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Alphapointe
BoysGrow
The Don Bosco Centers
Hope Faith Ministries
Journey to New Life
Legal Aid of Western Missouri
Mattie Rhodes Center
Operation Breakthrough
Sheffield Place

Thanks to this collaboration, 22 college interns experienced a summer filled with service, faith, and growth.

Each week, interns reflected on their experiences and connected their service to their faith. Read on for a glimpse at the impact this summer had on these interns, organizations, and our community.
Blessed
By Katie Black
Operation Breakthrough Neighborhood Intern

My summer has been full of continuous memorable and formative moments that have led me to understand that a little bit of love and positivity is all that a person needs sometimes. Prior to my internship, I already had a lot of experience working with people and children who come from lower-income households or families. So when I began working at Operation Breakthrough, I did not feel as if the atmosphere was brand new to me. Many of the kids were attention insufficient or stressed out which in turn caused them to have breakdowns or temper tantrums, consequently getting them into trouble. In my opinion and experiences, strong and trustworthy relationships/connections are the absolute most important thing for a child to have while growing and maturing.

With that being said, I believe that my most valuable role that I’ve played this summer has simply been that go-to person that these young children have if they ever need to talk about something, let out their anger, or just need a hug or a smile. When it comes to kids, I like to think that I have a 6th sense that’s just knowing when their moods are a little bit off for whatever unknown reason. This summer has taught me that patience and kindness are essential to the well-being of children and that you can’t forget to educate their hearts along with their minds. My faith has also grown throughout this experience, in knowing that God has a plan for all of the little babies that I’ve taken under my wing within the past 2 months and that I should trust Him to keep them safe and happy because I can’t do it all by myself.
Recognizing God’s Presence
By Gabrielle Boucher
Hope Faith Ministries Garden and Client Care Intern

This week was an eventful week, but also a week filled with growth and learning. I met some new people that came to harvest in the garden. I really enjoy when people come to harvest from the garden because I get to hear their stories and where they come from. It is really cool to see where the food is going and to see the people that are actually going to enjoy. I also just love hearing my supervisor in the garden talk about the garden. She has so much passion for the garden because she truly cares about the people in the community. She really does have a beautiful heart! Her outlook on life inspires me on the daily. She makes me want to grow in my faith and just be a better person all around. She holds herself to a high standard which makes me want to hold myself to a high standard and live the way Jesus wants me to. I'm so glad she is my supervisor!

In the late mornings and afternoons, I work at the guest services window after I finish in the garden. Since we have been at our sites for about three weeks now, I have started to recognize the guests that come in on a regular or semi-regular basis. While I, of course, do not want people to have to come to Hope Faith because they are in need, it is truly a blessing to get to know these people and get to know their personalities. It makes me care so much and want to help them in any way I can.

Most of the people I encounter are quite kind given their circumstances. I feel like this week, in particular, I have noticed this. It really does amaze me how people who are in such distress and have reason to be in bad moods are still kind and thankful. Thinking about this more, I realize that the explanation for this kindness is no doubt the Lord working in this organization.

One of my favorite encounters I have is with a man who always signs up late or at the last minute for the shower. I tell him to sign up early, but he always comes right at the end. Sometimes he gets to take a shower and sometimes he does not. The thing about this is that whether or not he gets to take a shower or not, he still has a smile on his face, thanks us, and waves goodbye. Then, he comes back a few minutes later to check his mail. Again, whether or not he has mail or not he thanks us with a smile and waves goodbye. I know God is working in these people at Hope Faith; I can see it! I know God is working through me too as he gives me a good attitude and patience for things I have a hard time with. Sometimes I am not sure how to respond to a guest’s question and have to figure it out. I know God is helping me in these sometimes stressful situations!
In the past couple of weeks, Hope Faith has started conducting some surveys with our guests to discover ways that we can serve them better. I have gotten the opportunity to help conduct these surveys, and it’s been such an eye opening experience. I have gotten to have some genuine face-time with the guests in a more relaxed situation while they sat down with me to take the survey and chat. An interaction that really stood out to me from this is one afternoon when a guest that I have gotten to know a little in the past couple weeks finished up his survey and wished me a blessed weekend. Before he walked back to his seat, he stopped and asked if he could have a hug. It seemed like this simple gesture meant a lot to him, and I felt so lucky to be able to make someone feel a little more loved.

