

CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH IN S. AFRICA

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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.

AGENCY: 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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