

The End of My Time at Eden

Fri, 08/29/2014 - 00:00

|

Kristine Knowles newcomb@tulane.edu

[View PDF](#)



As I reflect back on my time on Eden House, it almost seems like fate that my last two weeks I was assigned greater responsibilities that greatly supported my first two goals. My direct supervisor and our office manager/ volunteer coordinator, Helen, was going out of town for two weeks and I was moved to her desk and got a crash course in the basics of her job. A big part of this ended up being donation coordination, which helped me better understand how Eden House uses community resources. I quickly realized that just because we were a nonprofit didn't mean we

needed or could accept all the donations people graciously offered us. It ran counterintuitive to my (and what I suspect many people's) vision of donating: you realize some somewhat expensive possession is no longer useful, you envision the vast improvement it will make on the lives of the people the nonprofit serves, and you donate with the expectation of receiving gratitude and a pat on the back. In reality, the nice bookshelves you want to drop off may not have a space in our house or storage unit or may not be used in the way you imagined, as many of our residents have limited literacy skills (NOTE: this is just a made-up example to illustrate my point, bookshelves are actually on Eden House's wish list right now). Though I set out to learn how a nonprofit uses community partners to maximize its capabilities, I ended up also learning how to be strategic about what is offered. Everyone coming to us with donations had our best interests at heart and I learned how to say no while still being gracious and appreciative. I also became adept at coordinating between our Executive Director, who had to approve all big-ticket items, and the donors, who often had strict timelines to get the items out.

In addition, I also got to try my hand at managing personnel. I was the go-to for the residents driving schedules, and I had to marshal the various interns and volunteer drivers so that each of our ladies got to and from their destination on time. This included working on the residents' communication skills and my own patience, as sometimes one of the ladies would forget to tell me about an appointment and I would be left scrambling. Though I felt frustrated at the time, it was valuable experience thinking on my feet and recognizing that when working with other people miscommunication is bound to occur. I also worked on my delegation skills with the other interns and worked hard to strike a balance of authority while still being encouraging (this was tricky because we were the same age and I was in a temporary position).

I think both of these new skills will help me greatly in my future endeavors. Most immediately, in my continuation with Eden House as a fall intern. I just couldn't leave quite yet and the connections I've made with various partners at EH will help me better understand our resources and provide improved suggestions when we're brainstorming. More broadly, I think my improved interpersonal skills are a valuable asset as I head out to the job market. How to work with other people who you may disagree with or have a different viewpoint from isn't something that's directly taught in class, but it's a skill that's required almost across the board in the job market.

After working at Eden House I think I would really like to get into the research side of the effects of sex work. There is so little hard data on the link between sex trafficking and prostitution, in the U.S. it is very often considered one and the same. And anecdotal evidence, both from the news and Eden House's own residents, tends to support this. But I have also read articles of women choosing to work in the sex trade and being satisfied with their decision. The whole debate is wrapped up in gender politics, in ways that I didn't previously realize. On the side are advocates who say all sex work is inherently degrading to women and no woman could then consciously choose it; if she does seem to choose it it's only because she has a history of trauma and doesn't realize she deserves better. On the other hand (the more historical though thankfully shrinking) view is that female sex workers are immoral and dirty and should be locked up by the government, not helped by it. In all this rhetoric the voices of the actual women involved are suppressed. I think it would be very beneficial to get out in the field and interview women in sex work at all different levels to try and get a clearer picture of what is really happening and how they can best be served.

All in all, my time at Eden House has been extremely beneficial and I leave knowing I have gained so much valuable knowledge and skills. My advice to future Tulane interns is to look for organizations/ internships that let you work on something you're passionate about, regardless if it doesn't fit directly with your major. You gain a new perspective and experiences outside what you already have!