

Emily O'Connor – Introduction

Since 1989 Lydia Place has supported housing initiatives in Whatcom County:

- Six month transitional housing program
- Permanent supportive housing placements
- Case management
- Advocacy and education
- Life skills courses
- Community resource referrals
- 78 apartment units for people coming out of homelessness

They now serve 300 families a year.

Some of the challenges that have come from working with students:

- Last minute requests from students who just need hours at the end of a quarter.
- Students who have been sent towards Lydia Place, but don't really know anything about the organization or why they should be calling.

Ways faculty could help Emily as she works with students:

- *Help students to be realistic.* Example: students show up at Lydia Place wanting “case management” experience in one quarter. This is a challenging request for an organization; it would require them to put significant training resources into a student who can't commit to more than 10 weeks of service.
- *Help students to value exposure.* Even if students are not doing the exact work they want to be doing when they get out of college, having an experience in the community can also be beneficial to them in many ways. They need help understanding that.
- *Do the research.* If both the student and the faculty member have a clear understanding of an organization, it can help everyone involved start with manageable expectations.

Dr. Kristen French – Introduction

Before engaging with the community, faculty can do a couple things to be better prepared:

- *Self examine.* We should know who we are, deeply, where we come from, and where those around us are coming from, before stepping off campus. Know that you don't know everything before you begin.
- *Attitude.* We need to be “extremists for love,” coming from a place of critical consciousness.

- *Relationship Matters.* We need to have an understanding of the social issues around us and build deep relationships before wading in. How long we stay in a community matters. Make your commitment long term.
- *Step lightly.* How you approach a community counts. Acknowledge that our way of being is just one way of being before working with people who are different than you.
- *Reciprocity.* Be prepared to give and receive. This isn't about you.

Kristen's big goal for herself: practice humility.

Big Ideas from the follow-up discussion

Part of the challenge of service-learning is helping students of privilege learn what they don't know about themselves.

Longer experiences in the community are better. A year with an organization can, according to Emily, create a much deeper experience for a student at Lydia Place than 10 weeks.

Caution: we need to be aware that some students are students of privilege and some are not. We also need to make sure our service-learning is not educational voyeurism, giving higher education students an opportunity to "experience" a community different than their own. What does a 2-week reservation "immersion" really do for a native community?

Solidarity vs. advocacy vs. partnership. In some settings one of these avenues may be better than others for engaging in diverse communities.

A challenge of privilege is that sometimes we assume that we are invited in to any community, and that our presence there is good. This is not the case.

We need to teach students not to view the people they are "serving" or engaged with from a deficient perspective. The communities we are entering are much bigger than the limited viewpoints we might approach them with.

Challenge for organizations: it is overwhelming to navigate each institution in town, all of their departments, the faculty within those departments, and various students who approach the organization. Maybe it would be better for organizations to have a few real relationships with specific departments, to be able to build better stronger connections that produce more mutually beneficial projects.

Example: Lydia Place doesn't need stuffed animal donations, and yet people who don't listen will continue to show up at their doorstep with stuffed animals to share. We must all transfer our positive energy into better, more helpful ways to solve housing security issues. Homelessness can be overcome, but not with teddy bear drives.

Higher education needs to help deliver the message of true community needs, rather than perpetuate these challenges with misguided service attempts.

How can we end the campus-community divide that separates us, and see everyone as part of the same community?

Listening, compassion for others, and speaking from the heart are missing pieces of our curriculum. Faculty can't miss out of teaching these things to our students, and it must start with each person overhauling their syllabus.

There is an assumption going around that this group of millennial students are particularly challenging. We cannot blame these students. We must create spaces in our classrooms for students to reveal who they really are, rather than painting them with broad strokes and assumptions.

Young people can and should give us hope. We need to look to these future generations for our motivation, and then look at different teaching structures to figure out the base way to take students to the next level in their learning.