

Shower Ministry Project

Water Resources Policy Initiatives (WRPI) Community Water Internship
Program

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Project Summary

My project for my internship with WRPI for the SAWPA was a very unique one for a variety of reasons. The location was not a traditional setting to conduct research for an academic project. Regardless, there was a multitude of ways that I contributed to a better watershed for disadvantaged communities. The homeless population lacks resources and access to basic water needs, such as drinking and bathing. The ability to have water to drink and tend to personal cleanliness is a basic human right. The simple act of showering and tending to hygiene makes a huge difference in a person's attitude and well being. Inarguably if one doesn't have water to drink they cannot thrive. The services provided at the Shower Ministry program are essential in helping the homeless population who often gets left out regarding the overall allocation of the watershed. It is important to have spaces where one of the most marginalized groups in our society is able to have access to the basic right of water.

My project location was a church that held a biweekly service for the local homeless population, 'Shower Ministry', where showers, meals, clothes, hygiene, and other basics were given for free to those who visited. My specific job duties for the Shower Ministry were to help run the shower service by managing the list, timing showers, making sure showers were stocked with supplies, passing bath towels, doing laundry (of the dirty bath towels), and any other areas that needed my help at the church. A pattern I would notice often among regular patrons of the program is that many would stop by before appointments: job interviews, doctor visits, meetings with social workers, and other events that were important in helping them improve their life situations. A simple shower made a significant difference in their confidence going into these appointments.

Overall though, more than 90 percent of my time was dedicated to helping manage the shower service part of the 'Shower Ministry'. My internship began the summer before my senior year at Long Beach State, June 2018, so I was only able to complete around 147 hours before graduating May 2019. The 'Shower Ministry' is a program that only runs Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m., with many participants lining up at 5 a.m. to sign onto the shower list. Since the program only ran so often, I was not able to complete all my internship hours (only 70%), even though I tried to volunteer 5 hour shifts whenever my schedule allowed.

When I first started my project I didn't know what to fully expect because of the location and position description that I found online for the internship. My responsibilities were explained to me clearly when I visited the project site for the first time; to help run the shower service. A 'project' was never really assigned to me to focus on, which the leaders at the church were confused about as well. My role at my project location was more of volunteer work, not

really research or quantifiable data. I talked about this misunderstanding a lot with the internship fellows, because my location did not really have a quantifiable or academic 'project'.

This brought up the issue of how are nontraditional spaces navigated with when associated with higher education projects. I don't blame anyone for the unique situation I was in throughout the whole internship regarding my project location.

Conclusion

I still got a lot personally from the experience, especially working with such a misrepresented community. I admit when I first started I did not know what to fully expect, especially when I misunderstood what it meant to be homeless as well and thought of the stereotypes instead. I got close to the other volunteers, who were part of the homeless population, and didn't feel that underneath it all, they were that different from me so I felt and grew an empathy and understanding I didn't have before. Overall I feel very fortunate to the SAWPA and WRPI for exposing me to a new experience that has helped my interpersonal communication skills grow regarding different types of people. This is an important skill and understanding to have, especially as sometimes we become insulated from problems, that we as people in higher education, are always learning about and trying to improve in our communities.