

What is The Center for Women and Families?

This semester I volunteered for eighty hours with The Center for Women and Families. This organization is well known throughout the United States as one of the premier facilities that deals with domestic abuse. Domestic violence is a widespread epidemic in the United States. Nearly one in three women will experience intimate partner violence in her lifetime and around one in four men as well. The statistics show that relational abuse in Kentucky is higher than the national average. My research indicates the relationship between Kentucky and domestic violence gets worse. Amongst states that report stalking rates, Kentucky is the highest in the nation. When it comes to sexual assault, about sixty percent of them are never reported, making it one of the most under-reported crimes in the country. It should also be stated that people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender experience domestic violence at the same rate as heterosexual couples. Adults are obviously not the only people who suffer. On an average day last year, 16,458 children were living in an interpersonal violence shelter or transitional housing facility in the United States.

In 1912, the founders of The Center for Women and Families recognized the need to change this culture of violence. They took the first step by opening a small one room office in a downtown Louisville YMCA. In 1975 The Center began rape crisis and creative employment programming and by 1977 it became the first domestic violence shelter in Kentucky. The emergency shelter provides supportive programming intended to promote emotional and physical safety, crisis stabilization, and a space for hope and healing. It is important to provide survivors a community living environment where trusting and healthy relationships are built with staff, residents, and volunteers. This is a temporary and voluntary program that serves the most vulnerable. The Center meets their immediate needs by providing trauma-informed care and

client-centered case management built on individual strengths and self-determined goals using an empowerment and educational model. Today The Center is a private nonprofit organization with five regional locations serving nine counties throughout Kentucky and Southern Indiana: Bullitt, Henry, Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer and Trimble counties in Kentucky, and Clark and Floyd counties in Indiana. I mainly volunteered at 2nd Street Branch, otherwise known as the Joan E. Thomas (JET) campus, which received massive renovations from 2013 to 2015.

What were my Responsibilities?

I was, unfortunately, not able to be a children's volunteer advocate, but I was able to help this great organization in other ways. The first was through volunteering in the kitchen. It was very simple work, yet meaningful work. I usually served either the hot meals or at the salad bar. When the main rush of people was over, I washed dishes, swept floors, wiped down counters and tables, spot mopped, put leftover food away, and took out the trash. I am extremely familiar with this work because of my extensive service at Parish Kitchen. Parish Kitchen is also a non-profit organization and is located in the heart of the urban core in Covington, Kentucky. The organization gives out free lunch every day to people experiencing homelessness. My participation in these duties allowed my fellow volunteers, Ben and Teresa, to work on preparing meals for later in the week.

I offered my time and services through another form as well. I decided to help through administrative tasks. My first day in the administrative side was a little different than in the kitchen. The kitchen is a much more personal and confidential setting, while the administrative is very business oriented. There is an open room with seven smaller offices all connected to it. Three of the offices were dedicated to accounting and the other four were split between human

relations, head of budget, donations, and grants. The majority of my work included scanning financial checks and receipts into an online system called Fortis and then organizing them together. There was multiple years' worth of paperwork to go through. I know during the discussion of *The Call of Service* some of my fellow students mentioned that anyone could do some of their tasks and how it made them feel replaceable. I too felt this way at first, but then I remembered the manner we ended that conversation. I am doing this work, not because other people do not want to do it, but because they are too busy working on important objectives such as pay roll or budget decisions. Even though I was not helping my originally-desired population, I was assisting people who needed me. This made me contemplate why it originally discouraged me to not be working with kids. In an indirect way my work liberated individuals who could redirect their talents to assist those kids I wanted to help in the first place. The goal of service should not be to help just a certain category of people; it should just be about helping any people in need.

