

Improving Patient Well-Being in Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital Cape Town, South Africa

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South Africa is a culturally diverse country with many ethnicities and languages, 11 of which are officially recognized in the constitution. About 80% of South Africans are of Black African ancestry and SA has the largest communities of European, Asian, and racially mixed ancestry in Africa, as a result of its colonial history.

Although South Africa has the biggest economy on the continent, a quarter of South Africans are unemployed and live on \$1.25 a day. South Africa also ranks in the top 10 countries in the world in income inequality.

South Africa had its first democratic election in 1994 when Nelson Mandela was elected President after a negotiated settlement with the Apartheid regime. Cape Town is the legislative capital of South Africa and the most popular tourist destination in the country. The city is still marked by the racial segregation mandated under Apartheid with the majority of the black and colored populations living in impoverished townships on the Cape Flats.



Field Agency

Friends of Valkenberg is a non-profit volunteer organization that works in conjunction with Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital (an underfunded government hospital) to support the psychiatric patients. Almost all of the patients at the hospital were from the impoverished townships of the Cape Flats.

Mission: To improve the hospital experience for patients and help them on the road to recovery by affirming their dignity and self-worth through interactions with committed and caring volunteers.

Services:

- ❖ Responding to direct needs (clothing, transportation assistance, equipment and materials for the wards).
- ❖ Running psycho-social recreational groups including cooking, dancing and sports.
- ❖ Free hair salon
- ❖ Shop selling discount goods to patients and staff

My field tasks:

- ❖ Conduct an evaluation of FOV's programs and services (focus groups, interviews)
- ❖ Communications – produce newsletter, articles for local newspapers
- ❖ Fundraising campaign
- ❖ Lead weekly cooking group
- ❖ Assist other groups/projects as needed
- ❖ Research mental health care in South Africa

Outcomes

- ❖ Completed evaluation project resulting in a report and a presentation to disseminate findings
- ❖ Newsletter included a patient story and was disseminated to all stakeholders
- ❖ Two articles were published in local newspapers
- ❖ Fundraising campaign planned and started

Skills Utilized/Developed

- ❖ Evaluation skills
- ❖ Self-awareness
- ❖ Critical thinking
- ❖ Engagement
- ❖ Cultural sensitivity

Classroom Connections

- ❖ Mental Health Policy gave me a base of knowledge about the US context with which to compare South Africa's mental health system
- ❖ SW 799 Global Seminar helped me examine my social identities and how these might come into play in my experience abroad
- ❖ Public Policy 717 Social Activism: Perspectives from the Global South is deepening my understanding of the liberation movement in SA and post-apartheid South Africa

Lessons Learned

- ❖ I learned a lot about the pitfalls of evaluation projects and how to avoid them
- ❖ Being flexible is an absolute must when working abroad

Career Connections

Evaluation skills will be very useful in my future career. The ability to work with people from different cultural backgrounds will be essential

Advice

- ❖ If you are even remotely thinking about a global experience, do it.
- ❖ Apply for every possible source of funding
- ❖ Be flexible and open minded

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