Interns for Justice 2012 Final Report

Program Overview
Since 1990 the Moreau Center for Service and Leadership, formerly known as the Office of Volunteer Services, at the University of Portland has supported interns in summer service. Unlike other summer internships, Interns for Justice stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized in an 8-week intensive on-site internship. Interns build deep relationships with the people and communities in which they work, critically examine root causes of poverty and injustice, and are encouraged to use the lens of faith while reflecting on their experience. While the Interns for Justice program is only required to last 8 weeks, most students have opted to serve with their chosen communities throughout the duration of the 14-week academic break.

Each spring and summer the Moreau Center assists interns in solidifying an intern site, helping set parameters for their summer service, and supports them and their supervisors with advisement throughout the duration of the internship. In previous years, the Moreau Center has supported roughly 5 University of Portland students as Interns for Justice, this year, thanks to the generous funding of a new donor, the Interns for Justice program has been able to expand to 9 interns. In addition to receiving program support from the Center, students additionally received financial support in the forms of scholarship money and a generous living stipend. Scholarship and stipend funds were offered this year to students through an endowed Center grant in addition to a private donation by a local donor and a local foundation.

Each intern that goes through the program is unique and their experiences have become incredibly diverse. This summer the Center supported 9 interns through the Interns for Justice Program. The following information reflects the summer work of these interns, their syllabus outlining what was required, and their reflections on their experiences in their own words.

Thank you for your ongoing support and for making this program possible and for creating a unique opportunity for these students to immerse themselves in service and civic engagement in ways that they may have not been able to otherwise.

Interns for Justice: The Class of 2012
Andrea Monto—Provided care and assistance to adults transitioning out of substance abuse.
Central City Concern—Portland, OR

Monica Dangeti —Offered support and clinical assistance to families seeking information, testing, and treatment for lead infestation and lead poisoning.
Josiah Hill Clinic—Portland OR

Katie Van Dyke —Provided support and care for women and children coming out of domestic abuse.
Raphael House—Portland OR

Daniel Lunchick-Seymour —Provided support for local families and school children by coordinating summer school lunch program and maintaining local community gardens.
Village Gardens—Portland OR
Nastacia Voisin — Provided mentoring and educational support to local incoming 9th grade Roosevelt High School Students throughout their summer learning experience.
*Roosevelt High School — Portland OR*

Sommer McWhirter — Assisted local family shelter in every day process of shelter life and acquiring housing.
*Portland Homeless Family Solutions — Portland OR*

Sarah Wong — Engaged local elementary students in environmental education, supported local river organization around clean river action, and engaged local North Portland community in awareness around Portland’s Superfund site.
*Groundwork Portland — Portland OR*

Nicole Fluery — Provided therapeutic and programming support for children of families coming out of abusive and economically stressed conditions
*Children’s Relief Nursery — A LifeWorks Site, Portland OR*

Amanda Munro — Provided support and education to a poverty stricken community in Ecuador, teaching both students in English and Spanish, supporting children with disabilities in their learning, and supporting a local co-op effort started by elderly women in the community.
*Clara Luna School & Jose Rivera Chonillo Foundation - Puerto Lopez, Ecuador*

---

**IFJ 2012 Data:**

**Outputs:**
-A combined total of 2,570 hours of service were offered to site communities through the 2012 Interns for Justice program in the areas of education to underserved student populations, community health care and education, outreach to the homeless and those recovering from substance abuse or having recently left abusive homes, children with disabilities and children having experienced domestic abuse.

-2 strong and supportive curriculums were created and tested for communities, offering education on environmental stewardship and justice and alternative teaching ways for communities working with children with disabilities.

-Over 120 patients received free lead blood testing throughout the 2012 Interns for Justice program

-Over 900 lunches were served to low-income children throughout the 2012 Interns for Justice program

-Over 25 students received tutoring in writing, math, and science through the 2012 Interns for Justice program

-Over 25 volunteers have been recruited to continually support the Goose Hollow Shelter in Portland due to the post-program advocacy of a 2012 Intern for Justice

-More than 100 North Portland children learned about the importance of the Willamette River and what they can do to keep it clean

-The local domestic abuse crisis line was able to offer 90 additional hours of service because of a 2012 IFJ—this intern freed up additional staff to train more volunteers and offer additional services to the community.
Outcomes:
- Organizational capacity built, in collaboration with numerous partners, at local non-profits, government, and educational institutions.