Some of the other administrative work I did besides checks and receipts included scanning bank statements, stuffing envelopes for a fundraiser, and processing donations. The bank statements were very similar to the checks, except the statements were much quicker to do. The donations were definitely the most interesting part of my time at the Center for Women and Families. Half of The Center for Women and Families' current operating budget of five million dollars comes from government and corporate grants. The reasoning behind this financial assistance is not solely social. The cost of intimate partner violence in the U.S. exceeds \$5.8 billion each year and results in \$4.1 billion in direct medical and mental healthcare cost (CDC, 2007). The numbers are clear. The investment of time, talent, and treasure in The Center of

Women and Families is much more than a donation. It is an investment in the social, environmental, and economic health of the Louisville community.

The second biggest form of income emerges from private fundraising. This is where my oath of confidentiality was considered most crucial. I will be honest and say that I never recognized anyone I knew in the dining halls, but I did know a lot of names on the donation forms. Many were local businesses and state universities, but the names that surprised me most were teachers that I have had. For unknown reasons this made me extremely proud to go to the University of Louisville and to be taught by people who try and change their community for the better. The same can be said for some of the businesses that I frequent and their effort to create a sustainable Louisville.

The Center for Women and Families' Mission

The three main principles are educating communities and partners, promoting self-sufficiency, and rebuilding lives. These activities are all forms of Johan Galtung's positive peace. All of these actions take steps to prevent violence and promote peace in the future. That being said, The Center also is a form of negative peace. It offers a safe place for a family to withdraw from domestic violence. Survivors who escape their hostile situations and arrive at the shelter typically stay ninety days. Sometimes families return to their abuser for numerous reasons, but often they move to transitional housing. They can stay in a transitional living environment for up to three years and ninety six percent of those survivors shift to permanent housing.

Educated Community and Community Partners

The Center for Women and Families has many opportunities for community outreach and education. One example is the “Take Back the Night” event held on the University of Louisville’s campus. Young, educated people provide society with opportunities for more dialogue to occur between people experiencing conflict. Education is a tool that people can use to open the doors to peaceful relations. The Center also raises awareness in the community by participating at other events such as community fairs, job fairs, health fairs, high schools, businesses, and churches.

The Center for Women and Families also promotes education within the organization. Every six months or so The Center partners up Green Dot and provides employees and volunteers with bystander intervention training. Green Dot originates from the University of Kentucky and equips individuals with three main tools that any bystander to violence can use. They are distraction, direct intervention, and calling the authorities. It is a great approach to engage the community and create awareness. This also reminds me of both Gandhi and Thoreau’s point of view. They believed that sitting around and doing nothing to change the culture you disagree with is just as bad as promoting violence.

Promote Self-Sufficiency

Self-sufficiency might be the most important aspect of promoting positive peace that The Center for Women and Families is involved in. During their time in shelter, survivors are provided with free food, legal advocates, and child care. These are all aspects that individuals are going to have to start providing for themselves once they leave this temporary sanctuary. The Center employs life coaches that can assist with the transition survivors into becoming independent. This relates directly to the very first step of mediation: preparation. These life

coaches must contain very similar skills as mediators. They must be able to think logically, communicate clearly, and ask questions that contain depth. Life coaches also act in a comparable way as mediators by meeting the individual and learn a little history about them. This encounter helps the life coach start to assess the person's strengths and weaknesses before going over strategies for financial stability.

Rebuild lives

I was often doing repetitive tasks that left me being able to listen to the conversations of those around me. One day I was working near president and CEO of The Center, Marta Miranda. She was on the phone with a community member who knew someone was struggling with domestic violence. Marta was explaining to this person how to handle the sensitive situation and the key was loving speech. I love the way The Center respects these clients. People are often leaving a very dominant and controlling relationship so the last thing representatives of The Center for Women and Families want to do is force these people into anything. Instead employees calmly talk to victims with no judgement, express empathy, and inform them of the many services and options that are available to them. The Center provides individualized healing plans that include assessment goals that can be achieved through individual and group services. Some of these services include psycho-educational groups, survivors support group, and individual or couples counseling. A lot of people on the outside looking in believe the most important part of counseling is the advice the counselor give the client. These outsiders are wrong. The most important part of the healing process is the non-judgmental, therapeutic listening that takes place. "By listening with calm and understanding, we can ease the suffering of another person. An hour spent in this way can already relieve a great deal of another person's pain" (Hanh 1997, p. 37). Hanh is referring to the same interpersonal interaction that Marta was

conveying over the phone to a concerned friend. This particular interaction impresses me a great deal because the friend is fulfilling the vision of living in a community where violence is not tolerated and everyone is an active bystander.

