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Community Engagement in Writing Programs: Preparing Students for Success in Professional Settings

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Community engagement served an important part of my graduate education as a student in the Master of Professional Writing Program at Kennesaw State University over the past two years and will continue to do so as I look to continuing on to pursue a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. In the final semester of my undergraduate degree, the first chance for me to work on a community-engaged project became possible when a professional editing class partnered with a national Minnesota-based nonprofit, Green Card Voices (GCV), to edit and publish a book of personal narratives written by young immigrants, refugees, and "Dreamers." This collection gave these individuals the opportunity to share their stories and struggles in their own voices. This particular project functioned as a fully integrated community writing and editing project (or service-learning project) with the opportunity to pursue additional volunteer work for the organization outside of the classroom. My work with GCV, however, did not stop when I graduated with my bachelor's degree. As I began my master's degree, a graduate research assistantship allowed me to continue working with GCV on more book collections and projects featuring the immigrant and refugee stories of individuals who resettled in the US in other states from countries around the world. Through my work with GCV, community engagement became a focal point of my master's education.

Working with this nonprofit showed me not only the importance of community-engaged work but also the significant opportunities for teaching, learning, and research that community-engaged work provides. Community-engaged project connect universities with the public and private sectors to create opportunities for enhancing students' learning, expanding scholarship, and improving civic responsibility ("Community Engagement"). Rather than just finishing a project for class to turn it in and never think about it again, these types of projects allowed me to

see how the skills learned both in my undergraduate and graduate years can actually impact something other than my own personal grade and provided the type of professional experience that cannot be taught just within the classroom. Specifically, for individuals in writing and rhetoric programs, community-engaged projects create opportunities to learn and research in an environment requiring the practical use of skills learned in those programs.

For two years I have worked with Green Card Voices on different community-engaged projects and presented at conferences about my work with them. Working with GCV was particularly rewarding: GCV "aspires to build a bridge between immigrants, non-immigrants, and advocates from across the country by sharing the first-hand immigration stories of foreign-born Americans, by helping us see the 'wave of immigrants' as individuals, with interesting stories of family, hard work, and cultural diversity" ("About Us"). Because of my work with GCV and how important community engagement had become to my education, when I started considering capstone projects, I knew it would need to include a community engagement component. This led me to pursue a practicum as part of my capstone. I wanted to be able to work with a local nonprofit and use my writing and editing skills to assist the nonprofit in any way that I could. In addition, I wanted to better understand the kinds of writing that occurs in the nonprofit sector and how colleges and universities, especially faculty in writing programs, can maximize community engagement initiatives in their classes and help students see the power of writing outside of the classroom.

While I found the topic of immigration noteworthy and interesting, for my capstone project I wanted to explore how I might be able to assist other types of nonprofits—nonprofits focused on other missions and community needs. Specifically, I wanted to look into using what I learned in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program to help nonprofits that

support individuals in the foster care system or homeless individuals. Rather than working with a nonprofit on grant writing, which is the type of writing commonly associated with nonprofits, I wanted to experience and produce other types of writing in a nonprofit organization. As my professional writing interests mostly lie in technical writing, I hoped to be able to find a nonprofit that needed someone with technical writing skills.

Searching for nonprofits in the area that support the foster care system and at-risk youth ultimately led me to Advocates for Children (Advocates) in Cartersville, Georgia. This nonprofit is "committed to the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. . . . [and] strive[s] to one day help create a world where all children are respected and loved, happy and thriving" ("Home"). Advocates provides services to help prevent child abuse and to assist youth over the age of eighteen learn to live independently. In addition, Advocates runs a children's shelter, the Flowering Branch Children's Shelter (FBCS). This group home provides housing and care for up to thirteen children at a time, but the passage of the Families First Prevention Services Act has placed a strain on shelters such as FBCS because this act seeks to "curtail the congregate or group care for children" ("Families First Prevention Services Act").

