Community Social Work in Israel-Palestine

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Location

The city of Haifa is located on the slopes of Mount Carmel by the Mediterranean Sea. While most Israelis and Palestinians live in segregated communities, Haifa is one of a handful of mixed cities where Jews and Arabs live together. It is also home to Druze, Baha'i, foreign workers, and asylum seekers.

Why Israel-Palestine?

I chose to complete my field placement in Haifa because of its unique community makeup and programs that strive to cultivate a shared society.

Living in the Middle East for four months gave me the opportunity to make multiple visits to cities in the West Bank and neighboring countries including Jordan and Egypt. Meeting local residents in all of these places grew my understanding of many political, social, and economic challenges as well as individual and collective strengths.

Partner Agency

The Haifa Municipality Department of Community Social Work has a significant role in addressing mental, emotional, physical, and social wellbeing on individual, family, and community levels. It focuses on the empowerment of Haifa's vulnerable populations and promotes collaboration among residents to trust one another and provide mutual help in times of need.

Projects

Foreign Caregiver Assessment

Assessed challenges and strengths of caregivers providing live-in aid to aging residents in Haifa

- Initiated key stakeholder interviews
- Led five focus groups with caregivers from the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka
- Presented findings and recommendations to stakeholders in a first-ever collaborative meeting between caregiver agencies

Community Garden Evaluation

Evaluated Haifa's community garden programs that foster individual, social, and environmental wellbeing

- Co-designed evaluation survey
- Visited 10 community gardens and 49 evaluation participants
- Created a professional evaluation report, presented at Haifa's Community Garden Forum

Asylum Seekers in Haifa

Facilitated initial stages of community organizing to address service gaps faced by the asylum-seeking community in Haifa

- Conducted research and outreach to relevant organizations
- Organized Tel Aviv day-trip to meet local leaders, learned about their ongoing work and service barriers
- Initiated a meeting among diverse stakeholders to work collaboratively with asylum seekers in Haifa

Skills Utilized

Assessment and evaluation

Balancing learning and leadership

Cross-cultural communication in professional relationship development

Lessons Learned

Schedule multiple focus groups in a timely sequence and inform participants of the entire focus group schedule during the first meeting. Providing a certificate of participation can be helpful to retain participants for all focus groups.

Advice

- Listen to multiple perspectives.
- Attend meetings even if you cannot understand the language. So much is expressed in non-verbal communication.
- Spend time in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and other parts of Israel-Palestine to become familiar with the richness and range of cultures and political climates in the region.

Classroom Connections

658 Women and Community Organizing
Specific organizing techniques, practice tools

522 Basic Social Work Research
Self-designed a research paper with a focus on Arab-Jewish encounters in Israel-Palestine

697 SW Practice Community & Soc Systems
Group project focused on mindfully entering, working with, and exiting international communities

Career Connections

My field placement site demonstrated the importance of building a welcoming and supportive work environment. In my future career I look forward to to contributing to a collaborative organizational culture while putting to use new and refined social work skills.