Catholic Community Services Internship

I was able to complete an internship with Catholic Community Services from the end of last spring through mid-summer of 2011. I participated with the refugee resettlement program that is established in Salt Lake City. Catholic Community Services has a mission statement that clearly identifies what they do for the community. “Since 1945, Catholic Community Services of Utah has been empowering people in need along the Wasatch Front to reach self-sufficiency. By giving strength to the weakest in our midst, CCS is able to lovingly serve and provide hope to those with the greatest need in our community regardless of race, religion or personal circumstance.”(Catholic Community Services)

A refugee is someone who has been displaced from their home country due to varieties of persecution. According to Catholic Community Services’ statistics, there are over 15 million refugees worldwide and nearly 80% of them are women and children. In 2009, the United States brought in 79,937 refugees. Of those nearly 80,000, Utah helped resettle 1,226 refugees. The majority of the refugees that are resettled in Utah come from Iraq, Burma, or countries in Africa. (CCS Memorandum) The refugees normally do not know English; they have little concept of American customs or finances. Many of them have never seen a toilet before. Much is done to help these people become an asset to the community.

My particular responsibilities for my internship were two-fold. First, I was put in charge of a program called Family Employment and Housing Program or FEHP. “The purpose of this tenant-based rental assistance program is to provide month-to-month rental assistance for up to 24 months for eligible refugee families. This program provides services to eligible parents with dependent children residing in their homes and strives to empower families to increase income and become financially independent (Housing Authority).” I did the necessary paperwork for the single parent families who
were in need of housing assistance. This 15 page paperwork was completed for about 20 families. After obtaining the necessary signatures from the housing coordinator, the refugee adults and the case manager, I delivered the paperwork to the apartment’s property manager to get the final signatures. Then I delivered it to the state’s office where they verified and approved the paperwork.

The second task I was assigned was to teach a 6-week life skills class to newly arrived refugees. I taught two sessions of this class to a Burmese group and a Burundi group. This paper will discuss how this internship supplemented my classes for the Health, Society and Policy major, and it will discuss the direction that I received for my future career plans.

Classroom Learning

This internship has reflected many facets that I learned in three of my classes: Healthy Communities, Nutrition 1020 and Public Health a Global Perspective. I will discuss first how my Healthy Communities class helped me teach my life skills class, and then I will discuss how my nutrition and public health classes helped me understand the role I played in the community with this internship.

My Healthy Communities class was a great asset to help me understand what impact my 6-week course had on the refugees and on the community. In Healthy Communities, a large focus of the class was centered on a concept called Community Capital. Daniel Stokols summarizes three types of capital that are a part of a community’s capital which are: economic capital, human capital and social capital (6). Economic capital is financial assets that increase productivity and health. Human capital is an accumulation of skills and information. Social capital is relationships among persons. In order to increase community capital as a sum total one must increase individual member’s capital.

In order for the newly resettled refugees to add to the growth of the community’s capital they must learn many new skills and customs. Catholic Community Services assists refugees in learning English as a second language. Children also participate in after-school programs so they can learn English. As they develop English skills, it helps them live a more comfortable and sustainable life. Other
essential skills that were taught to them in my 6 week life skills class are the following: nutrition, house cleaning, personal hygiene, laundry, food safety and fire safety. All of these things increase their human capital.

Social capital is “changes in relations among people that facilitate action (Stokols 6).” There are so many pieces of the community that network together in a large web to assist the many refugees that come in each year. There are individuals who pick them up from the airport, mentor them, and provide them with basic necessities to help them get their feet on the ground. There are also many community donors who provide food, furniture and clothing for them. It was a great privilege to be a part of a community coming together to help these refugees who could not have done it with us.

Much must be done to create and increase refugees’ economic capital. In the 6-week curriculum that every refugee must go through, they learned how to utilize money. I first taught them how to count it and use it at stores. I then trained them how to buy food from the grocery store that is a part their diet. The final and most difficult thing that I taught them was how to budget.

This was also an excellent time to use the skills and knowledge that I learned from my nutrition class. I gave them positive encouragement for the many good foods that they enjoyed eating. They have great habits of eating many fruits and vegetables. I also taught them that they should drink much more water than they currently were.

I have now learned from my public health class that all of these things that I was involved in was public health. One of the most difficult things about public health is creating sustaining changes in a community. It is also difficult to measure the results of preventative measures. With these informative classes that I taught, it was very difficult to find out if the refugees were implementing anything that they were learning. The language and cultural barriers made it difficult to tell if the classes were producing any of the desired behavioral changes. This internship enhanced my education by supplementing these three classes that have been discussed.
Career Goals

One of the reasons that I chose the Health, Society and Policy major is because of its interdisciplinary nature. I know that I want to go into a career related to health and administration; however, I am just unsure if I want to work for a non-profit organization, the state government, the federal government or a health care organization. *My overall goal is to help lesser privileged individuals obtain the basics of life that they do not have adequate access to: food, water and shelter.*

This internship interested me because I have been involved with another organization where I tutor and mentor refugee families from Somalia. This experience, over the last few years, has provoked in me an interest in refugee health. Instead of trying to decide what I want to do for a future career, I have made a list of fields/occupations that I may want to pursue. I have been crossing things off that list that I do not want to do in hopes that by the process of elimination I will be able to find a career that I love. I decided from this internship experience that I do not want to work with refugees on a local or state level for a career. However, I may still want to work with refugees on a federal or international level; I have not yet crossed that off of my list. I was also able to work closely with many social workers who were case managers for the newly resettled refugees. I was able to cross social work off of my list of potential careers. I learned how difficult and demanding social work can be mentally and emotionally; it is also a very time consuming career with low paying salaries. However, my respect for social workers has considerably grown.

Working with the refugees from all over the world at Catholic Community Services sparked my interest in international public health. Since the internship, I have been looking a lot into Public Health Graduate Programs on the east and west coasts of America. I have developed an interest in working in the field of disaster relief management either nationally or internationally. Without the internship experience with Catholic Community Services, I do not think that I would have developed the idea or desire of working in the international public health sector.
Overall, I learned a great deal about myself, my interests and my strengths from this internship. It also helped me to direct and clarify my future school and career goals. It was rewarding to be able to observe the theories and principles that I learned in the classroom be applied into a job setting. My Healthy Communities, Nutrition and Public Health classes gave me knowledge that greatly added to my internship experience. Working with the refugee resettlement program at Catholic Community Services was beneficial to my overall education and future career.

**Works Cited**


