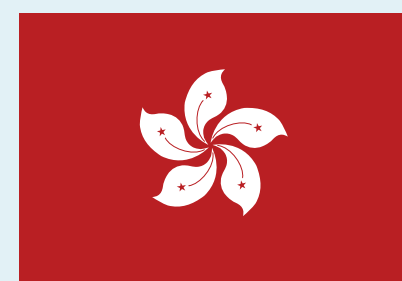




Engaging, Enriching, Empowering People with Learning Disabilities

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING in HONG KONG

ERIN ELLY // UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK



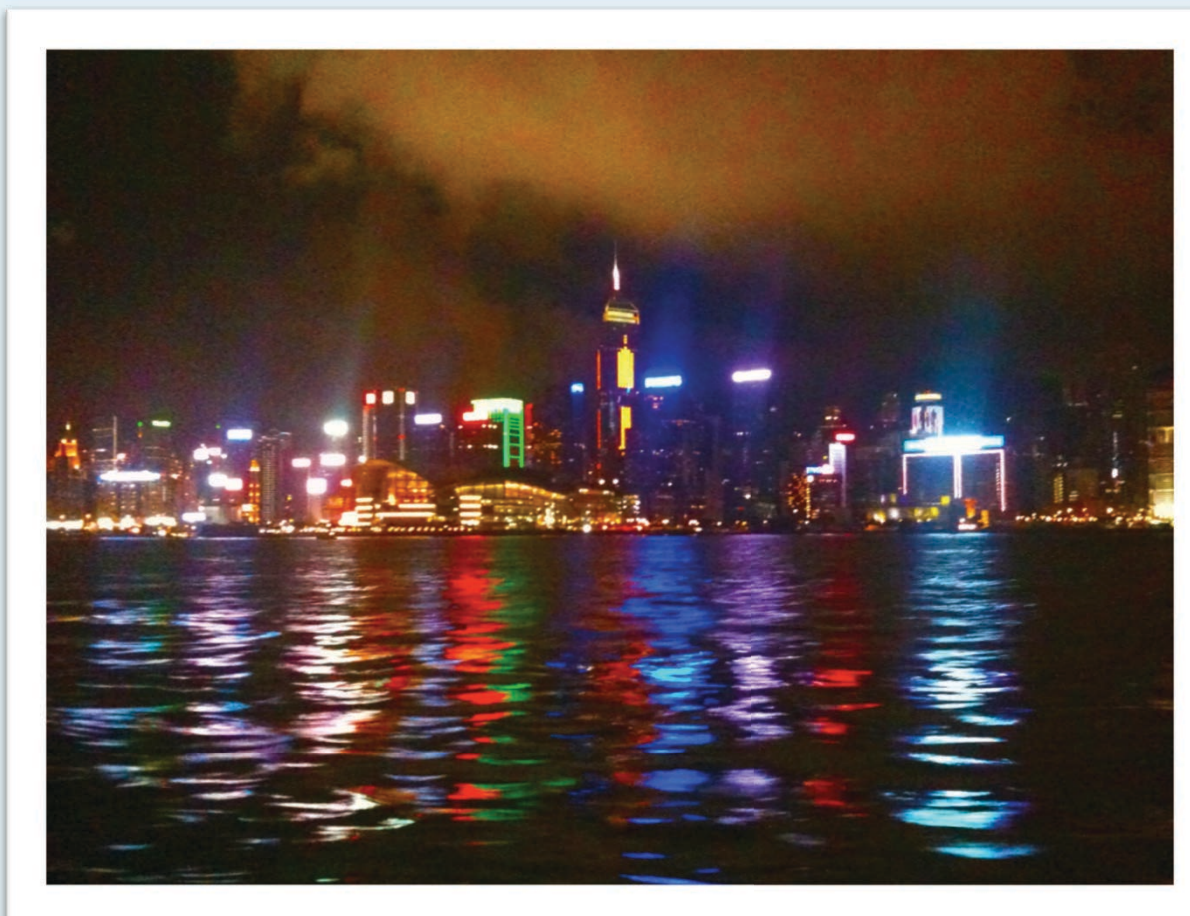
DISCOVERING HONG KONG

Hong Kong is located on southern coast of China. It is one of the most vibrant and densely populated regions in the world. Hong Kong was under British rule from 1842 until 1997, when sovereignty was transferred to the People's Republic of China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR). Hong Kong currently observes a "one country, two system" policy.

