



Catholic Charities, Volunteer Relations Department



MY STORY: SOCIAL JUSTICE INTERNSHIP, VOLUNTEER RELATIONS INTERN

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Introduction

The Social Justice Internship is a grant program run through Loyola's Engaged Learning office. A group of students are selected every year to work under several nonprofit organizations and each student has a specific position within their respective organizations.

I applied for the volunteer relations position because I believed it would allow me to put to practice everything I had been learning in my business classes and for a bigger purpose.

I was ecstatic to hear that I received the spot and that I would be working with Catholic Charities under the Volunteer Relations Department. I would come to work on many projects including Celebration of Giving and the food pantry on LaSalle. As someone who has guided their experiences towards helping underserved communities, Catholic Charities has been a great outlet to continue pursuing that. Working with CC has taught me patience and strength and it is an experience that I will cherish.

"Catholic Charities fulfills the Church's role in the mission of charity to anyone in need by providing compassionate, competent and professional services that strengthen and support individuals, families and communities based on the value and dignity of human life."

Catholic Charities pulls communities of people together; these communities work to give back to their own communities, Chicago gives back to Chicago. The way the volunteer relations department does this is through holiday giving and year-round food security. The Celebration of Giving is an event held every holiday season to ensure that families who cannot as easily afford gifts can still receive them and be included in the holiday season. The Volunteer Relations team pairs all families with donors, organizes the donations, and sends out teams to deliver the collections. Through the Celebration of Giving, the CC community works to ensure that everyone in the greater Chicago community can have a good holiday season. CC also gives back to the community through their nightly suppers and through their several food pantries. CC collects meats, produce, and meals from local restaurants and stores. Through their community with the local Chicago area, they feed the part of the Chicago community that cannot always afford a meal or groceries.

My Story

The two projects described are the ones I have been a part of during my internship. I was included in a lot of behind the scenes work for Celebration of Giving which included pairing families and donors in the system as well as auditing family forms.

In the Spring semester, I was able to participate more in the food pantry through volunteering. I was able to get to know the food pantry team and other volunteers; we made lunchboxes, grocery bags, and prepped a lot of food for people to pick up throughout the day. Seeing the way the community comes together to give back is warming and is a great example of asset-based community development.

I am thankful for all the work and opportunities this internship has provided me; however, it is far from what I had expected. Coming into the volunteer relations position, I was hoping to implement my business knowledge in a nonprofit setting. I was thinking I would get to investigate and observe the systems in which volunteers are recruited, how they sign up, and the demographics of the people who volunteer or even the people who we serve. While the work I did for Celebration of Giving touched the surface of my expectations, the rest of the internship was different to say the least. I have mainly spent the spring semester volunteering. I think this was a deterrent for me to be transparent; I was really hoping for more data-based work, more technical work, and more administrative work. This is the work that I felt was purposeful for me. Over time I saw that there were parts of my internship that were breaking down. Leadership was wary and they were human in that they were fighting their own personal fights too. The leadership we had were not being prioritized and that was reflected onto the interns. I realized though that even if this internship was not what I had expected, it is up to me to switch my perspective on how meaningful it can be. The most important takeaway I have gotten from this internship is that it is up to the community to take care of their own community. It is up to the more privileged of Chicago to take care of the underserved of Chicago. Even if my expectation did not match my reality, that does not lessen the purpose and meaning of the work I did, and for that I am thankful.