- Hundreds of elementary, middle, and high school students in our community were mentored, showed compassion, care, and consistency in addition to receiving ongoing academic support this summer through IFJ.

- Curriculum was developed in collaboration with Groundwork Portland that encourages and promotes environmental education and justice for youth in local North Portland communities—this curriculum will be used in local PPS schools in the future.

- Hundreds of people learned about the ongoing harmful affects of lead and lead poisoning, in addition to receiving free lead blood testing.

- Families and individuals coming out of poverty and abuse received additional personal connection and support through extra hands made available by IFJ.

- A new teaching outline was created for children with disabilities in hopes that a new learning practice can take place to continue active learning.

- Many more fantastic moments of relationship building, understanding, mutual compassion and growth in addition to program development and sustaining momentum offered to Interns for Justice site communities.

***Throughout the summer the response when it came to impact that was received from the internship supervisors was grateful and repetitive:

“This internship allowed us to connect with more than 50 youth and several community partner organizations that we would not have been able to reach otherwise. Sarah has provided momentum for a new area of programming for our organization that I believe will grow and continue for years.”

“Our Intern has particularly bonded with one of our more difficult students; he is open with/responsive to her in a way that he is with nobody else in the program.”

“Dozens of better connected patients, a smooth transition for a program needing continuity to serve the population well.”

“Greatly enhanced ability to carry out organizational services and outreach activities in the community”

“Our Intern is an open-minded person, she is interacting well with the people in the community. She is a good teacher, she has a good methodology when teaching.”
The summer is in full effect and I know that many of you have already started to dig into your internship while others of you will be starting very soon. Hopefully information noted in this letter will be helpful for you as you start or continue your internship work. If at any time throughout the summer you have questions please let me know. Thanks!

**What am I doing and am I on the right track?**
Remember that the goal of your role in IFJ is to stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, build deep relationships with the people and communities in which you work, critically examine root causes of poverty and injustice, and use the lens of faith while reflecting on this experience.

All of your sites will provide the opportunity to do this great work. Great check-in questions to your experience could be the following. When you are unsure of why you are doing this or if you are on track ask yourselves these questions.

*Am I standing alongside those in need in this community? Who are they? What does it look like for me to do this work? What does this feel like? What do I think about it?*

*What are the roots and causes of poverty and injustice that affect this community/population I am working with? What does this feel like? What do I think about it?*

*What are possible solutions to end these causes? What are the small, or big, tangible things I can do now to engage these issue? How have I acted? Why have I been hesitant or unsure?*

*What makes up my spirituality/faith and when I consider the community I am working with what does my lens of faith tell me? How do I feel? What is helpful and what is not as helpful?*

**Requirements**
In addition to participating in your internship and the work that is being asked of you, there are some additional requirements the Moreau Center is asking for and would like you to participate in. These items **will be due no later than September 4th 2012** or at the end of your internship this summer – whichever comes first.

1. **Journal** – Please keep a journal of your experience that you don’t mind sharing with Laura, Melissa, and Pat. Share your experiences, what moves you, what stirs you, how you feel, things you are thinking about or are curious about. This is just an encouragement for you to be able to process on paper. There is no maximum. We would like you to keep these journals, but would like a photocopy of **at least 10 entries** throughout the summer due September 4th 2012. Journals are now ready for you to pick up in the Moreau Center at any time.