The Families First Prevention Services Act aims to direct more federal resources to keeping families in crisis together while limiting the funding for group homes and shelters (Kelly, "A Complete Guide"). The bill seeks to prevent the splitting up of families in crisis by redirecting funds that pay for child welfare—currently used to provide both foster care placements and assistance to adoptive families—to services designed to prevent the use of foster in maltreatment cases (Kelly, "Family First Act, Part One"). These prevention services attempt to address mental health challenges, provide substance abuse treatment, and offer in-home parenting programs, but in doing so, it creates challenges for placing at-risk youth into safe foster

or group homes due to a lack of funding (Kelly, "Families First Act, Part Two"). Shelters and group homes will no longer be reimbursed for housing youth for longer than two weeks with a few exceptions. One of these exceptions is for a "qualified residential treatment program," but to earn that status requires meeting rigorous licensing standards (Kelly, "Families First Act, Part Two"). Advocates provides long-term group home care for up to thirteen children at a time in the FBCS and therefore needs to be licensed as a qualified residential treatment program in order to keep the shelter operational.

To maintain its status as a shelter for at-risk youth and to continue serving its community, Advocates is seeking licensing through the Council on Accreditation (COA), an organization dedicated to "partnering with human and social service organization to strengthen their ability to improve the lives of the people they serve" (COA). This requires a rewrite of the nonprofit's policies and procedures in order to adhere to the standards set forth by COA and the Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS). One such policy that needs to be rewritten and checked against these standards is Advocates' Behavior Support and Management policy. The practicum portion of my capstone allowed me to connect with Advocates to assist in writing this policy. Finding Advocates for Children worked perfectly: they needed an intern to help write and edit their policies and procedures, and I needed a local nonprofit to work with for the capstone project. An internship with Advocates for Children allowed me to combine my interest in technical writing, the foster care system, and community-engaged work into one project that would carry me through my last semester in the MAPW program and allow me to explore my interests in a rewarding way.

Through this capstone project and the internship with Advocates, I hoped to answer three overarching questions. First, how has work on a course-based community engagement project

focused on immigration also prepared me to explore careers and work in the nonprofit sector,

particularly nonprofits working in the foster care system? My years of working with GCV, both

as part of my class and as part of my graduate research assistantship, informed much of my

professional development, and I wanted to look specifically at how those community-engaged

projects with a nonprofit prepared me to work professionally with a local nonprofit. The

internship provided primary research into how my work with GCV prepared me to work within

the nonprofit sector. A professional journal of my accomplishments and struggles of the

internship allowed me to reflect on how having worked with GCV for two years before this

capstone prepared me to work with Advocates. This journal also provided the foundation for an

autoethnography about my time working with Advocates.

Second, what kinds of writing, research, and other deliverables are needed by nonprofits

working with foster care concerns, and how did the MAPW program prepare me for this work?

Looking into local nonprofits that support the foster care system and at-risk youth and

researching nonprofits in general started to give me an idea of the types of writing that nonprofits

need, but actually going to work with Advocates gave me firsthand experience and knowledge of

what types of writing nonprofits need. The internship provided insight into how the classes taken

in the MAPW program uniquely prepared me for this type of work. Because this internship

mostly required technical writing and editing, classes such as Technical Writing and Careers in

the Literary Arts provided a foundation for how to work alongside Advocates.

Third, what is the impact of having a strong understanding of the history and context of a

particularly social justice or humanitarian project on an internship before it begins? In order to

contextualize the importance of the project I worked on as part of the internship, I researched

into the history of the foster care system, its early and current challenges, and the lasting effects

of its origins. The research skills acquired during my education enabled me to look more deeply into the history of the system and its lasting effects. Without the professional writing program, particularly the Issues and Research class that required research into an historical event, trying to learn about the system and find what I needed to know for the internship would have proved to be even more of a challenge than it was. This research gave me the foundational knowledge necessary to understand the system and informed why the work of nonprofits that support the system and the individuals in the system is so important. Contextualizing a social issue before approaching a project about that issue creates a more thorough understanding of both why the project is important and how the project will impact those involved.

