

# SAARTJIE BAARTMAN CENTRE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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## FIELD PLACEMENT

The Saartjie Baartman Centre is working toward the creation of a safe and secure society and a human rights culture where women and children have agency to exercise their full rights.

The majority of the women who access services at Saartjie Baartman Centre have limited financial resources, formal education and employment skills. Services include emergency and short-term accommodation, counseling, life and job skills training, and legal assistance. The centre is also involved in research, community education and awareness-raising, and advocacy efforts.

As an intern I was largely responsible for overseeing the support group programs in place for the women we served. This included curriculum development, facilitation, planning and execution of all group sessions. The group programming included parenting, relaxation, arts & crafts, storytelling and support.



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Thank you to the Office of Global Activities and the Alumni Board of Governors for financially supporting both my education here at the School of Social Work and, most importantly, my experience in South Africa. I have learned about forgiveness and survival and healing and love in ways that I never expected and for that, I am incredibly grateful. Without question, this would not have happened without the women of Saartjie Baartman.

## CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa, with its history of Apartheid, continues to address its unique social issues. Considered a middle-income country and a burgeoning democracy, South Africa is dealing with the affects of the disenfranchisement and marginalization of large segments of its population.

South Africa is an incredibly diverse country with 11 official languages, many religions and a variety of ethnic groups. Its multicultural society has earned South Africa the name, Rainbow Nation.

## SKILLS

Although my focus within the School of Social Work is Community Organization, much of my time at the Saartjie Baartman Centre was spent in group work. Through this, I was able to increase my knowledge and capacity for interpersonal practice. Additionally, I was responsible for the management of the support group program thereby creating the opportunity to gain skills in assessing and executing programs and managing other interns.

## ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN

- South Africa is purported to have the highest rates of gender based violence, including rape, in the world.
- “Among women aged between 15 and 44, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined.” (UN Women, 2011)
- “In South Africa, a woman is killed every 6 hours by an intimate partner.” (UN Women, 2011)

## OUTCOMES

Throughout my field placement with the Saartjie Baartman Centre, I was able to:

- Create and execute a comprehensive 8-week support group curriculum.
- Assess current programming and offer suggestions for changes to the current support group programming and structure.
- Expand knowledge of trauma-informed and empowerment focused social work.

## CONNECTIONS

### CLASSROOM

Since beginning the program, I was able to ground my MSW experience in both theory and practice principles situated within feminism. I have chosen classes in the School of Social Work and within the Department of Women’s Studies that has centered on feminist organizing. This has included: Women and Community Organizing, Transnational and Multicultural Feminism and Feminist Practice.

### CAREER

In tailoring both my classroom and field experience to issues related to women, gender and feminism, I have firmly established myself in pursuing future work that allows me to apply that knowledge. When I graduate, I hope to work within the intersections of individual practice and community empowerment – simultaneously building capacity for individuals and communities.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**PASSION and PRAGMATISM:** As social workers, we can only do what we have the skills and capability to do. That is always better than nothing. We should not be satisfied with the status quo or with mediocrity, rather, there are times when we simply do not have the tools or the ability or, in my case, the time, to do all that could possibly be done within the communities we serve. Balancing investment and intentionality with humility has been an absolute lesson learned.

## ADVICE

After spending 3 months in Cape Town - engaging, working and learning daily - issues of race, gender, culture, privilege and oppression (among many other things) have only become more complex in my mind.

Attention paid to positionality is critical as a social worker, however, it is also crucial to not allow that awareness to impede your ability to invest in the work. The salience of intersectionality in social work practice only became more evident within a global context.