The Call of Service

I consider volunteering at The Center for Women and Families community service. It is not a charity. We do not give free handouts and expect victims to figure the rest out on their own. Members of this organization work relentlessly to help each and every individual that walks through the door get back on their feet and become an independent member of the community. This is exactly what Justin Mog is referring to when he mentions the third circus ring of sustainability, building resilient communities (Mog 2013). Another reason I consider it community service is because The Center has pulled together an incredible number of community partners. The five biggest being Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs, Louisville Metro, Kentucky Domestic Violence Association, Metro United Way, and Kosiar Charities.

One aspect of service that I admire Coles for bringing to the forefront is being rewarded for helping others. He often describes individuals that he interviewed feeling guilty for not helping out enough and then exploiting their experience for resumes and job applications. (Coles 1993). I have given this issue quite a bit of thought and in the end I disagree with the notion. I have volunteered at a multitude of different sites and I am always proud to share my experiences with others. I think starting a discussion with peers about volunteering is an important conversation to have. It proves to others that they can follow in your footsteps and also informs people about issues that you want to revise. I believe if you try your absolute best to help people

out of the kindness of your heart and potentially are rewarded later on for doing so, then it is a win-win situation for all who take part. There is also no guarantee that you will be given anything of importance down the line.

Coles also does a great job explaining despair and burnout. I am happy to say that even though there was a short period of time I considered my work to be very unimpressive, I never came close to burnout. There could be a number of factors as to why burnout did not occur, but I think the most important was that this was a temporary eighty hour experience. I realized that my situation was not permanent and that I would be able to switch my role at The Center. Depending on the day, I could be in the kitchen or I could switch it up and be working in the office. There was an instance where a roommate seemed to experience burnout for me. He took notice of how much time I had spent volunteering and asked me why I cared to help these people I had never met. He suggested I need not spend any attention on people who are so different than us. This comment spurred us into a very heated, yet respectful debate. The dispute really tested my mediation skills, especially stopping me from creating counterpoints rather than fully listen to him express his stance. I also used purposeful moments of silence in order for my roommate to elaborate and go more in depth on certain issues. Lastly, I made timed pauses in my speech to emphasize effect. I am disappointed to report that the match of moral reasoning behind service swayed neither my roommate nor me and probably just fortified our original views on the issue.

Intercultural Communication

My Intercultural Communication course with professor D'Silva was one of my favorite classes in my four years at the University of Louisville. Throughout this course I inspected the relationship of mindfulness and its journey from Eastern cultures to the United States. In order to

understand the penetration of mindfulness in the U.S., we must examine the second most popular Buddhist to Americans after the Dalai Lama. Thich Nhat Hanh is a famous Buddhist author with over forty five published books. Even though he is a Buddhist, his writings are never about trying to convert people to Buddhism. He simply believes Buddhist ideas and concepts lead to peaceful ways to experience life that everyone deserves to know about. Hanh believes that the path of peace starts internally, with the individual. Peace can then be expanded from the individual to the community and eventually to the whole world. Therefore, you cannot be an unaware and unloving person and expect world peace. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds readers to bring awareness to life and it will positively affect both your life and the lives of those around you. “In the light of emptiness, everything is everything else, we inter-are; everyone is responsible for everything that happens in life. When you produce peace and happiness in yourself, you begin to realize peace for the whole world” (Hanh 1988 p 47). Thich Nhat Hanh even provides readers with strategies to promote inner peace. “To smile is not to smile only for yourself; the world will change because you smile” (Hanh 1988 p 47). In psychology, they call this positive personality. Genuine smiling, not cheesy smiles, are known to produce feelings of happiness in both the person doing the action and the person receiving the smile. Focusing attention to the positive emotions developed through smiling leads to longer lasting happiness and joy. Personality psychology also fits in with the beliefs of Buddhism through personality traits. The present is also when all of your personality traits should be judged. You cannot say you are a person who does not hold grudges if at this very moment you are experiencing lingering anger towards someone. Past traits and future traits are all looked at in a different light depending on how you act in the here and now.

