



STAR Project

Building safer, more connected and resilient families and communities.

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Glasgow, Scotland

- Scotland recently had a referendum on independence from England; 55% of voters opposed, narrowly warding off Scotland becoming a sovereign nation. The “better together” (with the UK) campaign was not well-received in pro-independence Glasgow however, and crowds rioted after the results.
- Glaswegians speak their own dialect, which incorporates Gaelic words and phrases: wean=child, swally=drink, Mad wae it= drunken state

STAR Project is a community organization in Paisley, an outskirt of Glasgow. Paisley has one of the highest poverty rates in Scotland and the UK. In 1999 STAR Project was founded in Paisley by a small group of therapists and Social Workers motivated to combat poverty and support low-income families and at-risk children.

The Agency

STAR Project takes a holistic approach to helping families, offering parental counseling, education, healthy structured activities, micro-loans and financial management assistance, nutritious meals, and mediating the difficult process of Child Welfare Social Services intervening with a family.

Mission Statement: Building safer, more connected and resilient families and communities.

Purpose: “We support individuals and families through a diverse programme of services and activities rooted in genuine positive relationships with a holistic approach to their needs and aspirations.”

Goals: To promote and advocate for the benefit of the Paisley community, without discrimination of gender, status, political or religious affiliation, or any other factor. To provide facilities which promote social welfare through education, activities, recreation, and family-oriented programming so that conditions of life may be improved. To prevent and relieve poverty, and to advance civic involvement and community development.

Population: Children and families who are disadvantaged, not only due to financial hardship but due to age, ill health, disability, or other reasons.

What I Did

I had the opportunity to work both with the children and their parents during my time at STAR Project. Tuesdays were centered around activities and/or excursions specifically for the children, such as crafts, scavenger hunts, team games, dress up. Wednesdays prioritized the parents need to connect with other adults over tea and a communal meal, creating a space for informal group therapy where parents could seek guidance, while their children played adjacently in an expansive playroom. Thursdays focused on the family unit as a whole, with enjoyable excursions to the zoo, nature preserve, botanical gardens, or a community event.

<http://www.star-project.org.uk/>



Outcomes

I forged relationships with children at different developmental stages, ranging from toddlers to ten-year-olds, modeling a gentle, care-taking role as a male as a healthy counterbalance for many of the children who had absent or overly authoritarian father figures. I created and facilitated structured activities for the children, and also spent quality time having meaningful, supportive conversations with their parents.

Skills developed

STAR Project taught me to view my client as the family unit as a whole, not just the child or parent. The operative belief is that empowering the family unit will in turn benefit the child's welfare. I practiced active listening and affirmation with parents, boundary-setting with the children regarding social norms, sharing, cooperation.

Seelio Portfolio

<https://seelio.com/w/rbd/special-studies-at-star-project-in-glasgow-scotland?student=jamesshoemaker>



What I Learned

I learned how Scotland's Social Services use incentives and scale the degree of intervention based on each individual situation to allow parents to still have custody of their children as much they are safely able to do so. I learned about specific cultural problems for Scottish families living in poverty: pervasive heroin abuse, a heavy drinking culture, lopsided gender roles favoring hyper-masculine, aggressive males, disparities in healthcare access and services, and poor primary school education for children in low-income areas.

Career Connections

- I gained experience providing supportive counseling using a different lens, not only from a cross-cultural perspective but also from STAR's unique approach to helping children and families. Counselors don't rescue parents when problems arise with their children, but instead give the tools and knowledge to handle difficulties in child-rearing in a healthy, safe manner.
- I also used a multi-generational approach to family interventions: STAR's Social Workers broaden their scope to include multiple generations of parents and children and seek to identify unhealthy behaviors being inherited and “break the cycle.” For example, identifying a norm of violence (physical, emotional) during conflict which was modeled by the previous generation, and intervening by allying with the parent and then providing psychoeducation and healthy alternatives like conflict resolution techniques

Advice

- Study the logistics of the community you will be working in beforehand. Bus routes, train schedules, maps, grocery stores, and especially your mode of communication (cell phone, laptop)
- Learn about the nuances of the local culture beforehand: slang, popular food, norms, political environment.
- Ask as many questions of your clientele and supervisors as is appropriate within that cultural context

Acknowledgements

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I was fortunate to have supervision, guidance, and education from two experienced Social Workers at STAR Project: Emma Richardson and Sharon McAuley

Why I chose Scotland

My goal was to establish a relationship not only between the School of Social Work/University of Michigan and a community organization in the UK, but to also promote dialogue between organizations which operate in very different governmental and institutional contexts.

Classroom Connections

SW 530 Social Welfare Policies and Services - history of social welfare policy, services, explored current social welfare issues in the context of their history

SW 625 Interpersonal Practice with Children and Youth – Theory techniques and approaches, building therapeutic relationships and intervening with children, adolescents and their families.