2. **Read & Watch** – We would like you to read x articles and watch “Waiting for Superman” – a documentary on the decline of the education in America, throughout the summer and write a reflection on these articles incorporated in your final paper that integrates what you have done in your internship, what your overall thoughts are about your experience, and key connections from the articles you have read.
We would like you to read, watch, and reflect on the following articles:

1. The New Orleans Agriculture Street Landfill:
   http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/Jones/agstreet.htm
3. Poverty in the US – New findings:
   and please also watch the short video located at
   http://austin.ynn.com/content/health/283673/healthy-living--senior-isolation
5. Gender and Substance Abuse: http://www.elementsbehavioralhealth.com/addictiontreatment/women-have-special-needs-in-substance-abuse-treatment/
6. Decline of Education in the US: Documentary “Waiting for Superman” – available through Netflix. If you have a difficult time access this film please let me know and I can help you find it at the local library.

3. Write the final paper – Final paper, as noted above, should be outlined with 4 distinct subheadings addressing the following four areas:

   1- What did you do for your internship and how did you fulfill the 4 IFJ roles: standing in solidarity, building relationships, questioning the roots of injustice in your context, and reflecting through the lens of your faith.
   2- What were your thoughts and what feelings did you realize through the experience.
   3- What key things from your reading/ documentary you can you connect to your experience.
   4- What are your next steps in relation to your internship experience?

   -The reflection paper should be 6-8 pages double spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt type font, with footnotes. Any questions please let us know.

**Please note that each intern is required to complete these requirements in addition to providing 250-300 hours of service throughout the summer months.

INTERNS FOR JUSTICE REFLECTIONS: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE REFLECTIONS WRITTEN BY THE IFJ CLASS OF 2012. TO CONTACT THEM DIRECTLY OR FOR FURTHER QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT MELISSA IN THE MOREAUCENTER- MARLEYM@UP.EDU
This past summer, I had the great pleasure of working as an Intern for Justice for the organization Central City Concern in a program called the Recuperative Care Program. Central City Concern is a Portland-based organization that works with less privileged populations to provide resources and improve the quality of life among these populations. In their words, they provide, “comprehensive solutions to ending homelessness and achieving self-sufficiency.”

In my roles as a co-worker and as a case manager, I worked closely with other case managers and many patients, building strong relationships with many of them. I enjoyed the informal nature of case management as opposed to therapy, which was my original career goal. I also liked my work with the homeless population, which was a population I had not originally considered working with. In building rapport with patients, one of my favorite parts of working at RCP was hearing their stories. We had addicts, trauma victims, veterans, and the occasional mad scientist. It was so beneficial getting to know people in the population I hope to serve as a social worker as well as people working as professionals in my hopeful future career.

Through hearing the stories of patients at RCP, I discovered many cases where the system had failed them and uncovered roots of injustice in the Portland community. There were drug addicts who had become homeless as a result of their addiction and were now unable to afford the inpatient treatment they needed to get clean, veterans who were receiving inadequate help from the Veterans Association and had fallen through the cracks, and individuals with undiagnosed mental disorders who couldn’t understand why their minds and memories were failing them when they had once been so capably independent. These gaps in providing care were surprising and saddening to me, but I loved that I was able to work with various resources and network to improve the lives of these people that society had forgotten.

My work at RCP has given me my first foot in the door as a social worker and given me the skills and confidence that I needed to move forward with my career. The next steps in relation to my internship experience are already underway, as I take the experience and knowledge that I gained at RCP through my Interns for Justice internship to my new practicum placement at the Residential Alcohol and Drug detention unit for juveniles at the Department of Community Justice. Although the two placements are vastly different, I gained confidence at RCP in my abilities as a social worker that will be very helpful in my new placement and next steps. Thank you for making this opportunity possible, it was a great summer.
Of Lead and Life

I spent my time this summer interning at Josiah Hill Clinic. It was an amazing four month experience that helped me learn more about the local community and helped me become more socially aware. Josiah Hill Clinic started out in the back of Josiah Hill’s car, teaching the local community about the toxic effects of lead and promoting awareness in the community about how to prevent lead toxicity. I received training to conduct blood lead testing for both kids and adults while working with Josiah Hill throughout my internship. During my training I learned that a committee was formed in the 1970’s to get rid of lead in the community, houses, plumbing, vehicles, everyday utensils and anything else. 40 years later however, lead is still prevalent in our world and community. I was surprised to learn that there is also a correlation between lead poisoning and neighborhoods with high minority populations.

