Community Based Service Learning

1. **What were the differences between what you thought the service would be and what it actually turned out to be?**

I volunteered at Kids TLC. When I chose this organization, I thought it was either a daycare or school. It turned out to be a program for children with mental and behavioral issues, developmental trauma, and autism. Families from all over the United States seek treatment at Kids TLC. Most of my volunteer hours were spent with the mental and behavioral issues children. I did several reading groups, after school activities, and spent three mornings in the classroom. Prior to volunteering, I thought a child with behavioral issues meant a child you may come across in the grocery store that never stops screaming. After volunteering, I learned there are many children in this world that were put in unfortunate situations at young ages, seeing and experiencing things they should have never been around. As a result of those experiences, they adapted behavioral issues beyond their control. Experiencing a five-year-old say every cuss word you can imagine, physically try to harm them self, and switching moods in a matter of seconds, was a very sad and eye-opening experience.

1. **What is the mission of the program/site? What did your experience tell you about the community site and how they meet their mission?**

Kids TLC’s mission is, “Transforming lives of children and families in our community.” Before I began volunteering, I had to pass a background check and complete a two-hour orientation. Part of the philosophy the program uses is to keep the children safe. Including the adults they provide to influence the children’s lives. During the orientation, I was informed about some of the behavioral issues I may see while volunteering and how to respond. My role as a volunteer was to let kids be kids. The staff, nurses, and therapist dealt with the underlying issues in the children. The orientation was very informative and made me feel prepared to work directly with the kids. I was never left alone with kids and even the teachers always had a staff member in the classroom.

The staff was well trained before they were eligible to work with the children. Observing the staff do their jobs shows how the organization meets their mission. They use the P.A.C.E. model, meaning playful, accepting, curiosity, and empathy. When a child cusses, the reaction is to not draw attention to it. If a child came into the program saying fifty cuss words a day, but says seven today, the child would be rewarded. It may not be perfect, but the child is making steps in the right direction. When a child would have an outburst, the staff removes the child from the area and puts them in a safe room to talk out what the child is feeling. Sometimes, when a child cannot control themselves, the staff puts the child in a hold. It was frightening to see at first, but the idea is to make the child feel safe until they regain control. The classroom is much different than a public school. They teach directly to the behavioral issues. Incorporating ways to handle frustration, sadness, and social settings. Family counseling was also a part of the program. For those that had parents, weekly family therapy was included. Also, the children had “pass” weekends. After so many days at the program, the child would spend the weekend with their family. The goal being to send the child home to their family to a better situation. By allowing the child to go home throughout treatment, the family and child were eased into the changes together. They did this to avoid making progress in the child and sending them home to the same situation that made them have the issues they were originally experiencing.

I also spent a few hours in the office side of the organization. Kids TLC has a lot of “behind the scenes” activities going on to make their mission possible. The program holds events to raise money, lobbies at the capitol to continue to get the government’s support, works with several fostering agents, and deals with a lot of insurance companies. The organization has a wonderful website, [www.kidstlc.og](http://www.kidstlc.og), that elaborates even more on how they meet their mission.

1. **What is the future for the clients you worked with? Based on what you experienced, what would make things better for them?**

The future for the clients I worked with varied. Some children in the program came from foster agents, in which they have been rejected by multiple foster homes due to their behavioral issues. In those children’s cases, the goal was to correct their behavioral issues so the child could find a foster home or to potentially be adopted. Sometimes the children would complete the program and have no where to go. They would then live in the “sanctuary”. The sanctuary refers to the children that have passed the program and does not need as many rules and regulations as the children still in the program. Other children would return home to their families.

Kids TLC also deals with many insurance companies. Like the dental field, it plays a big role in the care the children can receive. Sometimes children need to stay longer, but the parents can only afford what insurance covers. It is common for the children to be released and seen again in the future. I think changes in the insurance coverage would help tremendously with the success of treatment the first time. Overall the program is very successful. Things that would make it better are factors out of their control, like insurance companies and foster families. Many of the children are six to twelve years old. Most adoptive families want children younger prior to behavioral issues developing, so these children are forgotten about often.

1. **How would you describe your experience with community site to another colleague?**

I would describe my experience as unique. Kids TLC is a great organization, with a great mission. It was an awesome experience for myself, but I do not think it is for everyone. You must like kids, because they will want to hold your hand, hug you, and sometimes be in your personal space too much. It is very sad to see the children act out in the way they do. Some people may not want to be around the children when they lash out or watch the staff put children in holds. Also, if you are not interested in working with children directly, they have opportunities with indirect help. They take help in the office, with the events they host, and to sort donations.

1. **How did you feel at the end of each day you spent at the community site?**

I felt incredibly blessed for my upbringing. Innocent kids are put in situations they had no control over. Sometimes we take little things for granted, like a non-abusive family or even having parents. Volunteering at Kids TLC reminded me not to take the life I have for granted. It felt good to be able to provide even a few hours of fun for the kids. Knowing I helped contribute to small pieces of happiness in their lives was fulfilling. My time was spent letting the kids be kids. I did not see or know about as much of their issues as the employees did. Seeing them act like a normal kid around me made me feel good about giving them the opportunity to act like a kid.