

Freedom House Internship Evaluation

Freedom House is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to serving all types of homeless people with children in the Green Bay/Brown County area. It was started in 1992 by a handful of churches that were very concerned about the issues of homelessness in the community. Freedom House does more than just provide food, clothing, and shelter. By providing education and counseling, modeling appropriate behaviors, and encouraging sound family practices, the 8 to 12 week Family Life Advancement Program helps families break the cycle of homelessness and hopelessness. By investing in parents and giving hope to children, Freedom House is able to give them the tools they need to become vibrant members of our community; self-sustaining, but also as volunteers with heart who give back to the community in abundance. I chose to complete my internship at Freedom House because I very much believed in the mission of the work and family restoration.

During my first conversation with the President of Freedom House, I was asked what I wanted to take away from my experience. With very little background in nonprofit administration, I wanted to know what makes a nonprofit organization successful and what type of leadership and skills it takes to run this kind of operation. The first day I walked into the Freedom House, I realized that I knew very little not only about nonprofit administration, but also about the social and economic issues facing many families in Brown County.

I can classify my executive assistant internship in two parts. As an assistant to Robyn Davis, the President of Freedom House, the first part of my internship was job shadowing and filling in where necessary. I assisted in the day-to-day operations and

commitments required of the President of Freedom House. I attended and took notes for Robyn at business networking meetings, emergency homeless shelter coalition meetings, grant writing meetings, and a board of directors meeting. At speaking engagements, I represented and lobbied on behalf of Freedom House, and observed one of the most important hats the president wears as an advocate and face of the organization. I quickly learned the importance of public relations and maintaining donor relations, which involved both the private and public sector. I drafted thank-you notes and appeal letters to various organizations and supporters of Freedom House in addition to formal requests for corporate partnerships and business sponsorships.

As a faith based organization, Freedom House receives very little government funding. As a result, I conducted research on various grants and funding opportunities as well as nonprofit networking membership opportunities. From a financial and budget standpoint, I assisted in the preparation for the state audit by obtaining all the necessary documents and statistics.

Although the president plays a major role in advocacy and budgeting, there are still internal affairs that must be addressed by her. In reference to human resources, I created a draft template for a formal documentation of misconduct, updated the employee handbook, and revised the policies regarding holiday paid time off. The time I spent directly assisting Robyn provided an inside view of different roles a president of a nonprofit organization must play in order to be successful. As President of Freedom House, Robyn is the face and voice of the organization, a passionate advocate and lobbyist. She is an administrator dealing with personnel, budgets, and public relations. The role of a bureaucrat requires strategic planning for the future, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, investigating,

decision-making, delegating, and leadership. Robyn's charisma and passion for family restoration, education, and experience are extraordinary qualifications that make her an excellent president of a successful nonprofit organization.

After spending time in the president's shoes, I quickly realized that funding and money raising is essential for sustainability. One of the biggest sources of Freedom House's revenue comes from The Celebration of Hope annual fundraiser. During the second part of my internship, I served as the event coordinator for the big "ask-event." Preliminary work required obtaining, sorting, and updating the master tracking of last year's event which included corporate donors, table sponsors, individual donors, donation items, live and silent auction items, auction bids, volunteers, and vendors. Using last year's layout, I created the publicity for sponsorship opportunities, the invitation, and the appeal letter. After updating all the corporate and individual donor lists, I sent out invitations and sponsorship opportunities, followed by a confirmation phone call. I delegated volunteers and Celebration of Hope committee members to make hundreds of phone calls and in person requests. Donations from businesses for the silent auction were confirmed, menu options were solidified, and the music group booked. I teamed up with the auctioneers to create a raffle ticket system and gift baskets were assembled. Every aspect of event logistics and planning was covered in my role as event coordinator.

I explained in my Internship Theory and Practice Paper that the nonprofit sector plays a unique role in society and falls between the concepts of public and private entities. Throughout my internship, I found that nonprofit administration utilizes principles, concepts, and theories often taught only in reference to the public and private sector. The substantive issues associated with public administration such as politics, funding,

accountability, management, and administration affect the nonprofit sector equally. Procedural issues are equally as present in the form of methods of evaluation, decision-making criteria, efficiency, and long-term and short-term planning. My basic understanding of concepts such as organization theory and practice, barriers to productivity, political culture, decision-making theory and practice, distribution of work, and ethics prepared me to take on various roles in a nonprofit organization. When editing and tightening up the policy regarding paid time off, I found myself using policy analysis following Jeremy Bentham's model of asking "who benefits" while keeping in mind who will lose. I drafted a formal documentation of misconduct for an ethical situation regarding a violation of donations. I found myself utilizing the ethics triangle, using the virtue-based, principle-based, and consequential-based approaches to determine how I would resolve the dilemma.

Although I have a great deal of respect for those in nonprofit administration, I do not foresee any future career in the nonprofit sector. I had an open mind coming into my internship and learned a great deal about nonprofit organizations, but fundraising and constantly asking for donations is not something I would enjoy or tolerate doing for a long period of time. Grant writing seemed tedious and I didn't like being in constant competition for money. At a homeless coalition meeting, I witnessed various shelters and churches fight over \$2,000 for nearly an hour. It was only \$2,000 but they all felt that they were in dire need of it and most deserving.

The only time in my internship where I felt behind in understanding was when it came to the state audit and some of the budgeting procedures. I think that perhaps a finance, statistic, or accounting course offered with an emphasis in public administration

would be beneficial to the PA curriculum. I know statistics and economics are required electives for the major, but the concepts and principles are not specific to public administration. I think one of those courses would be beneficial and a nice addition to the PA major, especially for those considering graduate school. Many of the health administration graduate programs I am considering recommend a strong background in statistics and economics in preparation for the rigorous coursework.

My experience at Freedom House was truly rewarding on an academic and personal level. I learned key concepts and practices unique to the success of organizations in the nonprofit sector such as grant writing and maintaining donor relations. The internship challenged and improved my verbal and written communication skills, as well as my ability to complete individual projects and event planning. I gained new respect and appreciation working in a capacity involving homelessness, domestic violence, and hopelessness.

What I admire about nonprofit administration is the passion and mission that drive the organization. Although I don't want to pursue a career in nonprofit administration, my internship at Freedom House confirmed my passion for helping other people in some capacity. My long-term goal is to obtain a Masters in Health Administration (MHA) and provide the same kind of service and compassion that I experienced at Freedom House. I want to change lives for the better and restore hope and health to others in a healthcare facility, just not necessarily an emergency homeless shelter.