I started to wonder what caused this correlation and had many questions: Was the funding to remove lead from homes specifically not used for minority or low-income neighborhoods? Did wealthy people have enough resources to move away and live in newer housing built without the use of lead? Is this injustice isolated and simply related to the issue of lead in homes or does it circle back to the larger issue of poverty as a whole. To me this seemed to be a vicious circle. If you are living in poverty, you are constantly trying to make ends meet, so you don’t have the luxury to find time off and try to fight for your rights or you might not be aware of the injustice because of the lack of access to good education and a lack of resources and so on.

Despite my many questions, I learned so much through my internship. During my time with Josiah Hill, I had the opportunity to interact with many types of people. While conducting lead screenings in the office and during outreach programs I met so many new people and had the opportunity to get to know them. My favorite opportunity was during blood lead tests. The machine that reads the amount of blood in lead takes two minutes to result. I took complete advantage of this time to engage in conversation. I was surprised at how well you can know a person in two minutes if you listen and ask the right questions. I truly felt like I was making roots in the local community. Additionally, through this experience I got to interact with people that were experiencing poverty, a new experience for me. It was very interesting to see the world from their perspective and I found that many people living in poverty live one day at a time. I feel like I got to experience a snippet of their life and it is an experience that I will carry with me forever. It taught me a lot about humility, humanity and finding the happiness in everything I approach despite my situation.

This summer I truly feel that I had the opportunity for personal growth and exploration. I was initially looking for a very academic and clinical placement, but I am very glad that I participated in the Interns for Justice program and ended up at Josiah where they take a holistic approach to health. This semester I will still be involved with Josiah Hill Clinic to some degree. We recently started working on creating the “Healthy Teens Project” with the EPA grant we just received and I will still be working with them until the project is ready to go. If my schedule allows I may also help with presentations in the local high schools. I believe that we should be the change we want to see in the world, and I will seek to utilize the knowledge I have gained this summer to be the change around me. Thank you for this opportunity.
My time at Raphael House has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I have learned so much: about the issues facing victims of domestic violence, about the system that fails to stop it, about the realities of working in a non-profit environment, and, most importantly, about myself. During this internship, I spent the bulk of my time working directly with residents in shelter: responding to needs and requests, being a friendly face to residents, and answering the door/monitoring the security system. I would also simultaneously be the person responsible for answering the crisis line, which often meant fielding requests for shelter space, communicating with other shelters, guiding callers to other resources, and talking callers through crisis situations. The remainder of my time was spent in the Advocacy Center. Ultimately, I saw my role at Raphael House as one dedicated to serving the needs of this particular community.

Building relationships was a major part of my internship experience. Because I was at the shelter four days a week, I interacted with the residents almost as often as the primary advocates, but in a less formal way. I was able to have conversations with people as they were coming and going from the shelter; I was always there to respond to needs and requests. I think I also developed a good relationship with many of the children in shelter, especially those who weren’t old enough to go out of shelter without their moms, but were old enough to have to keep themselves busy during the day while their moms worked on things like finding housing and resources, or whose moms just were so mentally and physically exhausted that they weren’t always able to engage with their kiddos. I have gained so much from these relationships, such as a newfound understanding for what it is like to be on welfare and have to rely on underfunded community resources for every need. I never believed in the existence of “welfare queens” who are just too lazy to find a real job, but now I realize even more how far from the truth that stereotype really is.

My interactions with residents of shelter have also led me to a new understanding of the causes of this injustice—a systemic lack of respect for the role of women in families and society, as well as a failure to recognize that relationships matter, even at a young age, and that educators and legislators have a responsibility to provide education about warning signs of abuse. The causes of this problem are everywhere, at every level. Individual people are abusers, but so is a society that allows women to be paid less, for occupations that are considered “feminine” or have less prestige, for maternal roles to be completely unrewarded and disregarded by those in power.