These three questions drove the project. Through the internship I was able to use the skills learned throughout my college career to assist a nonprofit that performs admirable work and positively affects its community and those surrounding it. Community-engaged projects such as the one that I undertook for this capstone project allow students to gain firsthand experience on a project that truly matters, one that will not simply be turned into a professor and promptly forgotten about after the grade is posted. My time working with GCV led me to my internship with Advocates and allowed me to explore how community engagement can have lasting effects beyond the classroom walls. Ending my master's education with a service-learning project seemed especially fitting because it was a service-learning project in the final semester of my bachelor's degree that drew me to community engagement in the first place.

Methods and Methodologies

Three overarching questions led my research throughout this project and helped me determine the types of research I would conduct. Through both primary and secondary research, I sought to answer the following questions:

- How has work on a course-based community engagement project focused on immigration also prepared me to explore careers and work in the nonprofit sector, particularly nonprofits working with the foster care system?

- What kinds of writing, research, and other deliverables are needed by nonprofits working with foster care concerns, and how did the MAPW program prepare me for this work?

- What is the impact of having a strong understanding of the history and context of a particularly social justice or humanitarian project on an internship before it begins?

Answering these questions required different forms of research. To look into how both my work on a course-based community engagement project and the MAPW prepared me to work with a nonprofit, I needed to begin working with a nonprofit and put my skills into practice: a practicum with Advocates for Children would allow me to learn firsthand how my coursework and my time in the MAPW prepared me to work in the nonprofit sector. Prior to beginning my work with Advocates, I researched to discover both the writing that nonprofits require and the history of the foster care system in order to gain an understanding of what might be required of me and to contextualize the Advocates' goals and mission within the history of a system design to benefit at-risk youth and families.

Conducting secondary research through databases of scholarly articles resulted in a foundational knowledge of the history of the foster care system, which is covered in the

Historiography section, as well as the types of writing commonly needed by nonprofits. This secondary research was important before beginning the practicum because it provided the understanding that I needed to adequately serve Advocates for Children. As explained by Margaret J. Marshall in "Looking for Letters," "researchers have to turn to secondary histories . . . . to learn about the structure and evolution of the larger enterprise within which their interests operated. Such secondary sources are thus . . . a way of contextualizing one's project" (146). This secondary research provided me with the background knowledge of the history of the foster care system that I would have been unable to attain during the practicum.

Understanding the foster care system and its history became an important component to working with a nonprofit organization that support the system. Without completely understanding the system, its origins, and its current status, it would have been much more difficult to understand what these nonprofits require and why they pursue their missions. Advocates serves at-risk children, families, and youth who are old enough not to be in the foster care system but who still need assistance. This research into the foster care system was wholly secondary as it required me to go search databases for articles written about the history of the system as well as government websites about the origins and evolution of child welfare governmental agencies. Contextualizing the work of Advocates and situating it within the rich history of the system's development helped me feel more confident going to work for Advocates because I understood why Advocates' work is necessary.

Before attempting the practicum that would take me into Advocates to assist with the writing and editing skills I learned in my time as a student, I needed to know what sort of writing nonprofits typically need in order to succeed at their missions. The research into this type of writing provided me with a general understanding of the writing nonprofits need, which made

working with Advocates to provide written deliverables go that much more smoothly. Gaining the knowledge of what nonprofits typically need allowed me to begin the practicum with a well-rounded foundation for what might be required of me. For Advocates, I mostly needed to write policies and procedures, which was not the first thing that came to mind when I thought about possible types of writings that a nonprofit would require.

The first type of writing that I immediately associate with nonprofits is grant writing. My initial search of what types of writing nonprofits often need proved my initial thought true: many articles describing service-learning or community engagement courses designed to work with a nonprofit focused on a grant writing project undertaken by a college writing course. One article in particular, "The Community Grant Writing Project: A Flexible Service-Learning Model for Writing Intensive Courses," describes a community engagement project in which students worked with a local nonprofit organization to assist in writing grants for the organization (Stevens 263). Local organizations' needs for grant writing remains so high that the same course every year works with a community partner to assist with writing grants (Stevens 267).