Working at Hope Faith has opened me up to so many new ideas, but something that I had never thought about before, is all the ways in our everyday lives that we can make people feel loved. Whether we do it through sharing a piece of candy, or talking to someone for a few minutes to see how their morning was, adding that little bit of joy into someone else’s life is one of the easiest things we can do. I am blessed this summer to have so many chances to help others, and I am excited to continue learning from the generosity of those around me.
Building and Challenging

By Makenzie Fuss

Sheffield Place Program and Development Intern

When I think of moments at Sheffield Place that I will remember forever there are many times that come to mind. One of my favorite things to do is to hang out in the lobby of Sheffield with the moms and kids just playing and getting to know one another. One conversation that really sticks out to me is when I was sitting outside with one of the moms watching her daughter play on the playground. She said to me that as long as her daughter had a smile on her face she knew that she would be able to smile too. As long as her daughter was healthy and happy she would work to be the best she could for her. I know most of the moms at Sheffield truly feel that as well, and it just makes me so happy to listen to them rave about their children.

Reflecting on my time at Sheffield Place so far I know it has both built and challenged my faith simultaneously. I have not considered myself a “good Catholic” for a long time, as I do not go to church regularly and have focused much more on the service side of things than actual participation in mass. It is hard for me to think about why exactly that is, especially since I have always gone to Catholic schools and was raised in a Catholic household. Being at Sheffield Place has brought so much light to my life in the form of my co-workers, the kiddos, and the moms who brighten every one of my days. I have drawings from the kids on my walls at home and in my office, and every time one of the moms thanks me and tells me how much their kids love me, my heart swells. I have grown so attached to this organization, which is also something that can bring me down. Not everyone in this program succeeds. When someone “fails” by not following the rules or living up to the standards we have set for them, they are usually sent back out on their own to face whatever gets thrown at them. Although I see this happening and I know we tried and I know the moms had a chance, I still can’t help but feel a sense of failure. These people did not ask for the life they were born into just as I did not ask for mine, it was pure luck for me that I was born into a loving family that was able to send me to good schools and always put food on the table.

I guess that randomness is what causes my struggle, because I did not do anything remarkable to be born into the family I was born into, just as the women and children here did not do anything to deserve the trauma they have gone through their whole lives. Although I know Sheffield Place is doing so much good, I can’t help but think about those that fall through the cracks. My faith lives and breathes just like I do, and it changes as I do as well. I know I have a lot more learning and growing left to do, and I think continuing to focus on service will help me a lot with that. I have a lot of gratitude that my Non-Profit professor mentioned this internship and I applied on a whim. I knew I wanted to do something meaningful with my summer, but I didn’t realize just how meaningful it would actually be.
As I sat drinking my morning coffee, waiting for the rest of the seniors to arrive at the center, I tried to wake up a little and put on a smile for the day. I was dealing with some difficult things, outside of work, the day prior, and was still quite distracted by it. Then, the Lord gently broke through the fog over me. One of the seniors walked up to me, smiling as he always is, and said, “Good Morning Miss Maddie, I just wanted to tell you that God is good, and don’t ever let the devil steal your joy.” It was like a weight had been lifted from me. His words were exactly what I needed, and I think the Lord knew that.

Today’s Gospel is one of Jesus’ most well-known parables: the Good Samaritan. I think often, our tendency is to immediately place ourselves in the shoes of the Good Samaritan and try to derive a lesson from the story. This is not wrong. However, we are in the first place the one lying beaten on the road. Only when we have been loved back to life by the One “in whom all fullness was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:19) and “who makes peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20) are we able to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). When we are filled with God’s mercy, we are equipped to show it to others. The Lord has been equipping me through them.

All this time, I thought I would be the one serving the seniors every day, but it turns out that they too have been serving me, just as Christ commands us, in abiding love. The people at the Don Bosco Senior Center have certainly made their mark on me; I hope I have shared His mercy with them as well.
This week, I had an interesting encounter with someone who wanted help finding a job. I was sitting at the front desk Wednesday afternoon, likely counting down the minutes before the long weekend. All of a sudden someone came into the lobby and seemed a bit lost. I asked him what he needed help with and he said he needed to find a job. He gave me some papers even though I didn’t need anything from him, and I saw that he had an identification card from a prison. I didn’t know the first thing about this person but he had already identified himself as a former prisoner who had been released the previous week. I don’t know what I expected a former prisoner to look like but this was not it. I was surprised, and somehow sort of proud, that this person was already taking steps to find a job and had all of his documents with him. He was organized and motivated. He knew he had messed up but he wanted to take steps to have a better future.