I think that in order to address the problem of domestic violence, we need to start educating people about respecting others, as well as teaching children and young teens what a healthy relationship looks like and what warning signs to look out for. More often than not, domestic violence starts as dating violence, usually at a young age. If young teens are better equipped to look out for signs of abuse, in their own relationships as well as those of their peers, I believe we may be able to reduce the level of violence that results in families seeking emergency shelter. I want to put a stop to this vicious cycle before it begins. The Interns for Justice Program, this internship experience, has made me realize what I am passionate about, and has given me the tools to get started. Thank you for this experience, for which without it I may not have come to this realization and the clarity that will lead me to my next steps for hope and change.
Building Community
One Lunch at a Time

This summer I interned with Village Gardens, a sub-organization of Janus Youth Programs. Village Gardens has several different groups that do community work in the North Portland area. The main branches of Village Gardens are Food Works, Community Programs, Community Health Workers, Livestock, and Kids Programs. This summer I worked with three of these programs. Food Works is a program that gets teens involved in their first work experiences by giving them opportunities to work in the planting, harvesting, and sale of organic produce all grown in Portland. The Livestock program is a small, community-run chicken coup in the St. John’s Woods housing development, apparently the only such program within a major city’s limits in the whole country. Finally, the Kids Programs branch of Village Gardens worked to provide kids with food, entertainment, and learning in a non-formal setting. It was here that I had the most direct involvement, and I volunteered with Ms. Angela Martin, the Kids Program director, for three months this summer. My main responsibility was to support Angela in her everyday duties, including distributing free lunches on behalf of Portland Public Schools’ “Summer Lunch” program in both St. John’s Woods and New Columbia, planning and coordinating activities for the children including working in the local gardens, maintaining a healthy and safe environment, and preparing a healthy snack when possible.

Early on, I found that the greatest impact for my time throughout the summer would be relationship building. From my very first day at the Village Gardens office I was told that the most important goal of the organization is to protect and nurture a sense of community. Those who begin to work with kids quickly discover that children are often the very heart of a community. I was able to meet many people I probably would not have come into contact with otherwise because the kids drew their parents and their friends out into the space that the rest of the community shared. I was also lucky enough to have a resource like Angela who always made me feel welcome and who already had a deep connection with the community long before I started working there. I found it easiest to talk to the children who were curious about who I was and why I was there. They were easy to help, and I felt connected to the youth population from my very first day onward. More gradually I began to meet the parents and “patriarchs” and “matriarchs” in St. John’s Woods and New Columbia. I think that when they saw me work with the kids it was easier to trust me and welcome an outsider.

The toughest question I found myself asking was in relation to injustice. How can one person stand against the entrenched injustice that, while no longer so vivid, is still visible in Portland neighborhoods like St. John’s? Most people, especially undergraduate student interns, do not have the power or voice necessary to overturn the societal structures that cause injustice to occur. My time at Village Gardens showed me that we can, however, educate ourselves about these issues, support community efforts, and stand in solidarity with those affected populations. An example of this could be giving out lunches to hungry children in the summertime or sharing garden space to plant sustainable food together or it could mean buying food from a community-run grocery store rather than a corporate supermarket; Village Market would be a great alternative located in the New Columbia neighborhood. The most important point however is that no act is too small. Justice is an attitude, an ideal reality that is not always perfect, but if we make the conscious effort to help others, we approach this ideal as close as we are able to—hopefully within community.

To those who have helped make this program possible for me and my fellow interns—thank you so much for your support and for the opportunity to engage this community.
When I accepted this internship I explicitly wished to engage in a service project that would allow me to work with youth. I feel lucky to have had such a perfect opportunity offered to me in the form of a summer civic engagement camp, where I worked as a mentor with incoming Roosevelt High School 9th graders. I worked with both 9th graders and Roosevelt interns where I was required to engage myself fully in my role as a mentor. Our days were filled with learning—a variety of different subjects and electives. I would learn alongside the students and be present to their questions and concerns. I was there to understand their struggles and to help them recognize the value of themselves and their place in their community. I tried to impress on them through words and action the benefits of open communication, good work ethic, taking initiative and showing compassion.

