OPEN ARMS

Open Arms Home for Children is a residential facility founded in 2005 to provide care for orphaned, abandoned, and disadvantaged children in the Eastern Cape.

There are currently 52 children at Open Arms and a rotating staff of child care workers, cooks, and maintenance who provide full-time care for the children.

PLACEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

My role as a clinical social work intern was to provide therapeutic support to a client caseload of 12 boys, ranging in ages from 8-17. I met with them weekly and worked collaboratively with staff to address their needs.

OUTCOMES

- Completed assessments, case plans, therapy, and evaluations with 12 clients
- Ran one-day training workshop for child care staff
- Facilitated and organized a sex education weekend retreat for 12 clients and 5 child care staff

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

SW 625 Interpersonal Practice with Children and Youth prepared me with a range of evidence-based treatments specifically for children and youth.

SW 605 Infant and Child Development and Behavior provided a theoretical framework for understanding human development and the role of attachment in mental health.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Cross-cultural clinical experience
- Educational group facilitation
- Interdisciplinary team work

CAREER

Open Arms was my first experience with clinical work in an international setting. It gave me an appreciation for the nuances and considerations working cross-culturally. This experience affirmed my desire to work abroad one day again.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) It’s the little things that count. Working with my clients, simply providing consistency and reliability was the most important intervention.

2) Patience. I was an outsider and a guest. I learned to work at the pace of the people around me, not on my own time schedule.

ADVICE

1) Observe: Though there may be time-constraints and pressure to complete projects, take the time to listen, watch, and learn before jumping into work. It will ultimately save you time (and much pain)! 

2) Laugh: Learn to laugh at yourself, especially when you make a mistake. Humor gives the space to grow and makes the experience all the more enjoyable.

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EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

Also called the “Rainbow Nation,” South Africa is a diverse country with 11 official languages. The Eastern Cape is the traditional home of the Xhosa people and produced many national figures, including Nelson Mandela. The Eastern Cape, however, also has some of the highest poverty rates in the nation with over 2/3 of children living in poverty.

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