When he introduced himself as someone who had just been released from prison, I can’t remember what exactly went through my head. I’m embarrassed to admit I was probably a little scared, a little confused, surprised, whatever it may have been. However, as our conversation continued I didn’t see him as a criminal, I saw him as a man determined to have a better future, which was inspiring for me. Even as he waited in the lobby to cool off from the heat we had a little discussion about the US women’s soccer team - he said he was able to watch their last game from his homeless shelter.

We should not judge others. We are not our mistakes, as this man proved. We might stumble and mess up but that does not define us. Nobody can be defined by one thing. This man might have been a former criminal, but he was also motivated and determined and optimistic and joyful. I had these preconceived notions of what a former prisoner looks like but they were completely shattered. I think God wants me to see people as people and treat them that way. It’s a simple thing when you boil it down but this was a good reminder to treat everyone with respect and to never judge a book by its cover.
Renewed Sense of Empathy
By Jace Hasterlo
Legal Aid of Western Missouri Summer Intern

This week has been busy. We had two of our Pro Se Divorce Clinics on Wednesday and Thursday. Wednesday’s class was reserved for people who had low English literacy or some disability that made them unable to fill out paperwork without extra assistance. For that, the only person to show up was a man with vision impairments. I thought it was worth noting that the things he used to help him sign papers were from AlphaPointe, and that got me thinking about the intersection of a lot of marginalized identities in how nonprofit groups attempt to assist them. I do not know how well a lot of the nonprofits in Kansas City do in helping those with intersecting identities receive help or represent those intersections in their clients. LAWMO is an interesting case of this: while the vast majority of the people who work here are women, very few of them are people of color, disabled, or LGBTQ, which are huge portions of the people we help in the community. It can be hard to open up with the worst of your problems when they do not seem like they share any identities with you.

This week, I got to experience a bit of the relief these services can have. I have been having an issue with mice and roaches in my house, and upon taking some advice from the people who work in landlord/tenant issues and housing here, have finally gotten my landlord to do something about it. The knowledge of that little thing was enough to create an absolute huge change in my stress levels, so I can only imagine a piece of what that relief might feel like in someone who finds out they are not going to be evicted or are going to get to keep receiving government benefits. It was a good way to get a renewed sense of empathy for our clients and the situations they are in.
Faith and Good Deeds
By Arturo Hernandez
Mattie Rhodes Center Development Assistant Intern

Working at Mattie Rhodes has been an overall great experience and a great blessing. But like anything in life there were days that I felt like a superhero and other days when I felt as if I was at the bottom of the food chain. Needless to say, because of our fallen human nature, we tend to sometimes focus mostly on negative days. This was particularly true a very hot Friday afternoon while I was unloading boxes and furniture off a truck. This summer Mattie Rhodes Center administration moved from the Westside location to the Northeast location; I found myself in the midst of it.

When I first signed up for this internship I was fully aware that I would be doing administration work. However, I did not know I would be moving a whole company and over 15,000 pieces of art to a new location. But to be fair, I was indeed warned that not everything that I was going to be asked to do was in the job description. Thanks to this internship I have learned that there is so much work to be done if you want to help people through a nonprofit organization, of which work most people will never take notice. This concept is of course a very hard one to come to terms with when you are selfish and egocentric person like me. Hence, why I chose an internship behind the curtain. This internship has most definitely helped overcome this flaw of mine, but I am still a work in progress.

I am a strong believer that deeds can be more power than a million words, especially when it comes to the Catholic faith. But we are also ought to remember that deeds without faith are useless. Even further, faith without good deeds is dead. The true virtue is finding the balance between the two. I very often find myself believing that I have a strong faith, but lack in good deeds. A quote from the epistle of St. James, that always helps me to keep my feet in the ground, states, “You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?” (James 2, 19-20)

During this summer I have had the opportunity to do good deeds, but I found myself having little faith. During that very hot Friday afternoon, I was very tired, frustrated, and thirsty. Moving boxes up and down the stairs was starting to take a toll on me. I stop to rest for a bit and to drink some water. I was standing in the lobby. While I was resting I was becoming even more frustrated, I was asking myself, “How is this helping anybody?” Soon after, a single mother and her three children came into the lobby. All the children looked to be under six years old. The mother looked tired and in distress. The kids went straight to a box full of toys I had just put down. That is when it finally hit me, I thought to myself, “They are the reason I am here.” Seeing the smile on the kids while playing with those toys brought much joy to me, and know that the mother was getting the help she needed made me even more happy. While moving the boxes I was frustrated because I had no faith. My good deed was useless. But seeing this family getting the help they needed help me realize that one moves always do good deeds with great faith, and to always accompany faith with good deeds.
This summer working at Alphapointe has been an amazing, rewarding and learning experience. With this being my first big girl job, I couldn't have asked for a better boss, coworkers and environment. This summer has been a huge learning experience for me and I feel that I have grown immensely as a person. From working hands on with the campers at Technology Camp, to surviving the long hot days at Adventure Camp, the days in the office working hard to prepare for the events and goofing off with my fellow interns Aideen and Sydney, I wouldn't change a thing about this summer!