The summer civic engagement camp included a group of incoming 9th graders as well as seven RHS interns who were upperclassmen/women. One of the benefits of working with such a small group was being able to build solid relationships with all of these students. It was difficult at times to connect with certain students, or to get them to trust me. Some were shy, some open, and some were dealing with troubles from their personal lives. The other interns and I spent a lot of time trying to listen to the students’ stories and build friendships with them. I learned a lot from the students about the community of North Portland, and how and why it operates the way it does. To have a student confide in me their fears about high school, or talk about their family, or share a book they loved was always a wonderful experience, because it meant that they viewed me worth of their trust. I feel that many of the struggles these students faced came from very local sources, and as a mentor I’m glad I had the chance to have uplifting discussions about life and educational success with them.

Working with the students this summer I found myself really thinking about apathy and complacency—especially when it comes to the local community’s engagement with education and minority populations. I think that one of the main sources of injustice is just everyday complacency. It’s a mental adjustment, an acceptance that things like poverty and suffering exist. As a society we’ve decided to simply accept the existence of injustice and figure bad things just happen to some people and we shrug our shoulders. I believe that if more people worked towards a common good they would realize that when we abandon one part of society, we ultimately damage the whole.

Ultimately from my summer internship I came to the conclusion that I don’t believe you can change things from the outside, but you need to be a part of the inside to truly change things. It’s easy to try to identify patterns, causes, and to isolate problems. It’s so easy to try to lean in and mend the glitches. But issues like poverty, homelessness, and discrimination can’t be patched up. If you want to fix the problem, you have to be inside the pattern; you have to be part of the weaving. The belief that human problems can be fixed with an external understanding has to be tempered with active service, so that the problem stays real rather than becoming abstract.

Thank you so much for giving me this incredible opportunity to spend my summer learning and serving a great community of students.
Life and Hope in Goose Hollow

This summer I was given the incredible opportunity to work at a wonderful Non-Profit Corporation called Portland Homeless Family Solutions (PHFS). Portland Homeless Family Solutions’ mission is to offer temporary, emergency shelter to homeless families with children; to provide transitional services to help homeless families find permanent housing and achieve self-sufficiency; and to advocate for the alleviation of family homelessness and its root causes. PHFS operates two emergency shelters for homeless families - the Goose Hollow Family Shelter and the Thirteen Salmon Family Center. Goose Hollow is a night shelter for homeless families with children and is located downtown Portland at the First United Methodist Church. Thirteen Salmon is a day shelter for the families staying at Goose Hollow and it is located downtown at the First Unitarian Church of Portland. I truly loved my time with this organization and am so proud of the work it does.

My role as an intern this summer included many different responsibilities including being an overnight shelter host, cooking meals for families, spending time with homeless children, assisting homeless families in acquiring housing, and getting to work behind the scenes of a non-profit organization. Almost every week I volunteered as an overnight host at the shelter. This is the greatest form of solidarity that I have ever experienced. Each night that I slept at the shelter I was able to experience the same things that the families at the shelter experience each night. I slept on the floor along side them, I eat the same food from the food pantry and Oregon Food Bank, and I participated in the same routine. The nights that had been spent at the shelter are the nights that I will remember the most. On these nights the families welcomed me into their world and they treated me as part of their family. We stayed up talking together and we ate breakfast together very early in the morning when the kids were still rubbing sleep out of their eyes.

This summer has only solidified my opinion that the reason these families are in these situations is from lack of support in tough economic times. In one of the articles I read this summer for my Interns for Justice internship noted that 4.3 million people in the US are below the poverty line right now. In my opinion from what I have seen, the millions of people that suffer from poverty lack the support that is needed from family, friends, and the government. People come here with many different stories. The most common denominator in all of them is that they came from a long line of poverty, poverty is what they know and they believe they have no support to help pull them out of it. That is what PHFS is designed to do better then anything else. Families leave the shelter with the support system they need to try and pull themselves out of the never-ending battle of homelessness. In my future I want to be able to create this same kind of support system for individuals as well as families who have fallen below the poverty line. Thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity this summer!
As an Intern for Justice with the University of Portland’s Moreau Center for Service and Leadership, I was given the opportunity to find a non-profit organization with which I could work in order to explore my interests while serving society in a meaningful way. With this, I chose to work with Groundwork Portland, an environmental justice group that strives to empower people of color, low-income community members, and disadvantaged youth. In my role as an intern here, I brought focus to the Willamette River and the Portland Harbor, which was identified as a Superfund site in 2000. I specifically worked with community outreach, and also created and implemented a summer school course curriculum for students at a North Portland elementary school. My experience with Groundwork Portland has proven to be incredibly valuable and when I reflect on my summer’s work, I can already identify how I have grown because of it and I am confident that this mindful and intentional service will help inform me wherever I go in the future.

