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When I went back to college in 2004, my plan was to get a degree in elementary education and work with at risk students. I had spent twelve years as a school volunteer, Special Education Assistant, and elementary school secretary and I loved every minute of the experience. But after taking an elective course in substance abuse, my objective shifted toward social work. I realized that I could get a degree in social work and still work within the school system. Furthermore, I would have a degree that was also in demand in other fields such as medicine, geriatrics, and mental health.

When I became a junior at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), I really found my niche in research. In the spring of 2007, I did an independent research study evaluating social work courses offered at UTC during the fall semester of 2006 to determine if each course was meeting the goals and objectives of the program. In the summer of 2007, I worked on a UTC grant for the Bradley County United Way. My job was data entry and analysis of the community surveys for the final report. For the spring 2008 semester, my senior field-based research project will focus on the perceived role of the school social worker in Hamilton County Tennessee. I will also be conducting a domestic violence needs assessment in Rhea County as an individual research study.

I am currently taking an education course (EDUC 400) to fulfill the requirements for obtaining licensure in Tennessee as a school social worker. I completed the two other course requirements during fall 2007, they were School Social Work and the Law (SOCW 435) and Education and Learning (EDUC 512). When I graduate in May 2008 with a BSW, I will apply for State Licensure as a School Social Worker.

Leadership

In 2006-07 at UTC, I served as President of the Student Social Work Association (SSWA). Our SSWA service projects have included teddy bear collections for the Child Advocacy Center, creation of toiletry bags for the domestic violence shelter, collection of funds for the Chattanooga Area Food Bank, and the creation of a Truth Commission to document economic human rights violations in Chattanooga. In March 2007, I was named BSW Student of the Year by the Southeast Branch of NASW Tennessee Chapter. I currently serve as the student representative on the Cleveland State Community College Advisory Board for the Human Service/Social Work program.

As part of a team, I created and facilitated a Reminiscent Therapy Workshop for a local nursing home and a Truancy Prevention Workshop for the Soddy-Daisy School Network in Hamilton County. I edited the video and photographs taken at the U.S. Social Forum and the Chattanooga Truth Commission to create a DVD of the experience for inclusion in our final class report for Practice III (SOCW 407). In field I created two brochures for Hamilton County Schools, one of which will be utilized in the future as a handout for the school system to explain to parents how tardiness affects school performance.

Strengths and Value System

My strengths are my leadership skills, my organizational skills, my people skills, my strong work ethic, and my ability to think outside the box for solutions to problems. I am highly adaptable to the situation and can think quickly in a crisis. My big weakness is the ability to say no, which can sometimes stretch me too thin. I have also been pushed in my field placement to be more assertive in advocating for the rights of my clients as well

as for myself. This is easy for me to do for my clients and extremely hard for me to do personally.

The values I learned from my family are very similar to the six listed in the Code of Ethics. From my father I learned the importance of integrity and social justice. From my mother I learned the value of service to others, that the dignity and worth of a person matters, and that the importance of human relationships can facilitate hope and change. From my field experience and association with like minded individuals in college I am learning that these five values must go hand in hand with *competence* before I can embark on my own journey as a social worker. Through the social work classes at UTC, I am diving deeper into what my core values are and how I must continually monitor them so I will not project my beliefs on other cultures. I think the hands on learning experiences, such as the Immersion Project (SOCW 333) are helping me to broaden my worldview and to become more aware of issues that affect my fellow classmates. Sharing our perceptions, ideas, histories and experiences in field will make us more competent, knowledgeable, and sensitive to the needs of others and will guide us when we take the next big step into actual practice.

Future Plans

My personal plan is to attend graduate school and obtain my master's degree in social work. In five years I would like to be a college instructor in social work, so that I may share my strong desire to help others succeed and my love for research with a new generation of students. In the community sector, I will lobby local school districts to incorporate community service into the elementary and high school curriculum. I want to instill the desire for community service by creating internships at social service agencies

for at risk students to spark interest in social service as a career. We now have a whole generation of disaffected youth whose main goal in life is to make money; we must help them to realize the importance of volunteerism and the gratification that comes not from material wealth but from helping out their fellow man. Also in the community sector, I will try to pull together a network of local leaders to implement an outreach program that is a dream of mine: a “*Doctors Office on Wheels*” that would go to area schools once a month and to rural areas in the county in a completely outfitted mobile unit that would also include dental services. Volunteers recruited from area high schools and colleges would serve internships for their required community service hours alongside the medical professionals. And of course a social worker would be an integral part of the team to make people aware of other social services available to them.

Self-care

As a social worker and as a female, I tend to always put other people’s needs before my own. One major point that I have taken from both class and field is the need to nurture one’s self. Although this is a hard concept to follow, I have found small ways to do this every day. On my long drive to and from school and field I always turn off the cell phone and listen to music which soothes even the most horrific day. Every night I share with my husband one good and one bad experience that I had that day. In the weekly supervisory sessions, my field instructor and I share one good thing that surprised us during the week. And I can always count on my cohort to allow me to vent, rant, complain, and move on without being judged because we are all in this educational journey together and we have vowed to support each other to the end!