This past week we had the overnight Adventure Camp that we have worked so hard to prepare for. It was so wonderful to experience and see all the hard work put in, unfold. I was placed with the Counselors in Training group which was extremely cool for me because I got to see throughout the week these teenagers grow so much, help their peers and step out of their comfort zone. I am excited to have a few of them return next week for day camp and help the younger campers out. It has been such an amazing summer getting to know all of these amazing people and see them grow. I thank God for bringing this opportunity to me and granting me with this amazing learning experience.
Small Things
By Lily Koppen
Hope Faith Ministries Client Care Intern

In reflecting on my time at Hope Faith this summer, I realized that I’ve finally come to truly understand a quote by Mother Teresa that I’ve heard all my life. She said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” Through working at the Guest Services desk and having direct interactions with the guests who are homeless or in need of assistance, my biggest takeaway was related to this quote. I’ve learned that so much lies in how you do the simple things -- infusing God’s love into those simplest acts. It’s so easy to get caught up in a frenzy when it gets busy and just go through the motions, but I feel like the guests just need to know someone cares and is on their side.

I have many examples of the impact of simple acts from the summer, but one particular instance stands out. There is a middle-aged man named Joe who comes just about every day to the shelter, and was always so upbeat and would smile and say hi to me. However, one day, he came up to the Guest Services desk looking distressed and asked to speak to one of the staff members about finding a place to sleep that night. He said he was getting to the end of his rope and didn’t know how much longer he could handle his situation. I tried to contact the staff member a few times but he was stuck in meetings; meanwhile, Joe continued to sit at the table looking hopeless. I occasionally reassured him he’d get some help soon.

Finally, the staff member was out of meetings and eager to help, and I happily pointed him in Joe’s direction. A couple hours later, I saw Joe waiting in line and when he got up to my window, he had tears in his eyes and thanked me so genuinely for getting him connected with the staff member. He said he had gotten set up with a couple resources but I could tell he was still upset. I told him I would be praying for him and he said thank you so much and assured me, “I will be back tomorrow though … I will see you tomorrow” with a little smile amidst his tears.

After he left, and even while writing this, I was/am overcome with emotion thinking about this genuine and normally smiling, upbeat man having to go through so much, and that he was so appreciative of me just doing my job. Since then, he often makes a point to come up to my window with a smile and ask how I’m doing. Joe reminds me that sometimes all people need is someone to be on their side. Even if I personally can’t help him out of his situation completely, I can try to help to ease his burden and the burdens of others by doing the small things with God’s great love.
On Tuesday, I learned what it feels like to lose one of the most important pieces of nonprofit work: the volunteers. We didn’t have anyone show up to help at the front desk, so I was supposed to spend my afternoon focusing on food pantry with Maria. However, right before we were supposed to start distributing food, Geno came to the desk and said that he needed me, as no volunteers had shown to help Geno back in the pantry, and the boys were out installing air conditioners.

The adaptation that Maria, Geno, the entire office, and I had to do in those moments was something I hadn’t expected before going into this summer, and an event I never thought would happen in the first 6 weeks. In moments like these, it’s very easy for me to get caught up in the business of the world around me and focus on checking names off of a list, when in reality, I need to be focused at the moment to make sure my ability to serve those around me, client, volunteer or staff, to the best of my ability.