As Groundwork is all about community empowerment, this organization served as a great foundation upon which to become a community connection, ally, and resource. In matters of environmental justice, I have found it easy to connect with others and realize the importance of individual experiences. Sharing these testimonies helps to build a community cohesion and commonality among persons that can be very powerful. Nurturing this kind of solidarity also serves as a gateway to building connections and relationships with others, which I found to be the most rewarding aspect of my internship.

I have always enjoyed working with children, yet, unlike my previous work with youth, I found that a classroom environment highlighted and enhanced the relationships we were able to build. Seeing and working with the same students at a school consistently over a period of time proved to be incredibly beneficial, and the resulting links that resulted in the classroom were certainly one of the best parts of my experience. Reaching out to community members to learn about their relationship to the river also provided opportunities to build more relationships. Whether I met new people at the Portland Harbor Field Day, happened upon someone using the river, or participated in a Portland Harbor Community Coalition meeting, this internship facilitated numerous ways to create connections with individuals and community partners. I certainly had the chance to learn and share with others and the connections that have been created were integral to my experience.

My summer as an Intern for Justice was truly valuable. I was able to learn about myself and society to an extent I had not anticipated, and I have built connections that I hope to foster in the future. Looking forward, I already know that I will continue to work with Groundwork Portland as the organization persists in developing the Portland Harbor Community Coalition. Here, I hope to serve as a resource in reaching out to the North Portland community and grow the outreach of our association. I also have plans to share my experience as an intern at an event I am helping to coordinate with my internship supervisor. Together, we will gather with other students and community members at the University of Portland campus to learn about environmental justice and the Willamette River. I can already see how I have grown inside the classroom and outside in the community, and I expect this will serve me well later in life. Thank you for making this opportunity possible as I am so happy to be working with Groundwork and other community partners still and I look forward to continuing to build upon and share my experience in the future.
Your Job is to Love

This summer I had the opportunity to work at the St. John’s Children’s Relief Nursery in Portland. I volunteered in their therapeutic classrooms and day care room Monday through Thursday. As an Elementary Education major I have spent an enormous amount of time in classrooms, but this was nothing like the experiences I’ve had before. The children were all under the age of five and did not come from ordinary backgrounds and the teachers’ goals for the children are not what you are going to find in the Oregon State Standards. The children I worked with came from backgrounds of poverty, abuse, neglect, and various other traumatic experiences. And the goals of the teachers at the Children’s Relief Nursery (CRN) are to help them deal with these experiences and the effects they have had on their lives. One of the overall goals of the CRN is to address this injustice as early as possible. To intervene in these children’s lives before the age of five has been proven to make an enormous difference in the rest of their lives. The CRN also provides social services and education to the families that qualify in various ways. Classes for expecting mothers and parent-infant classes are offered so that parents can build healthy relationships with their children and educate them in order to best prevent child exposure to traumatic environments and experiences.

Each child at the CRN came from different experiences that shaped them; even those that are siblings are affected differently from the same experiences. For example, if a child has suffered from neglect their oral language skills are often highly underdeveloped for their age – a case that was true for many children that I worked with at the CRN. When one child was angry or frustrated, he would lash out in a slew of curse words, upturn and destroy everything around him, and often hit or kick the person or thing that was upsetting him. But if you grow up in an environment where you have learned that is the normal reaction to frustration, what else can be expected from you? This is the challenge that the teachers at the CRN and I faced: how do we teach these children how to appropriately deal with emotional and process the events in their lives?

