

Global Field Placement with a Norwegian Nonprofit

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Kirkens Bymisjon - Church City Mission

A Norwegian nonprofit organization with a variety of programs all over the country aimed at providing social services to different social identity groups including sex workers and migrants/individuals with substance use concerns experiencing homelessness. The Norwegian welfare state extends only to Scandinavian citizens, therefore Church City Mission is one of only three organizations in Oslo that provides services and temporary housing for those who have no legal rights in the country. Programs include a weekend soup kitchen, a café that is run by social workers and provides healthy, cheap, hot meals, and an emergency shelter which can house 79 individuals (woman and couples). The staff is very diverse, with workers from Norway as well as Romania, Hungary and Uganda.

Placement Information

My time was split between three different City Mission locations, with the majority of my time spent at the shelter. This was a very micro social work placement as all of my responsibilities were framed around meeting our guests basic needs. All guests at the shelter were Romanian (Roma and non-Roma) migrant street workers and in addition to learning beginner level Romanian, I ran registration and check in, provided guests with soap and towels, monitored project development, and worked with staff to address any health, legal or social needs expressed by guests. Because this shelter houses people over night, shifts were in the evening, typically beginning at 5pm and ending around 11pm.

Outcomes and Skills Utilized

Outcomes included implementing and assessing a new project at the shelter (running a kitchen for guests to prepare hot meals in the evening), establishing working relationships with staff from a variety of professional and cultural backgrounds, and gaining an understanding of the strengths and needs of guests through formal research, language learning and improved interpersonal skills. I also improved my social policy competency by gaining a deeper understanding of the history of Norwegian welfare and its gaps in supporting migrants.

Oslo, Norway

Oslo is the capital of Norway, a Scandinavian country in northern Europe nestled next to Sweden to its west and vast coast lines to its east, touching the Norwegian and North seas. It has a population of 5.2 million and is a half capitalist, half democratic socialist society. It has an extensive welfare state and English is spoken by most, along with Norwegian. It has indigenous Sami people, although most Norwegians are ethnically Nordic. It is not part of the European Union (EU) but it is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) which allows EU citizens to live in the country as migrant workers.

Choice

Because of Norway's EEA membership, the migrant workers in the country have provided ethnic, racial and socioeconomic diversity to Oslo's demographics. This creates a unique and constantly evolving social work climate as the historical wealth and relatively high overall happiness of Norwegians (based on the World Happiness Report using a Gallup World Poll) are questioned by tensions around migration, immigration of varied social classes.

Classroom Connections

SW648, Issues in Global Social Work Practice, gave me the opportunity to apply an international lens to social work for the first time since beginning at the School of Social Work. It helped prepare for my experience by encouraging me to think outside the box about social work ethics and how they are truly based in culture, inevitably varying across countries and organizations.

Lessons Learned

My favorite part of this placement was the opportunity to work with such a diverse staff. I was given the chance to observe and learn from each coworker and, instead of replicating their method, use the lessons they taught me to expand my own toolbox as a practitioner. I learned how to trust myself, knowing my own strengths and see them as an asset to a team rather than a detriment because of the ways they may differ or stand out.



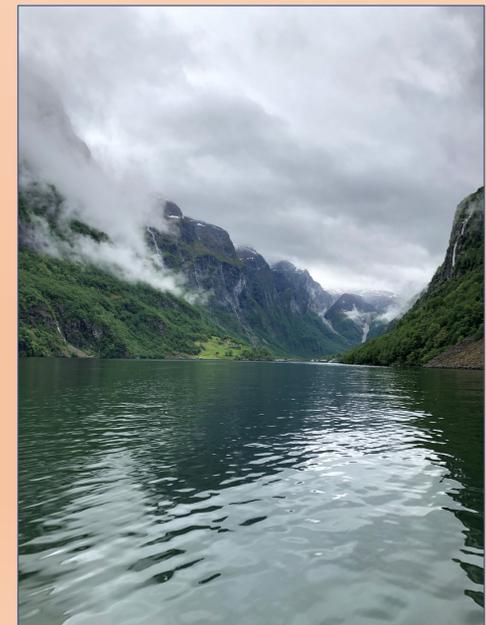
Career Connections

I plan to practice global social work after completing my degree by working for an international NGO. This placement proved an invaluable experience in dipping my feet in cross cultural communication. When working towards a shared goal with stakeholders from a variety of cultural backgrounds, it will be beneficial to have experience in navigating a multicultural workplace and knowing how I best fit into it.

Advice

Temper your expectations: No matter where your placement may be, it is impossible to anticipate what will be most impactful about your experience. If you go in with openness, humility and flexibility, you will be more prepared to make the most of your experience, most likely in unexpected ways.

Prepare contingency plans for time management: While you are probably already well versed in self-care, with a new schedule in a new environment around new people, it may be overwhelming in new ways trying to balance transition growing pains and general life. Be patient with yourself in finding the right way to manage your time outside of work and allow room for exploration and relaxation of different kinds. There is no one right way to live and work abroad!



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