This week, I saw God in one of the clients I was serving in the food pantry. I caught myself trying to check names off of a list, so to stop myself, I started conversations with every person who walked through the door. Due to our lack of staff, I couldn’t give all of the clients the personal attention I wanted, but in those moments where I felt like I couldn’t do enough, whether it was helping people roll their carts down the ramp or load groceries into their car, I saw another client lending a hand the moment I had to take mine away. It even put him receiving food a little bit later then he would have if he stayed in line, but he put the needs of others before his own and gave himself to his neighbors, just as Christ would have done. In moments like these, I realize that I do not have all of the answers, and neither does anyone around me, but if I focus on helping those around me and building them up, all of us can get a little bit better together.
I work at a nonprofit called Alphapointe, which is an organization that works with adults, students, and kids that have visual impairments. The mission of Alphapointe is to instill the values of excellence, integrity, service, responsibility, initiative, and teamwork in its staff members and clients, and Alphapointe especially seeks to give clients the skills to live independently. All summer, we have been preparing for our three week-long camps, and we have been anxiously awaiting the time in which we would finally meet the campers and see how they grow over the period of a week. I was placed in the CIT (counselors in training) group, which essentially was made up with the older kids who were wanting to develop leadership skills. It was amazing to get to know each of the people in my group, and see how they challenged themselves throughout the week—whether it be physically, like on the rock wall or ropes course; or by challenging themselves to meet new people, and help the newer and younger campers find their way around.

This experience has brought me closer to God, because it has instilled a hope in me in seeing the staff around me that work so hard to give these wonderful kids a fun camp experience, as well as first time jobs, the tools to develop leadership skills, and a program to transition to college living. In addition to the staff, I see God in each of the kids that I had the opportunity to meet. Each of them stepped out of their comfort zone, and many went out of their way to help others. Their courage, kindness, trust, and love brought me so much joy, as well as passion to continue to serve others in the future.
Most of the population in the United States has grown up with air conditioning. In my generation and those that preceded me, air conditioning has been taken for granted like electricity and indoor plumbing. But for the marginalized, this simple pleasure we enjoy is a lifeline. In 1999, 21 people died of a heat-related death. Finding this unacceptable, Bishop Sullivan Center, with a donor's help, began Project ElderCool. I have been touched countless times by the clients we serve, who are in desperate need of relief. It is amazing to feel the rush of oppressively hot air flowing out of someone’s home when they open the door and to know that they have been living in this heat for some time. I can remember the first install well, but to say the weeks followed have stood out to me would be inaccurate, because all of their situations were so similar, yet so dire.

I have always grown up with my faith in religion, yet I have never been able to connect my religion to the inner workings of society until now. This week, Project Eldercool was on multiple news stations, and that helps our exposure to receive more donations, and serve more clients. But for the most part, we commit anonymous acts for the marginalized with no camera following us. I am learning that is just what we Catholics do. We see a need, we fund a need, and we fulfill a need. We have done it for hundreds and hundreds of years, and now it is my generation’s turn to serve society.
I work with a lot of different people every day. Each interaction leaves its mark for good or bad, but I am changed by each and every one. It is difficult to pinpoint a client interaction that could possibly summarize my time at Journey. Each person has a story that put them in front of me in that moment. If I had to pick just one, it would have to be from about my third week.

As part of our learning experience, the other interns and I completed a class that is offered to our clients called Conflict Resolution. It promotes the ideals of restorative justice as opposed to criminal justice when dealing with wrongs and trauma. It is typically composed of about fifteen people. Just about everyone, including the moderators have a different worldview.

During one of these classes, I had the privilege of sitting next to one of our clients I did not know very well. Throughout the class he is incredibly vocal and I have noticed that he has some incredible insights. By the time we had gotten to our lunch break, he turned to me, introduced himself, and started inquiring about what I was doing there and why I was at Journey. This gave me the opportunity to ask him about his story as well. At this point he began talking about his kids. This is the kind of moment I wait all day for. He has a daughter finishing her teaching degree on a full-ride scholarship for volleyball. The pride in his voice was unmistakable. He said, “There are so many things I’m not proud of, but who she has become… that’s worth it all.”

Eventually, we were called back to the group to close for the day and afterwards he approached me to say goodbye. He told me he was sorry for going on and on about everything and thanked me for listening. I, of course, told him I was glad I got to meet him and looked forward to getting to know him better in future classes. Until the end of the course, we shared friendly hellos and goodbyes. He continued to astonish me with his insight and wisdom. While he’d hit it right on the nose with how he could ramble, if you really listened there was wisdom you could never find anywhere else.

I truly believe that sitting in that chair on that day changed how I saw what I do. Hearing him talk about the accomplishments of his daughter, listening to his rambling that led to honest to goodness wisdom, and receiving his well wishes reminded me of why I come to work every day. He reminded me to not just hear but listen because every day isn’t always good, but there is something good in every day. I am reminded to look for the God moments.
On Thursday at Journey to New Life, a client came in to meet with the attorney who works for us a few times a month. She is someone I have worked with and gotten to know very well over the course of this summer, but I hadn’t seen her in a few weeks. When she walked in the door and saw me sitting at my desk, she came straight over to me and greeted me with a big hug. I invited her to sit down so we could catch up. If I have learned one thing at this internship, it has been that there is an incredible amount of healing that can come from genuine conversation.

