



Fundación Mi Casa: Child Welfare in Santiago, Chile

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Location: Santiago, Chile

Santiago is both the capital and largest city in the country of Chile. The city combines metropolitan and breath-taking nature with the omnipresent view of the Andes mountain range surrounding the skyscrapers. With a population of 6.5 million and a strong presence of various immigrant and ethnic communities, Santiago is a central cultural and financial hub within Chile.

Political Context

In the context of Chile's rich political history, Santiago has often been the epicenter of political expression. With the dictatorship under Pinochet coming to an end only 27 years ago, political activism and the challenging of government remains a present part of the new democracy. This expression is seen in various forms ranging from weekly demonstrations regarding violence against women and access to higher education, to street art and radical poetry and music. This provided an interesting context while working within a government-affiliated project dealing with the highly politicized topic of child maltreatment.

Global Field Placement Agency: Fundación Mi Casa

Fundación Mi Casa is a organization under Chile's governmental child welfare entity known as SENAME (Servicio Nacional de Menores). This agency provides a myriad of services to youth and adolescents who have experienced physical, mental/emotional, or sexual abuse. These services include outpatient therapy, adoption assistance, and residential care.

Placement and Outcomes

My placement primarily took place with one of their outpatient programs that provided reparative psychotherapy to the children who had experienced abuse as well as social and legal interventions for their parents/guardians. They provided both individual and group interventions to their clients, all of which were legally mandated and free of charge.

Primary Projects/Responsibilities:

- Develop and deliver a presentation on competency working with LGBTI clients and families
- Assist in the development and implementation of a workshop for youth on gender-related violence
- Evaluate client satisfaction with youth and parents through brief interviews and surveys
- Participate in client intake interviews and complete the corresponding agency reports

Skills Developed

- Collaboration in both client intervention and program development
- Active listening skills
- Ethical entry into new communities
- Development of culturally-informed programming
- Effective cross-cultural communication
- Engagement with key stakeholders across organizations

Lessons Learned

- The importance of humility and active listening when in a new environment, especially one within another cultural context
- The balance between being respectfully assertive and being aggressive and unethical when it comes to voicing concerns about your work experience
- The value in making your contributions culturally relevant
- The benefits of collaboration as demonstrated by the multi-disciplinary model of intervention used by the agency



"The richness of Santiago is its diversity." The button I received when attending the First Congress on Sexuality, Affectivity, and Inclusion of Diverse Families.

Classroom Connections

- SW605 Infant and Child Development and Behavior- This course provided me with a sufficient background on the impact of parent/child relationships and early childhood trauma, so that I could effectively contribute to the work being done at my agency which functioned from a child development lens.
- SW683 Evaluation in Social Work Practice- This course provided me with experience with and knowledge of various evaluation methods which informed the way I approached evaluation work at Fundación Mi Casa.

Career Connections

- The role of the social worker in a Chilean context is much more community-focused as opposed to clinical approach, which exposed me, in a very hands-on way, to many strategies and best practices to put in my toolkit for my future community organizing efforts.
- The opportunity to sharpen my Spanish professional vocabulary in the context of Latin American social work, through both interpersonal communication and the development of culturally-informed programming, was invaluable experience to my future work with diverse communities in the US.

Advice

Familiarize yourself with all aspects of the culture, outside of solely the social work context, before arriving in a new community in order to help forge stronger connections. Genuine interest in and knowledge of music, food, and politics can go a long way when entering a new community and building professional/interpersonal relationships.

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