

GLOBAL FIELD PLACEMENT IN HONG KONG: Christian Action – Centre for Refugees



HONG KONG SAR

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China with a population of about 7.5 million. A British colony from 1841 until 1997, Hong Kong currently exists under a “one country, two systems” policy and is characterized by a unique mix of both eastern and western influences. While Hong Kong is a global financial center and has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, it is also host to social injustices such as income inequality, a lack of affordable housing, and the economic and social exclusion of marginalized groups.

Hong Kong is home to approximately 10,000 recognized refugees and asylum seekers, about 0.2 percent of the total population. Unlike China, Hong Kong is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a presence in Hong Kong, since 2014 all asylum applications have been processed through the Hong Kong immigration department. Less than 1 percent of those applications have been successful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the Centre for Refugees for welcoming me as a member of the team and providing me countless opportunities to learn and grow. An additional thank you to the University of Hong Kong for their support and guidance, and for the Office of Global Activities for their financial, academic, and personal support.



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AGENCY PARTNER

Christian Action–Centre for Refugees (CFR) is the first and only community center for asylum seekers and refugees in Hong Kong. Established in 2004, CFR aims to provide holistic support to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. Services include:

- Providing basic needs such as emergency housing, food, clothing, referrals to medical and legal assistance, milk and diapers for children
- Psychosocial and mental health support, including individual counseling, family therapy, and therapeutic and support groups
- Education sponsorship, English language courses, and other skills and educational trainings
- Assisting with right-to-work petitions and employability workshops for eligible clients
- Community outreach events and policy advocacy

PLACEMENT INFORMATION

This 10-week field placement was organized through the Department of Social Work at the University of Hong Kong. Although the day-to-day workload is constantly changing as the organization responds to urgent requests, generally, MSW interns work as case managers and are responsible for the following:

- Managing a caseload of approximately 3-4 clients while assisting fellow caseworkers
- Addressing clients’ basic needs such as securing housing, enrolling children in school, and providing referrals to partner organizations
- Assisting clients with documentation, paperwork, and accompaniment relevant to their asylum cases
- Facilitating a psychosocial support group
- Conducting intakes and needs assessments
- Participating in weekly case consultations

SKILLS UTILIZED/DEVELOPED

- Problem Solving
- Teamwork
- Cultural Humility
- Taking Initiative
- Empathy
- Assessment
- Treatment Planning
- Group Facilitation
- Crisis Management
- Outreach & Advocacy

OUTCOMES

- Facilitated a 5-week psychosocial support group for refugee mothers incorporating art therapy activities and psychoeducation topics
- Assisted clients to apply for private sponsorship to a third country including writing personal statements, gathering evidence and completing paperwork.
- Conducted 15+ education needs assessments with families eligible to receive education funding
- Assisted with chaperoning an offsite summer camp program for 10 children ages 4-6
- Assisted with the planning of annual community meeting and designing of a client satisfaction survey

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

- SW 504 Diversity & Social Justice: This course discussed the critical concept of cultural humility and helped me recognize aspects of diversity, privilege, and oppression in social work practice
- SW 625 Interpersonal Practice with Children and Families: This course helped me gain a deeper understanding of the impact of trauma, which is deeply relevant to refugee populations
- SW 799 Immigration Enforcement, Human Rights, and Social Justice: This course analyzed the impact of immigration and refugee policy on individuals, communities, and social systems



LESSONS LEARNED

- How to practice empathetic listening and help clients cultivate a sense of hope in the face of uncertainty
- The importance of cultural humility and approaching interactions with clients and colleagues with a sense of openness, curiosity, respect, and appreciation
- How to set boundaries with clients and colleagues
- The importance of regularly practicing self-care and the value of support networks to prevent burn out

ADVICE

- The agency’s fast-paced atmosphere requires interns to be self-directed, proactive, and independent
- Take the time to build relationships with clients and better understand their stories and situations
- Take advantage of your free time by checking out everything Hong Kong has to offer—such as beaches, hiking, cultural, and historic sites

CAREER CONNECTIONS

Through this field placement, I gained invaluable experience working with refugees and asylum seekers in an international setting, and was able to critically reflect on my cultural identity, strengths, and areas for growth as a social worker. This experience will help me better serve refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrant populations in the United States in the future.