Another article focused on creating a course designed around grant writing for nonprofits. "Incorporating Community Grant Writing as a Service Learning Project in a Nonprofit Studies Course" presents a case study in which students worked with a nonprofit to assist in developing grant writing capacity (Towey and Bernstein 301). The focus of this class was to allow students the chance to learn the best practices of grant writing for nonprofit organizations and to help the nonprofit improve its ability to write and develop successful grants (Towey and Bernstein 308). As suspected before beginning research into the types of writing nonprofits require, grant writing was a common theme among service-learning courses and projects that work with nonprofits, but there is another type of writing that seems to be growing in importance: social media writing.

As social media becomes more popular, it makes sense that nonprofits would need to adjust to that and learn the best ways to capitalize on this medium to benefit their goals and missions. Just as grants are needed to help fund a nonprofit, social media is now essential for expanding the "capacity, reach, and effectiveness," of the nonprofit (Smith 295). Through social media, a nonprofit can "create dialogue and social capital" to reach a broader audience (Smith 298). This type of writing has grown in importance for nonprofits and will continue to grow. Nonprofits need staff members and interns to write posts on social media to create a conversation with supporters and, hopefully, gain more supporters through that, and with more supporters, a nonprofit will thrive.

Social networking through different social media outlets proves an important facet of nonprofit work now because it allows nonprofits to build a rapport with its audience and remind supporters of the ongoing issue the nonprofit seeks to alleviate (Ryder 43). This type of writing has become more important in recent years as social media began to boom and began to be such a common piece of most individuals' lives. It allows nonprofits to reach out and connect with the communities they serve. While writing for social media and grant writing are both important aspects of writing for nonprofits, neither of these was exactly what I was really hoping to do in the practicum. The type of writing for nonprofits that I came across in my initial research that interests me the most is technical writing.

Technical communication serves an important role in nonprofit organizations. In "Bridging the Gap between the Technical Communication Classroom and the Internship: Teaching Social Consciousness and Real-World Writing," Tiffany Bourelle writes about the use of technical communication in service-learning projects and internships with nonprofits. Nonprofits need training manuals and policies and procedures as any other organization does.

While Bourelle briefly mentions other types of writing that local nonprofits needed as well, such as website content, blog writing, and social networking, she focuses mostly on the technical communication aspect (190). As this is the type of writing that interests me the most, I hoped to find a nonprofit that needed this type of writing so that I might be able to work with a nonprofit and assist through technical writing.

With the knowledge both from the research about the history of the foster care system and the types of writing needed by nonprofits, I was prepared to begin my practicum with Advocates. This practicum would provide the primary research needed to answer two of the questions that led this project: how work on a course-based community engagement project prepared me to explore careers and work in the nonprofit sector and how the MAPW program prepared me for this type of work. This primary research would provide the necessary experience to write the autoethnography portion of this capstone. As defined by Carolyn Ellis, autoethnography is "approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (273). In other words, autoethnography allows writers to be participants in the research itself and to take a step back to observe themselves within a particular situation.

For me this situation was writing for a nonprofit as part of the practicum process. I became a participatory researcher who engaged with the research in order to learn all that I could. One of the core ideas of autoethnography is that "rather than silence or disguise the personal reasons that lead us to choose our research projects, autoethnographers make use of personal experience and subjectivity in designing their research" (Adams et al. 26). As I had worked with community engaged projects before and found real meaning in those projects, I naturally wanted to work with a nonprofit for this practicum for personal reasons: I knew that

working for and with nonprofits created a sense of worthwhileness to my projects. In addition, as I had an interest in the foster care system, working with a nonprofit that supports that system was also a personal choice. These two reasons for my choice of practicum created an environment where an autoethnography would be beneficial as a research method. Writing the autoethnography would allow me to "offer complex, insider accounts . . . and show how/why particular experiences [were] challenging, important and/or transformative" (Adams et al. 27). My time with the nonprofit as a participant in the research showed me in what ways I was prepared for this type of work and in what ways this type of work challenged me.

