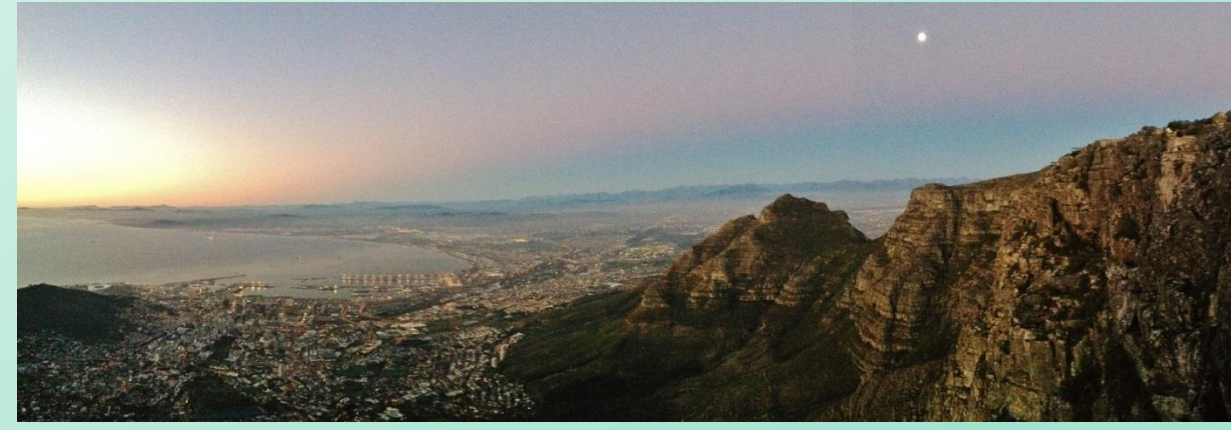


RAINBOW NATION: NAVIGATING TWO FIELD PLACEMENTS AND CULTURAL LEARNING ABROAD



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An excerpt from one of my first blog posts abroad: "Cape Town is absolutely beautiful—mountains in my backyard with an oceanfront only 10 minutes away. We can walk up to the mountains or take a train along the coast, it's really magnificent and I feel so lucky to be here. However, the city's beauty often masks the issues of the very apparent discrepancy between the townships' poverty and the wealth in the city center. Townships are informal settlement areas that developed during apartheid as a result of unjustified forced removal of black and 'coloured' South Africans from their homes and communities that were nearer to the city center. These areas were then destroyed, reconstructed and deemed "whites only". These townships are where CCS volunteers are primarily placed, as they are the areas with most need. Also, geographically, these informal settlements were purposely pushed to the outskirts of the city therefore they are further from transportation, social service organizations and other resources."

The injustices that took place in this country are atrocious, however I witnessed a sense of solidarity and resiliency of an entire nation. The country's reconstruction is built on truth, reconciliation, peace and justice for all who went through the struggle. There is truly no place in the world like South Africa.



Navigating Two Field Placements:



There are approximately 65,233 refugees residing in South Africa and a remarkable 230,442 asylum seekers. With xenophobia present in the country, there is a need for both physical and mental health support. AMP provides humanitarian assistance to vulnerable and disenfranchised asylum seekers and refugees in Cape Town. The goal of the agency is to provide the support necessary to facilitate a transition to self reliance.

I provided additional capacity and administrative support in facilitating services to the refugee community and the organization's pilot Peer Counselling Program. Through my contributions to AMP, I was able to leave evaluation tools for future Peer Counselling Programs. I developed a new and effective system for donation distribution which included direct service at the door and outreach to the community.



HFH aims to provide supported and supervised foster care for orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children in small family homes in their own communities. Lizo Nobanda is HFH's educare center for the children in Khayelitsha Township.

While placed at HFH, I co-organized a holiday program for the older children in the community during their school vacation. I also provided support to the educare facility through teacher assistance and psycho-social support. I also had the opportunity to conduct research, create and facilitate workshops while building meaningful relationships with the foster moms in Khayelitsha.

Skills Utilized/Developed

• Flexibility

Learning to be adaptable and take on tasks that were not necessarily comfortable or my area of expertise was crucial in my learning experience and the needs of the organizations.

• Autonomy

There is not always clear direction of what an agency wants you to do, thus taking initiative and creating projects for myself within the organizations was a major contributing factor to my learning outcomes.

• Relationship Building

Taking the time to get to know the people I served and the co-workers who surrounded me daily was essential in professional and personal growth.



Classroom Connections

Comparative Cross National Analyses of Social Service Systems (SW 823) provided the opportunity to analyze the similarities and differences in policy, service delivery and the affects it has on the refugee and asylum seekers in the U.S. and South Africa

Women and Community Organizing (SW 674) gave me new vocabulary to understand the complexity of intersectionality and skills to facilitate the workshops with the foster mothers.

Lessons Learned

- Trust your instincts. You didn't get to where you are today by not knowing anything.
- You build relationships with people, not textbooks.
- Honest self-awareness; practice it and continue to work on understanding you.
- Self-care, self-care, self-care: know when you need it and take the time to do it.

Career Connections

The experience navigating two field placements that went through major organizational changes while I was there will be useful for my future in this field. It pushed me to take initiative, be a leader and develop skills in areas I knew little about. It also presented the reality of working in NGOs which is that they can undergo many shifts and changes and we must adapt quickly and keep moving forward.

Advice

- Build on small wins – do not devalue your experience or accomplishments
- Let go of the things and people you cannot change
- Say and show your gratitude and appreciation

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Office of Global Activities for providing me the Global Activities Scholarship. I would like to thank CCS South Africa, The Adonis Musati Project and Home From Home staff and consumers. Lastly, a huge thank you to the friends and family who donated to my fundraiser to help make this all possible.