Stephanie Kaza also talks about mindfulness and its relationship to peace, but she adds an environmental twist to it. Kaza mentions international conflicts, but also sides with Thich Nhat Hanh in the fact that people need to create personal peace within themselves. “If you offer this practice your full intention you will find that peacemaking and peacekeeping are part of what we do every day to support stability in our lives” (Kaza 2008, p. 848). Kaza understands that people will have differing views when it comes to issues on how to properly treat the environment, but her goal is to work through these issues in a peaceful mindset with full mindful awareness. She warns readers that working through difficult controversy without being mindful of both yourself and others can lead to forms of violence.

Impact on my Professional and Academic Career

In the future I want my professional career to be in clinical mental health counseling. I plan to be the first person in my family to earn a graduate degree. I have been accepted into Northern Kentucky University’s Master’s program and will be attending classes next fall. I have always pictured myself working in a private practice and specializing in mindfulness-based approaches to combat depression and anxiety. However, this experience has made me want to look at other options. I still plan to be in a private practice setting, but I want to learn more about counseling at non-profits, universities, career centers, jails, and hospitals. I aim to use my two separate internships in graduate school to experiment which setting I will thrive in best. No matter what setting I am in, I intend to use my skills I have picked up from the peace studies program and continue to think outside the box to overcome any obstacle thrown at me.

One of my future academic goals involves continuing my research in peace studies and sustaining the connection of mindfulness. My idea is to implement the practice of mindfulness

into the school system. There are a few reasons why this idea occurred to me. The first is that I wish I would have experienced the benefits of mindfulness before my junior year in college. It has positively impacted my life in so many ways. I have a few friends who also practice mindfulness and they unanimously feel the same way. They wish they could have heard about it earlier. My solution to this problem is to insert it into schools. I choose schools because in the United States it is legally mandatory for people to attend school until they turn eighteen. Therefore, a large portion of students would at least have a preliminary experience with mindfulness before either continuing their education or entering the work force. The ages I am particularly interested in are children in middle school. This age is when personality really starts to strongly advance and I want to have a positive influence on that development. Not only will this system directly spread mindfulness with the children, but I think it will indirectly affect the parents of these kids as well. Parents are often very involved in what their children are participating in both in and out of the classroom. My goal is for these parents to also become interested and take some time to learn about mindfulness on their own which would lead to more participation. For example, when I told my mom that I have learned about mindfulness in class she told me that she had been practicing for years. I had no clue this was going on and at first I was a little disheartened that she never shared this practice with me. However, I quickly moved passed the hard feelings and happily enjoyed the multiple conversations that have followed from our shared experiences.

As Russ always says, coming up with the idea is the easy part. Planning and carrying out the idea into a real event, is where the true work and determination comes in. My theoretical plan will go as follows. First, I would need additional training in meditation and then practice teaching people. My hope would be to take part in John Kabat-Zinn's prestigious training

program at the University of Massachusetts. Next, I will start at a small private school. This will preferably be a school in which I have some ties to. I want to start small and work my way up. I also picked a private school because kids typically behaved more appropriately and follow directions better in a private school setting compared to public school. Since it will be in the early phases of my project, I will want students who follow directions thoroughly in order for the children to receive the most benefits by following proper techniques. A lot of private schools are also religiously based. The great thing about this is meditation is used in almost all major religions as a form of prayer. This would hopefully allow me to gain easier access to the schools.