It was no easy task but we made a difference. Some days I felt as though our endless repetition of teaching appropriate ways to express emotion, peer interaction, and conflict resolution were in vain. Everyday it’s the same struggles. But it all becomes worth it the day a child asks for a toy nicely instead of taking it out of the hands of another child, or when a situation is starting to escalate and one child say “I’m sorry,” and the other responds with “It’s okay,” or walks away instead of the normal response of screaming curse words and pushing them over. Those are the triumphant days when you know that all of your energy has not been in vain and that good habits are in fact forming —I am actually making a difference.

Running around with or after during the day, with of after small children, wears one out. Most days I came home completely exhausted and needing a nap and wishing I could sleep in just a little bit longer the next morning. But then the faces of the children I work with would pop into my head. I could hear one little girl’s sassy voice asking me “What’s your name?” and “Are you my frien’?” just as she does every day. I would remember how much another loves to grab my hand and run around the playground when we go outside. And out the door I’d run to catch my bus to see those smiling, sleepy, or crying faces that I love so much. I had grown to love each and every one of those children, quirks, tantrums and all. That was my job at the CRN, to love the children in front of me. This was another point of conversation in our Therapeutic Principles training session: your job is to be a loving, stable presence in these children’s lives. This idea not only helped me build the relationships I had with the children at the CRN but also completely changed the way I now view my future career as a teacher. **Thank you for this wonderful experience—both the children and I will never forget it.
As an Intern for Justice I spent my summer in Puerto Lopez, Ecuador, teaching English to public school kids, teaching and working with children with disabilities in a special school, and helping with an elderly women’s craft making co-op. I worked with two organizations: Clara Luna Language School and Jose Rivera Chonillo Foundation. During the course of my two and a half months there, Puerto Lopez became my community. I stood in solidarity with the children and elderly in the community, explored the roots of the injustices they faced, reflected on my own spirituality, and built meaningful relationships with many wonderful people that I never would have met otherwise.

The first group I worked with in Puerto Lopez were the public school children at Jaime Roldos School, where I taught English to four classes of children ages six to thirteen. Jaime Roldos was a small school with very few resources, and all the children came from extremely poor families. I stood in solidarity with the students and the teachers there by working with them every day from the inside of the school rather than the outside. Instead of telling them what I thought was wrong with the way school was taught, I spent three hours every day teaching classes, tailoring my lessons to fit the skill levels of the children in each class.

I also spent a lot of time and the majority of my energy with the special children at the Jose Rivera Chonillo Foundation. This school ended up being my biggest challenge, but also my biggest success. I went to Jose Rivera three times a week to teach children with disabilities how to read (in Spanish). It was one of the hardest and yet incredibly rewarding things I’ve ever done in my life. I don’t think I can imagine a more disadvantaged group of people; not only were these kids poor, but they were also mentally disadvantaged in a world that had no place for them. I enjoyed offering these students strong support throughout the summer and sometimes I even worked with just one or two students at a time.

But despite the minor frustrations, I had so much fun teaching. I loved each and every one of my students, even the mischievous ones. I joked with them and laughed with them, and no matter what, we always had fun in class. It felt so good watching their progress in wrestling with their learning. By the time I left, my students who were studying English could conduct a basic greeting, and name the parts of the body, certain animals, and common foods. My older students also knew verbs and could construct basic sentences about what they liked to do in their spare time. When I left, each student had a basic foundation that they could then build on in their pursuit of the English language, something that will help them enormously later in life. The students at Jose Rivera learned how to write letters from understanding, not simply from memory, for the first time—a huge milestone for them. Getting the students their was such a process that required patience and persistence, but we got there.

My time in Ecuador was so impacting and I learned so much for my experience. I was determined to make sure that the work that I got to be a part of continues. I created a manual with step-by-step instructions on how to teach letters to the students there for the teachers who remained and any other volunteers after me, complete with pages and pages of games I had come up with. I know these kids are capable of learning how to read, and I won’t let them fail. Thank you so much for your interest and investment in this program —Interns for Justice has changed my life forever.