At least 7 million people call Hong Kong home, according to the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. That means it supports roughly 17,000 people per square mile.

Hong Kong has been called the vertical city, with over 7000 skyscrapers shaping the landscape. The landmass is approximately 426 square miles, and includes several outlying islands. Hong Kong has a sophisticated transit system that makes it convenient to travel across the region.

The official languages are Cantonese and English. While English is widely used, approximately 89% of the population speaks Cantonese.



(Source: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, GovHK, 2013)

THE NESBITT CENTRE

The Nesbitt Centre (TNC) is an organization that provides English-speaking educational programs for youth and adults with various learning disabilities. The organization uses a person-centered framework, which is designed to cultivate the strengths of individuals. The staff works together with TNC members to achieve independent living goals.

The programs include:

- Work opportunities
- A residential and respite facility
- Speech and language therapy
- Team-building and leadership tools
- Vocational education

THE FIELD PLACEMENT

I completed my global field placement at The Nesbitt Centre during the summer of 2013. While there, I was asked to contribute to independent living programs for TNC members by facilitating and engaging in tasks, such as cultural outings.

OUTCOMES

Tasks and Accomplishments:

- Co-planned and managed a week-long curriculum designed to educate and engage TNC members in environmental stewardship
- Contributed to computer training, which primarily involved developing a blog with the TNC members as a creative outlet for story telling and sharing
- Researched accessible housing options
- Facilitated an advocacy workshop, which included an accessibility assessment of the building where TNC is located

LESSONS LEARNED

I had the opportunity to learn from individuals as I engaged with teams and formed relationships at TNC. Each TNC member had different needs and capabilities, which taught me to adapt to varied situations, and to appreciate countless strengths and challenges. One of the most valuable lessons from The Nesbitt community, was to recognize the capacity of our shared humanity.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The global field placement at TNC allowed me to:

- Gain organizational techniques
- Facilitate large and small groups
- Participate in a dynamic environment
- Collaborate with a diverse community

CLASS CONNECTIONS

SW790 Adventure/Experiential Therapy

I was able to draw upon the experiential models that were taught in the adventure/experiential therapy mini-course. I appreciate the information that I acquired, which was useful when asked to facilitate educational projects and outings. The knowledge from this class was particularly beneficial when planning five days of activities for an event that TNC calls "challenge week."



CAREER CONNECTIONS

The Nesbitt Centre encouraged me to seek projects based on my own interests while working closely with others. Engaging with groups and individuals taught me to be organized, yet flexible. I often had to think quickly on my feet, which has given me a foundation to expand on as learn and grow in my social work career.

ADVICE

If you can, try to reach out to people who have some knowledge of the region or who live in the region before you depart. It can be really helpful with logistics, and with acclimating to a new country.

Research the region and placement if possible, but explore with a willingness to learn. Some of the most meaningful lessons can come from unexpected places.



THANK YOU

I am grateful to have had a global field experience. I could not have completed this journey without the financial support and guidance of the Office of Global Activities. A special thank you to The University of Hong Kong, the Nesbitt Centre, and the people that make Hong Kong so extraordinary. To Professor Alvarez, Anthony Cheng, and Joannes Lee for sharing a world of experiential-based learning opportunities and ideas with me. To Maggie Vail, Kyle Brickner, and Kent Youil for the valuable advice as I prepared for my placement. Finally, to my family for their love and support.