

Improving Social Service Systems in Ghana

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Field Placement

International Agency

For my experience, I enrolled in Cross Cultural Solutions' Ghana program. This organization was established in 1994 with the mission of empowering cross-cultural services that improves the health, education and economic opportunities for vulnerable women, children and the elderly. Specifically in Ghana, the organization fulfills this mission across 6 volunteer and internship programs focused in three main areas of child development, health, and women's empowerment. During my time there, I primarily served under the child development program.

Community Partners

Cross Cultural Solutions partners with several community members and places their volunteers in service of these partners. The first two weeks, I was placed at a local primary school wherein I taught Science and English to 4th and 5th grade students. For my last week, I shadowed a team of social workers who specialized in interpersonal work (individual, family, and couples therapy), child welfare and disability services, as well as case management services.

Outcomes

Over the course of my 3-week global independent study, I was able to interact with several key stakeholders including teachers, social workers, and students alongside other community members. My accomplishments include:

- Research culturally relevant, global social work policies that affect the vulnerable populations in Ghana
- Interview key stakeholders regarding their impressions of current and goals for future social services provided in the country
- Collaborate with a team of social workers to provide clinical impressions and recommendations for clients receiving services
- Provide an executive summary of current social service provided in the country and implications for service improvement

Connections

Classroom

- [SW 511: Interpersonal Practice Skills Laboratory](#)

This course provided me with the foundational skills to engage and provide therapeutic services to clients which became incredibly important while working with the social workers in Ghana.

- [SW 530: Introduction to Social Welfare Policy & Services](#)

Oftentimes, when discussing social systems and policies in Ghana, I had to refer back to the lessons of this class to contextualize Ghanaian system development in relation to that of the US.

- [SW 560: Introduction to Community Organization, Management, and Policy Advocacy](#)

In this course, I learned the importance of being welcomed into a community and working with community members to assess and address their needs.

Career

This trip has drastically shifted my focus from interpersonal and clinical practice to more macro- and policy-based work. I have now begun researching positions internationally-based positions, specifically in Ghana and countries alike. My aim is to begin developing culturally appropriate, American-replica social welfare programs in Ghana. I believe that I am in a unique position to combine my personal experiences encountering social service systems with my knowledge of foreign and domestic social welfare policies to advocate for and enact real change in developing nations.

Skills Utilized & Developed

- Engagement from a strengths-based, person-in-environment perspective
- Practicing cultural humility and community organizing to increase social service utilization
- Strengthened global policy understanding, contextualization, and advocacy skills



Ho, Volta Region, Ghana

Ghana is an anglophone, coastal country that gained independence in 1954 from Great Britain. Ho is located in one of the country's 10 regions called Volta that is home to over 2.1 million people. The local language in the region is Ewe but it is one of over 100 dialects that can be found throughout the country. Ghana is known for being the birthplace of Kente cloth, home to the Cape Coast castle (a world heritage site due to its critical role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade), and its reputation as one of the world's most peaceful countries.

Social Work in Ghana

Practice Context & Challenges:

- Training began in the UK in the 1940's in response to the breakdown of traditional family systems.
- The Ghana Association of Social Workers (GASOW) is viewed as ineffective by members despite its role as representative of their needs.
- There is no present licensing board upholding ethics and education standards for social workers.
- Facing diminishing funding and ill-managed Non-Governmental Orgs.

Aims & Services: Promote social, economic and emotional stability in families with a focus on the most vulnerable populations. The department offers community rehabilitation and disability services, traditional therapeutic services, child welfare and protection, family planning, and justice administrative programs.



Lessons and Reflections

“Welcome home my sista”: My three weeks in Ghana started as an exotic trip to a distant land but became an ancestral homecoming as it is the Ghanaian belief that black Americans are of their people. I was continuously met with nothing but smiling faces, hugs, and kisses alongside plates of food being shoved in my face much like visiting a southern grandparent.

A Resilient People: Alongside their general jovial and hospitable disposition, I saw a naturally resilient people who have every means of improving the social and economic inequities in their country. Education is deemed important and necessary for all students with university-level enrollment on the rise.

Governmental Shortcomings: Currently, the government only offers emergency cash assistance to those in abject poverty who are incapable of relying on family members for support. This program is the only federal social service program that offers direct relief for individuals facing abject poverty.

Global Solutions: The challenges faced throughout the country proves that there is a grave need for impactful, culturally relevant, and sustainable solutions that tackle systemic and international injustices.

Advice

- Be humble, open, honest, respectful, and curious. Keep in check with yourself on your privileges and biases.
- Research the country you are entering and prepare yourself for the unexpected.
- Make connections before, during, and after your trip. These connections will be invaluable to your personal and professional development.

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