This woman has dealt with so much trauma in her life, followed by time in prison, and is finally on her own and settled into her apartment. Despite her progress, she still lacks a true support system which has drawn her to connect with volunteers, interns, and the staff at Journey. I met her on my second day as an intern and was originally surprised by her openness. As I have gotten to know her better, I have come to see that she truly needs these conversations. I feel fortunate to be someone that she can be vulnerable with and to be a listening ear for whatever she needs to say.

The first day we met, after I helped her pick out some clothing and discovered that we both have May birthdays, she asked me my ring size, handing me an emerald ring to try on. I slid it onto my index finger and it fit nicely. She insisted that I keep it even though I tried to refuse. She showed me her other hand and pointed out a matching emerald ring, saying that she had recently gotten two rings with her birthstone and was waiting to meet someone else with a May birthday. I was so touched by this gesture and truly saw God in that moment.

Since that first encounter, I have shared a special bond with this woman and have been inspired by her consistently. I have come to understand that treating all people with dignity and welcoming them with open arms can mean so much. I pray that this client, and others whom I have worked with, continue to find the support that they deserve.
This week we had our first week of Adventure Camp. Thirty-seven teenagers piled into a bus on Monday morning to spend a week at outdoor camp. Everyone showed up bright and early that morning and they were all so excited. I recognized quite a few of them from technology camp and most of them recognized me as well. We were in charge of pre-camp surveys and that gave us a chance to put faces to the names we have been working with on the computer for two months. The majority of the kids were there not to work on mobility or orientation but to become more confident or better leaders, just like teens who are sighted.

We then split into groups after lunch and did our adventure activities. My group did horseback riding and I led a horse and got to hang out with a kid named Blake for an hour while we were riding. He told me all about himself and his eye condition and then proceeded to tell me that because of it he could see in the dark and that last year he led a bunch of his friends, some of who are completely blind to a cemetery at night. That is the moment that I truly realized that this really was a normal summer camp. Before this week I thought that it was going to have to be completely modified because the kids couldn’t see but we pretty much did everything the same with a few minor modifications depending on the camper.

The rest of the week pretty much went the same and off without a hitch. The thing that surprised me most about the week was the campers’ willingness to try new things. On Thursday we went to a rock wall and high ropes course that was about four stories tall with a zip line at the end. Every kid went up and most of them did all three things but I stayed on the ground “to hang out with a camper that couldn’t go up” because I was too scared to. They are so much more daring and willing to try new things than I was at their age, and, to be honest, at my current age as well.

I was really pushed out of my comfort zone this week but watching them be so fearless and excited helped me be re-energized throughout the week even when I was exhausted. This week really showed me how big God’s love is. He created everyone perfectly in his vision and gave us the tools we need to live life. The kids at camp are no different. Although I know it has to be hard for them, they just live life differently, not better or worse. Each of them is just as fulfilled and has hopes and dreams and they want to achieve like everyone else. These are some of the funniest, coolest kids I have met and to think of them as anything else other than teenagers is ridiculous to me. This summer has really shown me to look at people as people first instead of defining them as something that is just a part of them. Yes, they happen to be visually impaired but they are all individuals who are so unique and cool and shouldn’t just be seen as their disability.
Growing up, I was taught many different lessons that I cherish even today. For instance, although you may fall 99 times you get up 100. And every time you fail it is putting you one step closer to success. I’ve also learned that every experience and every struggle you may face in life will help shape you into who you are today.

I came into this internship with an open mind, not knowing what to expect. And now that we are almost finished, I can honestly say I’ve learned many things about not only myself, but also about life. I’ve learned to be more patient and understanding. That although I may like having a plan it’s okay to go with the flow. But most importantly I’ve learned the power of a smile. If there is one thing I take away from working at Operation Breakthrough, it’s that there is always a reason to smile. People might make you mad, rules might be frustrating, or life might be stressful, but there is something about seeing a young child smile that makes all the hardships fade away.

