

Final Summary Report
HST 4275- Health Studies Internship
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Lutheran Social Services of Illinois
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Peoria, IL
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Lutheran Social Services

“Responding to the Gospel, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois brings healing, justice and wholeness to people and communities.”

When I first started my internship at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois I read websites, pamphlets and brochures regarding the organization. I read the mission, as stated above, and did not fully understand the responsibilities and hard work it takes to succeed at Lutheran. Between the affective supervisors to the determined therapists and caseworkers, Lutheran gives society hope that with any major issue there can be a positive outlook.

Structure and Function of Agency

In the Peoria office there are three wings divided between, adoption preservation and counseling, casework and business offices. Adoption preservation's focus is the children and parents who have adopted children in their family. The employees actually go into the home and insure that everything is functioning normally. Verifying the child is healthy and happy, adoptive parents are working well with the change, and if problems arise they are there to assist in any way they can. They create groups that can help the children understand what has happened to them, stress relief based, anger management or even a life skills program. This is a very unique team that has the focus of parents and children after the adoption process.

The counseling team was where I spent the majority of my time. There are a total of seven therapists and two supervisors. At this time counseling is on a waiting list and the therapists are overwhelmed from the caseload along with

paperwork. Daily the therapists see a wide range of clients and focus on their current well being, along with what is best for their future. There are two sex offender therapists who are responsible for assessments and counseling for the individual if required. Two other therapists are to work with in-tact families, meaning that the family is in some way still together. The therapist may have numerous people in the family to counsel, which in turn can increase their case load very quickly. The rest of the team members do regular therapy. The supervisors try and assign clients to certain therapists if at all possible. This way they can decide who would work best with the situation at hand. There are also groups available from the counseling team. During my time at Lutheran a domestic violence group was taking place. There has been discussion of different groups being planned because of the large waiting list. The hope is to narrow down the list so that clients are not waiting a long period of time to be seen. The team works great together. They are available to help each other when needed and work to find the best decision for their clients.

The foster care wing is filled with many helpful and hard working caseworkers. Whether their focus is adoption or simply just casework they are constantly busy. Paperwork, home or in office visits, and court dates take up their time. They keep track of different behaviors a child, biological or foster parent may be exhibiting. If they believe there is a problem they are to call the hotline to report the misbehavior and discuss solutions with their supervisor. A caseworker receives any kind of information that is going on in the home and is

the “go to” person for the client. They are able to give the individual advice for certain issues and can be a liaison for the counseling team if needed.

In the business wing there are individuals whose focus is strictly billing and finances. They also track employee’s records, for example, gas charges. In this business traveling is a must, so employees are to keep track of their mileage and then turn in the amount to the business ladies. Many times, I know with counselors, they get behind and do not turn their billing in on time. This can cause problems because the business employees have to come up with the money to reimburse them. If they are months behind that can be a fairly large amount!

Description of Experience and Activities

During my time at Lutheran my supervisor encouraged me to observe and work with each department. I was able to take part in meetings, groups, home visits and court. The meetings were basically team, quarterly staffing, and all staff once a month. I was able to learn how the organization worked together in the various processes for clients. The quarterly staffing were very interesting because I could see how the caseworkers and counselors work together to update each other on the events happening in the case. It is surprising the stories that clients tell to make themselves sound better or even try and get away with illegal behavior.

In late May, I took part in the last few weeks of the adoption preservation group. I worked with the group working with the children. In a separate room

adoptive parents were always learning ways to assist themselves and their child with the change. It was very interesting to me because I did not realize the many situations that can arise from being adopted or becoming a new parent. I have to say this was the first incident where my emotions were affected. As the group leader had the children go around the room and discuss their lives prior to adoption, a young boy explained that his biological mother could not feed him, dress him, and just did not want him. At that moment I realized the difficulty in separating yourself from the emotions. At the young age of about nine I could not imagine trying to figure out the meaning behind not being wanted by your own mother. That was the first time I realized I live in a sheltered world, not realizing that terrible things really do happen around me.

My time was shortened in June with Adoption Preservation because of the Illinois budget cutting. The office was notified there would be drastic cuts among the entire agency with adoption preservation on the top of the release list, resulting in closing completely July 1st. The agency was a zoo, so to speak. Between rumors amongst the employees in Peoria, the news from other offices in Illinois and the media no one truly knew what are going to happen. When walking into the facility the mood just took over your attitude. Tears, anger, and the emotions where shown by all members of the team. I even found myself lost for words to comfort.