After I perfect my craft and adjust to how children react to the knowledge and the practice, I would then expand to public schools. When I am both able to be successful and know I can make a positive difference is when I will be confident enough to go through all of the paperwork and certifications in order to operate in a public school setting. I believe this would also take an adjustment period to get accustomed to each school, but soon after my goal is for the teaching to become routine.

After introducing the practice of meditation to the children I would then share with them ways to continue living fully aware rather than on Williams and Penman's coined autopilot mode. I would give them suggested readings based on books I have read and continue to learn from. I also know children are being raised in a technological age, now more than ever (Druin, 2002). Technological sources are becoming more prevalent in classrooms and learning environments, and this trend is predicted to continue as schools aim for new curriculum to emphasize technology (Facer & Sandford, 2010). Therefore, I have spent some time looking into mindfulness apps. My favorite app for learning the basic skills behind meditation is called *Headspace*. It is an application that truly makes meditation simple. Each guided meditation lasts

just ten short minutes and covers a lot of different ideas and techniques. The first ten days are free and it goes over all of the guidelines you could want for a beginner. The downside to this app is that after those ten days it requires money to continue.

I do not want to make money an issue so I found an app that is the best price any student could ask for: free. This particular app is titled *Stop, Breathe & Think*. Once you open up this app it asks you to check in with your emotions and think about how you are feeling right at this very moment. After you complete that section, it pulls up a list of four or five guided meditations that suit your current mood. If you do not want to check in with your emotions one day then that is fine too. You can go straight to a list of guided meditations that are all free. This list includes fifteen different meditations and you can get up to twenty four more if you pay just over thirty cents per guided meditation. The longest meditation on this particular app is twelve minutes while the shortest is three. The relatively short length is the first of the many reasons why I see this app being successful with children. I think this is a great tool for people learning how to get into a habit of meditating.

The second reason why I believe this app would be productive with kids is the incentives you can earn. *Stop, Breathe & Think* operates on a sticker system. You can unlock a new sticker if you do well in the app. For example, if a student meditates a number of days in a row or checks in with their emotions a couple of days in a row then they unlock a brand new sticker which they can proceed to show off to their friends and family. Over the years psychologists have proven token economies can powerfully effect behavior change (Kazdin and Bootzin 1972, p. 368).

One great thing about both of these apps is that they can be downloaded on any smart phone or tablet regardless of the brand. That makes both of them very accessible to students outside of school either on their own devices or their parents. It also could possibly make it more readily available in schools that are more technologically minded. Some schools funnel financial funds into classroom tablets to increase educational sources.

I believe mindfulness would create a more peaceful society. I think the schools that administer this practice will see less bullying and more respect for the rights of others. These rights can then be expanded upon their fellow classmates to people from other cultures, genders, and sexual orientations. Children are able to recognize people who are different from them by the age of three. It has been my experience that kids often steer away from those who, at first glance, appear different until proven otherwise. Once children find similarities between themselves and overlook the differences of others then the effects of liking, loving, and friendship seem to take place.

One of the many benefits of my plan to increase childhood mindfulness is to bolster these friendships that would normally take more time to develop. Aristotle mentions “Friendships are necessary for happiness” (Aristotle 1996, p. 232). I want children to learn to view other people with a sense of open-mindedness. I also would like these children to give people the respect they deserve as free thinking individuals. Mindfulness is capable of bridging the gap of understanding. I aspire for children to learn from an early age that your only distinction between someone you label as different is that they were raised in a different place by different people. “I remind you that in many people, in many people called segregationists, there are other things going on in their lives: this person or that person standing here or there may also

be other things—kind to neighbors and family, helpful and good spirited at work” (Coles 1993, p. 32).