I firmly believe that God gives us challenges not because he likes to see us struggle, but to help us grow. The best part about those challenges is that He is always there with us. God is in the smile of all the children at Operation Breakthrough and He is in every one of us. I appreciate the little things in life and I am very thankful for all the struggles and experiences I’ve had that have helped me become the person I am today.
Whenever Mitch and I go on a visit to a home, we try to talk to the recipient of the window air conditioning unit to see how they are doing. Most of the clients are open about the situation they are in and enjoy sharing the wisdom they have gathered over the years. One client, in particular, Ms. Smith, voluntarily told us what seemed to be the short of her life. It was fitting that we went to her house on June 6th, the 75th anniversary of D-Day, because the majority of the male members in her family served in the military. I believe she even mentioned her grandfather served during World War II. She talked at length about how she has lived her life trying to serve and respect others. Being able to talk to her was a small thing that Mitch and I were able to do for her, but to her, it was the highlight of her day.

Being able to sit with the members of the community that we are also serving is a highlight of working for Bishop Sullivan Center. I have been taught the last six years of my education to be a “man for and with others.” Project Elder Cool gives me the unique opportunity to give to elders in our community that give so much back to us. It also gives us the opportunity to learn from those who are oftentimes overlooked, but in reality, they have so much wisdom to share with us.

Being able to do the little things to help people accomplish the bigger things in life provides dignity for our clients. Often times it seems like those in poverty and the elderly are treated as children in our culture. In contrast, we should be looking to treat everyone we come into contact with the respect that they deserve as Ms. Smith talked about to us on D-Day. We all need help along the way in life when we have hit a rough spot, and there is no need for anyone to act as though admitting you need help deserves anything less than respect. So far, I have learned and seen that giving people dignity and the time of day is arguably the most important service that we can offer our clients.
The other day a client gave me the best compliment I’ve ever received. He said, “See, your nails aren’t painted, you don’t have a ton of makeup on; you’re being your true self and not putting on a show”. Our clients have been through so much trauma in their lives that they know authenticity when they see it.

Through being authentic and actively listening to the stories of our clients, I have seen and heard some of the most raw human experiences. I have sat with a mother as she broke with the grief of mourning her children who she may never have a relationship with. My fellow interns and I witnessed the obvious signs of depression and chaos as we cleaned and packed the belongings of a dear friend whose living situation had changed. I have formed a great friendship with a gentleman who had been in prison for most of his life and celebrated his first birthday party with us at the office. I have also heard the story of a man who experienced homelessness for the past decade and can’t seem to find the goodness in people, even though he is trying.

These are real, authentic human experiences, and ones that often get brushed aside or go completely unheard. Now, I can’t pass a person on the street without thinking of our clients. I can’t drive by an apartment building without wondering if they rent to felons. And I can’t pass perfectly good furniture on the side of the road without thinking of clients who could use it. I see the world with a different lens now, and for that I am very grateful.

This internship has been full of ups and downs, amazing days and downright heartbreaking days. Through it all, my main takeaway is the importance of seeing the God given humanity, dignity, and goodness in every person I encounter. It has taught me to see people as they really are and give them a chance to show me that.
Being eight weeks into the program, I have had many moments and experiences that stand out to me as formative and significant. However, there is one specific encounter from only my second day at Operation Breakthrough that has kept a very special place with me throughout this summer.

I have a desk that sits in the purple neighborhood hallway, which also happens to be the kid’s indoor recess area when the weather does not allow them to go outside. I was sitting at my desk while the purple one room babies were all playing in the hallway. One of the kids ran up to me and hugged me, begging me to pick him up. I had never met this child and he had never met me, but he seemed so sure that he wanted me to be the one to hold him and play with him. With how cute he was, there was no way I could say no, so I carried him back over to his class and played with them. I originally did not think much of it other than a kid wanting someone new to play with, but I was informed later by the teacher that he never does that with people he doesn’t know. I found this extremely heartwarming because for some reason I felt like a safe person for him to go to, even when he had no idea who he was.

Ever since that day, I have gone to the purple one room every single day to check on and play with the babies. They all know me very well now, and will run up to the door to greet me with a hug when I walk in, and fight over who gets to sit in my lap to read books. While these are small things that do not seem to be a big deal, these eight little kids in the purple one room alone have made my entire summer, and I will miss them tremendously once the internship ends. At the same time, I also feel very fortunate to have been apart of something so great and to have made these connections that are worth missing. I will carry on making those connections throughout my future career as a social worker and remember these kids that made such an impact on me in just the span of a few months.
First Week
By Sarah Stoothoff
Bishop Sullivan Center Client Services Intern

As I started at Bishop Sullivan Center I wasn’t sure what to expect but I’ve already learned a lot. I know in our orientation we talked about the stereotypes we had going into this job and those stereotypes quickly vanished on the first day. I started the first couple of days working in the front office, answering phone calls, handing out sandwiches, and helping those who came in. I remember one phone call I had where a lady called to say her lights have just been shut off and she needed help with them. I started to ask her the typical questions I learned to ask those who requested help and as I was doing that she started to break down and cry on the phone with me and I panicked. I quickly asked Pat to help and take the phone call for me because I didn’t know what to say or how to help her calm down. After receiving the phone call I realized that some of these people that come in for help are mothers with children who can be stressed out about a lot of things and it’s my job to help them get through it. As I continued to do this job throughout the week I’ve already learned how to be there for someone when they’re really struggling and to understand that they will get emotional because of their situations.