The practicum served as my primary research and allowed me to learn firsthand how to work with a nonprofit, specifically how to produce written deliverables for the nonprofit. Writing an autoethnography allowed me to reflect on my time working with Advocates and really consider how I was and was not prepared for the work the practicum required. This internship allowed me to become a participatory researcher to discover the ways that my coursework and the MAPW program prepared me to work in this sector: "we use our experience to engage ourselves, others, culture(s), politics, and social research" (Adams et al. 1). Deciding to participate in a practicum as a research method provided an opportunity to "cultivate an 'epistemology of insiderness,' of being able to describe an experience in a way that 'outside' researches never could" (Adams et al. 31). Becoming a participatory researcher provided the experience and knowledge about working with a nonprofit that I would not have gotten through database research or just talking with someone who works for a nonprofit. To understand completely the type of work that nonprofits need and to examine how I was prepared to produce that work, the practicum was essential. It illuminated both the ways that I was prepared to work

with a nonprofit and the ways I still needed to improve. Without that experience of actually

working with a nonprofit, there would have remained a gap in my research.

This project required both secondary and primary research methods. Secondary research

allowed me both to learn more about the foster care system, its history, and its current state and

to gain an understanding of the types of writing that nonprofits typically require and need in

order to fulfill their missions. Primary research through the practicum itself allowed me to learn

firsthand what types of writing nonprofits require, to experience the ways that nonprofits produce

that writing, and to see exactly how the MAPW program prepared me for that type of work.

Writing the autoethnography provided an opportunity to reflect on my experience and really

become an "agent of [my] own learning" by sitting back and considering my time working with

the nonprofit (Yancey 5). Through my reflection while writing the autoethnography, I was able

to consider what I had accomplished and find a way to articulate that accomplishment (Yancey

6). With both the primary and secondary research methods as well as the reflection and

autoethnography, I was able to develop a foundation both of what I needed to know before

starting the practicum and of what I learned through the practicum. These methods enabled me

not only to answer my overarching research questions but also to better understand the

intersections between professional writing programs and community-engaged work, which is

critical for the next chapter of my academic career.

Historiography

The foster care system seeks to protect at-risk youth and provide them safe homes, whether that home be with birth parents or other family, foster parents, or group housing. This system has been in place under the direction of governmental agencies since 1912 ("Children's Bureau History with Foster Care"). As of 2018, over 400,000 children in the US rely on the foster care system each year and would likely be homeless without it (Children's Bureau). While there are positives and negatives to this system—and often the negatives are what receive the most focus—the foster care system overall succeeds in helping children and teenagers find homes and caretakers. This was not always the case: the origins of the foster care system, while based in the same positive ideals as it is now, was fraught with troubles and accusations of child abuse as children were shipped across the country to be chosen by potential parents along different train stops through the orphan train initiative, which loaded homeless children from New York onto trains and sought to find them homes in the Midwest. This idea of sending children to families who might want them set the foundation for what is now the foster care system. This section seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the origins of the foster care system, and how has it evolved to what it is today?

- How is understanding that history and the rhetoric and language of the system relevant to today's foster care system?

- How do nonprofits supplement governmental assistance to the children affected by the foster care system?

In the mid-1800s, long before the implementation of government-sponsored child protective services, groups began forming to house and protect youth in America. One such

group, led by Charles Loring Brace, formed the Children's Aid Society (CAS) in 1853. Due to CAS's core focus on child protection, it became the precursor for the foster care system as it is known today (Vandepol 225). To rescue the homeless children in New York, Brace organized for the CAS to send children Midwest on what is called "orphan trains." These trains carried homeless, orphaned, and abandoned children to a new life away from the city to the Midwest where they might be able to have successful lives. Most of these children, as described by Brace, were "the little waifs of society who thus, through no fault of their own, were cast out on the currents of a large city" (79).

CAS aimed "to give assistance . . . to discourage pauperism, to cherish independence, to place the poorest of the city, the homeless children . . . not in Alms-houses or Asylums, but on farms" (Brace 397). The hope was that by providing homes in the Midwest to the homeless children of New York City, those children would be "under such influences and such training that they will never need either private or public charity" (Brace 397). Sending these children to the Midwest through the orphan trains offered them a life with families to look after them. From the first train in 1853 until the last train in 1929, CAS sent almost a quarter of a million children from New York to the Midwest (Ramsey 154).