On July 1st the employees were told to stay until 5pm, the office had received a notification that they may be reinstated. Come to find out at 4:30pm there was a contract for adoption preservation to continue. No one knew for how

long or if it would even be permanent but a sigh of relief was taken. What a real life roller coaster to observe! Welcome to the real world!

Before the budgets cuts I had worked with the different employees organizing groups. We had a yoga group designed and fliers sent out. The other group was life skills for young teens and we were in the process of planning that when the news put us on hold. I do wish I would have been able to have that whole experience. I believe that the education I received from Program Planning at Eastern would have helped a lot.

I was, however, apart of a domestic violence group with the counseling team the entire time I was there. The experience was eye opening. The therapist I was working with is truly one of kind. The way she can reach out to the clients was a perfect learning experience for me. I learned such a great deal about domestic violence victims and how exactly to approach them. She even allowed me to lead group quite a few times. At one point, I was the only one available to lead so I was given the opportunity to do it alone. It will take experience and time for me to be able to respond in affective ways but I felt confident that the girls understood the point I was getting across. Being allowed to observe this group was a great opportunity.

The sixteen week process brings a special bond between the girls. They learn about other's experiences and by the second half of sessions they are assisting each other with problems. One participant truly "came out of her shell." During the first few weeks, she would hardly talk, did not have one friend, would not make eye contact, wear big baggy clothing and did not make a lot of effort.

By the time I left she stood proud, was exercising on a regular basis, looking at you to talk, brought a friend for us to meet and talked to the other group members on the phone outside of Wednesday nights. This experience truly impacted me! She has no idea how much I have learned from her and how she has made me think that this profession may be a road I want to take.

I plan to stay in touch with the therapist to receive updates on the girls. When I left them on my last day I felt that they were sad to see me go. It was nice getting to know them and understand the different backgrounds they have come from. I gave each of them a perfume to take with them. I wanted them to realize they are special and are deserving of little things like perfume.

I only went on a couple home visits with a caseworker. Both cases were dealing with the adoption process so she was just going over the next steps for them. She did discuss the current behavior the children were experiencing along with the attitude of the foster parent.

Early in the internship I went on an adoption court date. It was a wonderful experience. The family adopting was keeping the siblings together and the family was ecstatic! It was truly a positive and happy occasion for everyone involved! Another court date I took part in was not a happy occasion. I was not able to sit in the room because the small children needed to be taken out so I volunteered to watch over them. Their mother was actually taken into custody during trial. Even though the children were under the age of three, they were asking for her, which made it even more difficult to see. To my

understanding court cases are rarely as happy as an adoption. The depressing, life changing court dates seem to occur more often than not.

I also assisted supervisors in organizing their offices. Between the paperwork, unexpected news about clients and assisting their therapists they needed help in keep track of everything. Many days I was doing odd jobs around the office, whether making copies, running files to someone, stuffing envelopes for adoption preservation news, creating various charts or just helping out my supervisor I believe that my time here was affective.

Perceptions and Judgments about the Internship

The learning experience at Lutheran was well worth it to me. I am interested in this field and hope to work with individuals as the employees do. Seeing the different obstacles they go through is sometimes unseen by an outsider. As for the health aspect of my internship I could focus on mental and even physical health. As a worker the stress of report due dates, serious cases becoming very difficult, phone calls from other co-workers not happy with the performance of other employees or even just the clientele can impact mental stability. It is very difficult to walk out of the building and forget that your client has been sexually abused or because a report did not get done, a mother has to wait another six months to get unsupervised visits with their children. Being able to separate yourself from work is a huge issue and some may not be able to successfully do this.

As for the clients and their mental health I would like to go back to the domestic violence group. All the girls at one point are or were unstable. They are in this group because they can not control their behaviors or part with an abuser. Their mental health could have been affected by their abuse, childhood or just personality but by going through this group we are hoping they can end with a higher self esteem. One of the most valuable aspects I took away from this internship is realizing health issues are present everywhere! Just at Lutheran, emotional, physical, and mental health could be brought to attention.

I truly received a real life experience at Lutheran. The staff I worked with was wonderful. I was given opportunities that normally a Bachelors level intern would not get. I learned so much about the field and the attitude you have to have to succeed in this line of work. I could not have asked for a better place to spend my summer. I believe if future students are interested at all in this study area Lutheran is a great opportunity. I would feel honored to receive a job at a place like Lutheran. Even though there are stressful days, the occurrences when you reach out to a child, abused woman, sexual abuse victim or even a co-worker makes it all worth it!