Besides working in the front office, I got to sit in a meeting with Doug and a few others to startup the One City Café lunches. I enjoyed this a lot because I got to help and put my input in what a “healthy” lunch looks like and how to provide people with nutritious meals because for some people, they usually don’t get the option to eat healthy, they only eat what they can get. I also learned while sitting in this meeting how to work with the people who will be coming in to eat the lunch. We discussed how some people might try to ask for two sandwiches or possibly be a little stubborn with you and I know now how to handle these situations before going in. I look forward to my second week of work because I get to help make the sandwiches and I get to help pass them out which gives me a chance to get even more involved with the community.
Week number two has been logged away at the Boys Grow farm. The boys are still working very hard and haven’t gotten tired of the work (yet). I’ve really gotten to know most of the boys there and it feels so rewarding to be in the position I am in.

On Thursday we had a huge barbeque for the boys and their families. It was really cool to meet some of the parents and cook for them. I was surprised at how eager the boys were to introduce their parents to the staff, but I guess that’s just a reflection on this program. Before we actually started serving food we took time out to give the boys their paycheck for working so hard. This was really cool because each staff member, myself included, got to do a little intro for each boy as they came up to receive their check in front of their parents. I think this was really good for some of the boys. There are 3 teams: Farm, Construction, and Culinary and as you can imagine some boys don’t receive the credit that they deserve during the long hot days that we are out there. It was nice to see everyone get their own little praise for once and I can confidently say that every single parent there was very proud of their son.

A few of the boys who graduated from the Boys Grow program also came out for the barbeque to visit and eat good food. It was amazing to hear their stories of working at the farm and a few of them shared very personal things of how the farm helped them steer their life into a whole different direction. I was amazed at how many things I had in common with these guys. I talked to one of them about basketball and how it shaped our lives growing up for about 45 minutes and that was awesome! To me, the barbeque was very important. I looked at it as a way of coming together as one community even though most of us are from somewhere different or go to different schools. It was a good way for parents to meet parents and really see what their son is going through each day.

As always, I can’t wait to go back to the farm and work.
Partnering Agencies’ Feedback on Their Interns

Each intern qualifies for a bonus based on his or her work performance. We asked each agency to give feedback on their interns’ performance. EVERY intern received glowing praise. Below are some of the comments that agencies wrote.

“We have been very fortunate to have her with us this summer! We’ve even encouraged her to drop out of college and volunteer here full time (just kidding, but when she graduates she would be the ideal employee!)”

“They are amazing. I have no issues and hate they have to leave.”

“He has been a wonderful intern, very excited about his work and doing an outstanding job on everything from not-so-fun tasks to exciting ones.”

“He has been great. Give him the full bonus plus some. Honestly, he has been amazing.”

“They have all been amazing. We could not have accomplished so much this summer without them. Thank you so much for partnering with us this year.”

“She has been wonderful. We appreciate her service.”

“They are all smart and full of energy. They worked hard and were enjoyable to have.”

“I am always amazed at the work ethic of the ladies (because that’s all we’ve ever had). They are on time, communicate well, have great attitudes, role with the punches, and are always ready to serve our guests with grace. I wish I could have them more often, but am so thankful we are blessed to have them spend their summers with us.”

“He’s been a fantastic addition to our team.”
Our Mission:

Inspired by Christian faith, Bishop Sullivan Center shows God's love to people in financial hardship by providing food, help in finding jobs and other aid. Beyond material assistance, Bishop Sullivan Center strives to build relationships between those who live in poverty and those who do not, promoting mutual understanding and affirming the dignity of all.

Serving our community from three locations:

6435 Truman Rd, Kansas City, MO
3936 Troost Ave, Kansas City, MO
2220 Central Ave, Kansas City, KS

Connect, learn and get involved:

www.bishopsullivan.org

Bishop Sullivan Center  @Bishopsullivan  @Bishopsullivancenter