Brace's efforts essentially made him the father of the foster care system (Gish 122). His plan to remove homeless, endangered, and orphaned children from the streets of New York set the stage for others to begin finding ways to remove unwanted children from their cities and help them to find families. Sometimes this worked out, and sometimes it did not. In some cases, children were taken in by farming families and used as free labor (Gish 129). That did not deter activists and nonprofits from continuing to try to find homes for the children, nor did it deter some of the children from seeking out CAS in order to get out of the city and start a new life out

West (Bellingham 49). In particular, older children who found themselves caught up in lives of deviance and decided they wanted to "reverse the trend" would go to CAS to find a home elsewhere (Bellingham 49). CAS would never turn away these children. Instead, the organization would put them on a train and send them to find a new home because "a child, whether good or bad, is, above all things, an individual requiring individual treatment" (Brace 398).

Though the orphan trains managed to provided homes for approximately 200,000 orphaned children outside of city slum ("Children's Bureau"), scholars debate whether Brace's lasting legacy is as "the father of modern foster care or as the principal architect and popularizer of a social policy aimed at breaking up working-class families": Brace either rescued children from poverty and gave them opportunities that they would not have had otherwise or made splitting up families a common, acceptable practice in social work (Gish 122). Another argument against Brace's legacy was how the CAS treated Catholic orphans. Over time, the CAS became notorious for placing Catholic children in Protestant homes, which became problematic due to the "anti-Papist, anti-Italian, anti-Slavic biases of his day" (Creagh, "The Baby trains," 200–202). These tendencies to split up families of ethnicities and religions that were discriminated against in Brace's time, as well as the current challenges of discrimination in the modern foster care system, might affect how scholars view his legacy now.

Regardless of the debates around Charles Loring Brace's legacy, his efforts to create and maintain CAS led to the rehoming of a quarter of a million impoverished, orphaned children in New York. It laid the foundation for the foster care system and inspired others to begin rescuing children as well. In opposition to the CAS's treatment of Catholic children, Sister Irene created the Foundling Asylum of the Sisters of Charity in 1869, later known as the New York Foundling Hospital, which became the Catholic equivalent of the CAS and managed to rescue thousands of

Catholic children, specifically infants and younger children, from poverty (Creagh, "The Baby Trains," 205). These two charities, the CAS and the Foundling Hospital, were the two most prominent charities focused on rescuing children. By the 1920s, the Foundling Hospital, led by Sister Irene's successors, began "cultivating local placements and recruiting working-class women as boarding mothers to train and socialize toddlers for the benefit of prospective adopters" (Creagh, "Faith in Fostering," 10). Children no longer had to be shipped out West to finally families but rather could be taken in by local families.

Despite the challenges the foster care system faces, it still manages to protect homeless and vulnerable youth, and despite Brace's contested legacy, his efforts laid the foundation for other charities to begin rescuing children and eventually for governmental agencies to protect them. These governmental agencies became particularly important when the Great Depression disrupted American society. In 1912, as private organizations such as the Foundling Hospital and CAS provided care for children in need, the United States government, under the leadership of President William Howard Taft, formed the Children's Bureau, which was became the first government agency in the world dedicated specifically to child welfare ("ACF History"). The goal of this agency was to "investigate and report . . . upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes" (Children's Bureau Timeline).

CAS and the Foundling Hospital protected and assisted children in finding families into the 1920s, but as the Great Depression hit the country, many children found themselves in group homes around the country instead of in families. As many as seventy percent of children were living in group homes by 1931, which became particularly detrimental when the recession resulted in the closure of hundreds of boarding houses each year (Creagh, "Faith in Fostering," 13–14). At the time that private organizations were struggling to find homes for the at-risk youth

depending on them, the leaders of the Children's Bureau worked to draft sections of the Social Security Act of 1935 to offer assistance to children in need. Specifically, Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935, also called the Aid to Dependent Children and later renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children, granted funds to allow the Children's Bureau to provide maternal welfare services, child welfare services, and medical care for crippled children ("Children's Bureau Timeline").

