was an opportunity I'm glad I got to conquer and be apart of. While here, I have been able to talk with people and to empathize with others that may not have

the same opportunities as me. Completing my hours here, made me think of all the things I take for granted, like a roof over my head or the clothes on my back. I am so thankful for what I have and for the support system in my life; for the people who have paved the way for me to be all that I can be, today.

This place had made me a better volunteer because of the expectations I had going in and the challenges that I faced while I was there. Learning the art of volunteering, giving your service to others who need it, is not an easy task. I had to learn how to be patient, how to adapt to situations I didn't like, and to remember to put others before myself. I remember, one of my job duties while I was there, was to file some important papers into each resident's folder. As I was doing this, I started to get bored and irritated because I felt as if I should be doing something more important with my time. A few days went by and I had read a book called, "*The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism*" by Robert Coles. There was a passage in the book that essentially talked about the way in which people volunteer their time, and the simplest gesture can have an impact on someone else's life. This made me think back to when I was filing and how irritated I was with my time, but what I didn't realize was that I was impacting someone's life simply by putting important documents into the correct file. I was making a difference by making sure that residents had all of their documents and things were easy to find for employees who needed to review those documents. I then realized that it's not always about what your doing when you volunteer, but thinking about all the many lives you are touching in the process of performing that one job.

I have learned a lot about the magnificent art of volunteering and giving your service, but I won't say that I have perfected it or "got it right". I am still human and I have a long way to go before I can say that I have surpassed learning all about the art of service. I am still learning what it means to be a great volunteer and to selflessly give yourself and time, for others. I would like

to think that I am on the right track and have learned a great deal, by having the experience of completing my service learning with the Family Scholar House. I have learned to step outside of the box and to have an open mind. Things aren't always what it seems and won't always go how you want them to, but to be able to adapt to different situations is something that I will always carry with me, throughout life. My perspective about volunteering has changed a great deal and will continue to shape my mind frame as I continue to give my service, later on in life. I now look at giving your service, not as an assignment that needs to be completed, but as an opportunity to challenge yourself to grow into a loving and kind person, but also a way to meet new people.

Not only has the service learning experience contributed to my personal growth as a person, but it has also impacted my professional development as well. From the first day of volunteering, to the very last day that I was there, I evolved into a professional and well rounded individual that maintained commitments and respect for everyone I encountered. I learned how to conduct myself in a professional way by learning the appropriate way to handle conflict in order to properly represent the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation Program. In completing my hours here, I have been able to utilize a lot of what I have learned from my classes, in everyday situations, especially while volunteering with Family Scholar House.

Working with the employees at FSH, has been a relaxed environment with people who are loving and very helpful. Overall, if I had the chance to volunteer here again in the future, I would definitely not hesitate because I would know that as a person, I would have the opportunity to evolve into who I was destined to become. I am so thankful for the opportunity to grow as a product of the service learning project and be able to take these life lessons that I have acquired and use them in my future.

Career Plans

My career plans after I graduate in December, are to work with the federal government as a U.S Probation Officer. I have always wanted to work with convicted felons and to help those, that society deems as outcasts and unfit to integrate back into the community, with reintegration. I am a firm believer in rehabilitation which essentially tries to help condition felons back into the community. I think that as people of this great nation, it is important to forgive people who may have made a mistake and give people the opportunity to change. This is why I would like to become a U.S Probation Officer, so that I can help these individuals get their life back on track.

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