

Bethany G. Roberts

Dr. William Mountz

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### Service Learning Reflection Paper

For my Honors Service Learning project this spring, I volunteered with the Pumpkin Patch Childcare Center associated with Lafayette House over the course of the Spring 2022 semester. My volunteer work consisted of helping in the infant room, where most of my duties consist of cleanup and helping with naptime in the infant room. My work with Lafayette House and the Pumpkin Patch this semester resulted in a better understanding of the daycare and the mindset required to help there, as well as an opening for a new summer project with Lafayette House this year.

Lafayette House as a whole serves as a safe place for women who are victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and drug addiction. Their services include advocacy, support and counseling, case management, job training, and onsite childcare. This childcare is offered through the Pumpkin Patch Childcare center, a licensed center that is available for any community children with special slots saved for Lafayette House residents. While I've gone to Lafayette House in the past to help with Sunday afternoon services affiliated with my church, I did not offer hands-on volunteer work before this class; however, I've always carried a soft spot for the organization since, and knew immediately that I wanted to volunteer towards Lafayette House's mission in any way possible for this class.

I expected to enter this position nearly fully prepared with my background in childcare, but there was still a learning curve. I grew up traveling during the summers while my dad was a

children's evangelist, babysat many children over the years (including my nieces and nephew), and have worked in my church's kids' department for years. Volunteering in the daycare proved to be a huge difference, though. I was unaware going in of how much care and planning goes into keeping the children safe. I had to be a careful observer and a quick learner to pick up on the schedules, and had the pleasure of working with a kind and communicative staff. I learned practical skills such as cleaning up after mealtimes and successfully putting sleeping babies into cribs without waking them up, as well as common phrases used to establish a calm and constructive environment (including "feet on the floor, please" and "don't hit, use soft touches"). Mentally, I noticed how much the teachers collaborate and communicate to make sure each child has enough food at the daycare, a change of clothes when they have an accidental food or diaper mess, specific diapers and wipes for each child, and more. Additionally, teachers maintain individual conferences with the children's parent(s) to discuss their goals for the children and make sure both daycare workers and parent(s) are on the same page.

I ultimately noticed a common thread among the staff working at the Pumpkin Patch. While everyone carries a different role, personality, and set of interests, every team member I encountered holds a shared and genuine care for the children at the daycare. The teachers establish real connections with the children and work to keep them comfortable and developing healthily throughout their time at the Pumpkin Patch. This care includes intentional toys and books, playtime, healthy foods, and constant friendly interactions with the children.

This close attention and genuine compassion for the daycare kids proves to be essential considering the potential backgrounds of the children and their mothers. In order to generate a safe and constructive environment for the children of the community and of Lafayette House residents, it only makes sense that the staff carry patience, compassion, and empathy for the

daycare kids. This creates a truly beneficial place for the children to learn and develop in, and their mothers have the comfort of knowing that their children are being taken care of. The Pumpkin Patch has a confidentiality agreement with all staff and volunteers, including myself, to ensure the protection of their clients, extending only one of many forms of safety measures with Lafayette House staff.

This care transmitted between teacher and child is one of the main reasons I'm looking into continuing summer volunteer work with Lafayette House this year. The volunteer coordinator informed me that Lafayette House was looking for a childcare volunteer to watch residents' children during one-to-two-hour group night events throughout the summer, and I asked to be informed with further information over the summer. I learned over the course of the semester that providing childcare is one way to offer security and support for women who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or drug addiction; furthermore, I found that this is an area that I am more than happy to continue to provide help with over the summer.

Overall, my volunteer project this semester opened my eyes to one of many facets of community service through childcare, as well as the careful thought, planning, and relationship-building that comes from doing so.