When examined in this perspective there is very little difference between others and yourself. In fact, Buddhists believe there is no self. Americans would have a hard time believing this fact because we spend so much of our time looking at personality traits that make us different from others. However, the lack of a self is very appealing concept because it means we look at people as the exact same as us. It also makes everyone more unified on this earth.

Another Buddhist concept that ties with mindfulness is called sympathetic joy. The term refers to all humans having to endure suffering in this world so we should feel happy any time we see someone else being happy. Again this is difficult for Americans because when we go to a job interview and we do not get the job and the other person does, then Americans feel upset. Buddhism preaches this is the worst reaction people can have. People should feel happy because someone else who is exactly like you is not currently suffering, but instead, experiencing joy. One can easily see how these two ideals can undoubtedly benefit building new relationships.

I find childhood relationships fascinating and I think mindfulness would both increase the quantity and quality of them. I was excited to hear during my meetings with NKU that Dr. Jennifer Sharp is putting together a wellness research team. Her background is in middle school counseling and integrating mindfulness-based approaches into counseling. I believe with the proper guidance I will be able to turn my dreams into reality.

I had thought of this research project long before starting my time at The Center for Women and Families. I had decided that graduate school plus working full time was going to be a lot to handle and that I should just stick to work and school in order to get by. My extensive

research in this field convinces me that this project would be worthwhile of my time for the greater good of my community. Volunteering at The Center for Women and Families and witnessing some of the physical damage that these people have experienced only confirms my belief that I need to see this idea through. It pains me to see the bruises and the scars on victims and I think my research can help diminish the violence in Kentucky's culture. Ever since I was young I have wanted to give back to the community where I grew up. I have carried that motivation with me throughout my life. I enjoy coaching baseball and teaching others the skills I have learned, but after this capstone experience I think this research proposal needs to take top priority over a game of competition.

My volunteer coordinator, Allison Brown, actually asked me a fantastic question that directly translated to my graduate interviews at both Xavier and Northern Kentucky University. The question was "What do you do to take your mind off of what goes on at The Center". A similar question was posed about how to work in mental health and not become too overwhelmed. My answers to both questions were the same. I enjoy reading, meditating, exercising, gardening, and being in nature. All of these activities will help to prevent burnout. Eleanor Brown once said "Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel". This experience has reminded me to enjoy some relaxing time not just for myself, but for others as well.

Thich Nhat Hanh also gives advice on how to unwind in everyday life. In Hanh's native Tibetan Buddhism tradition, monks use temple bells to remind them to take a moment and pause and come back to the present moment. Monks stop what they are doing and simply enjoy breathing. Hanh says church bells can have the same effect in American society. Thich Nhat

Hanh writes “I proposed to professors and students at the University of California that every time the bell on campus sounds, the professors and students should pause in order to breathe consciously” (Hanh 1991, p. 19). Hanh says these simple reminders are a great way to relax and can be done anywhere there is a bell. He also stresses that everyone should take time like this to enjoy being alive.

One of my favorite peace builders, Nelson Mandela, regularly promoted the African concept of Ubuntu. This idea is often translated as “A person is a person through other people” (Stengel 2010, p. 231). This idea is extremely opposite to individualism that has been a staple of Western thought since the Renaissance time period. A person never truly does everything completely on their own. As my undergraduate career comes to a close, I continue to realize how truth behind this view. A quick look will show how my family has provided me with both financial and emotional support, my friends helped take my mind off of school and lessen the stress in my life, and my teachers gave me the tools to overcome my academic challenges.

In conclusion, I have witnessed what happens behind the scenes of a non-profit organization and have realized all of the work that goes into making it run smoothly. Even though my volunteer work was dull at times, the overall experience has inspired me to continue and strive to change a culture I do not agree with. My overall participation has confirmed my belief that I want a career involving meaningful work where I can make a genuine effort to improve the lives of others and interact with individuals on a personal level.

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