The Children's Bureau went through multiple transitions, shifting departments almost every decade before become part of the Administration for Children and Families in 1991, where it has remained ("Children's Bureau Timeline"). Despite all of the shifting around the government, the Children's Bureau never stopped providing assistance and homes to children in need and continues to provide for America's children. In 2002, the Children's Bureau partnered with corporate and nonprofit partners to create the AdoptUSKids photolisting website that shares pictures and information of children in the system as well as contact information for caseworkers to increase adoption opportunities for children across the country ("Children's Bureau Timeline"). Under the umbrella of the Children's Bureau, different state-specific governmental agencies and departments continue to provide for children in the American foster care system.

In Georgia specifically there are more than 12,000 children in the foster care system ("Demographics of Children in Foster Care"). The total number of children in the foster care system around the nation is approximately 430,000 children in 2018 ("The AFCARS Report"). Of those 430,000, approximately 19,000 are in group homes around the country ("The AFCARS Report"). Group homes have been an integral part of the foster care system since its inception, particularly during the time of the Great Depression. For children who are unable to find foster families, including children with special needs and disabilities who often face more challenges in

finding foster care placements or permanent placement, there would be nowhere else to turn without group homes to provide a safe environment (Coyle).

Now, however, at-risk youth might find it difficult to find housing in group homes: the passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act seeks "to curtail the use of congregate or group care for children and instead places a new emphasis on family foster homes" and to decrease a youth's time in a group home to no more than two weeks, with some exceptions to certain institutions ("Family First Prevention Services Act"). Through providing mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services, this act strives to prevent the need for foster care placements. While this initially presents itself as a good thing—it makes sense for children to be able to stay with their parents or relatives if prevention services are keeping them safe—the Families First Prevention Services Act brings new issues: it assumes that current foster families can take in more children, that relatives of foster children can take in those children without, and that preventative services will successfully protect all children in cases of maltreatment.

Assuming that foster families and relatives of foster children can provide homes to more children is particularly troublesome because in Georgia alone there are almost double the amount of children in the foster care system than there are foster homes ("Who Cares"). Many of the children who need to be removed from dangerous situations with no relatives to live with and no foster home to move into will need to turn to group homes. With the number of groups home diminishing because of the Families First Act, however, the children who are not already in foster homes and who can no longer reside in a group home for more than two weeks will struggle to find placements at all.

Autoethnography

Choosing to work with a nonprofit that supports the foster care system stems from two experiences: first, growing up in a family with a history of fostering and adopting, and second working with a nonprofit through community-engaged projects both in my undergraduate years and during my master's program. Some of my earliest memories are of my older brother and I playing with a foster child who lived next door with our grandparents. He was a year older than my brother. For seven years he lived with our grandparents until he found a family to adopt him, but for a week or two every summer he would come back to stay with my grandparents and would spend much of his free time with my brother and me. My grandmother spoke often about the thirty or so foster children she and my grandfather took in over the years, and it made me interested in the system and the idea of providing safety and shelter to children in need.

As I grew older and my grandmother no longer spoke as much about her foster children, however, that interest faded, yet it was always there in the back of my mind. When I began working with Green Card Voices in the last semester of my undergraduate degree in spring 2018, I began to consider what it might be like to work with a nonprofit that supports the foster care system and at-risk youth. My desire to learn more about the foster care system and perhaps work with a nonprofit supporting the system came back to me that semester for a very specific reason: my grandmother had passed a few months before, and while helping clean out her house that spring, we came across some letters from one of her foster sons in which he spoke about how much she and my grandfather still meant to him thirty years after he left their house. The opportunity to work with a nonprofit supporting the foster care system presented itself when it was time for my capstone and this practicum. My interest both in community-engaged work and in the foster care system aligned perfectly for me to be able to enter nonprofit that supports the

system to build upon my community writing skills and have the chance to gain a better understanding of the writing needed by nonprofits.

When Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society (CAS), which as previously explained became the basis for the foster care system, he could not have foreseen the challenges and imperfections of his orphan train idea or the ways in which the modern foster care system has both solved some of this issues and failed at correcting many of them. Despite the good intentions of the CAS, the group's early shortcomings in regularly scheduled, frequent follow-ups with the children they shipped West resulted in the exploitation of child labor on the farms where they were often sent (Vandepol 226). Brace later investigated the claims and took measures to decrease the possibility of child abuse in the foster homes by permanently assigning agents to the states in Midwest (Cook 189). I mention this briefly because of the stark difference I saw in how children were protected in the earliest stages of the foster care system versus the protections nonprofits like Advocates provide for at-risk youth now. I am thinking specifically of the training that staff members of Advocates must go through and the forensic interviewing that is implemented should a case of child abuse arise.

Children who have experienced abuse are questioned through the means of forensic interviewing which places them in a welcoming room where they are asked questions on camera while being watched through a two-way mirror. The child never has to relive what happened more than the one time it takes to ask all of the questions. Before this internship, I did not know that forensic interviewing even existed. Only when I started actually working with a nonprofit supporting the foster care system did I have a chance to learn the extent to how the system aims to protect children now. Compared to just loading children up on a train and sending them hundreds of miles away from the only place they have ever known, it is clear to see how far the

system has come in protecting youth in need. Staff at nonprofits supporting the foster care system are mandated to undergo over thirty hours of child abuse training and are taught very specific ways to speak with children who might approach them with a disclosure of some form of abuse either happening to the children themselves or happening to another child they know.

Even the way the policies need to be written and the language required by COA speaks to how particular the system is about protecting children now, which is so very different from how it all started. This community-engaged internship provided a chance to learn about these changes with hands-on experience and see how language is used in this type of environment. Writing for Advocates helped me better understand how the foster care system. Without this internship I would not have understood how specific the language of the system needs to be in an effort to provide protections to the children in the system. My own curiosity about the system, the research skills gained in the MAPW program, and the experience from the internship helped me better my understanding of the system and its evolution to what it has become today. My time in the professional writing program taught me the research skills to make these sorts of connections and better understand how the foster care system developed since its inception as well as prepare me to write the materials to help support Advocates' work.

As mentioned before, Advocates needed to meet the requirements put forth by COA in order to be licensed as a qualified residential treatment program. My internship consisted mostly of writing the policies and procedures for the COA standards put in place for the Behavior Support and Management (BSM) policies and procedures of nonprofits working with at-risk youth. DFCS defines BSM as "those principles and techniques used to assist a child in facilitating self-control, addressing inappropriate behavior, and achieving positive outcomes in a constructive and safe manner" (FY 2020 Room 11). Classes taken in the MAPW program and

my time as a GRA in the program provided the writing, editing, and researching skills necessary to write that policy successfully. Grant and Proposal Writing along with Technical Writing taught me how to write a document that covers a range of different requirements, which helped me when I began to write the BSM policy.

Before beginning to write this policy, I read through the COA standards and took notes to familiarize myself with what that organization requires. Seeing how specific and rigorous the standards are in order to ensure the protection of at-risk youth in these programs really put into perspective the importance of the work of nonprofits like Advocates: without group homes such as the one Advocates runs, many children would have nowhere to go. In addition, knowing the history of the system and the workings of the modern system expanded my understanding of the writing needed to support an organization serving the needs of children. My knowledge of the history of the system and its modern iteration made me understand how important the wording is for everything and why the Council on Accreditation was looking for specific protections of the children. Without researching the history of the foster care system and seeing how it has evolved through the years, it would have been harder to understand why COA was so specific and why there are so many rules and regulations in place now.

COA required the first part of the policy a couple months earlier than the full policy. This part covered the organization's BSM philosophy. This segment of the full BSM policy was reviewed by Advocates' Board of Directors and accepted by COA without any changes or corrections (see Appendix A). Per Advocates' request, it is marked as a draft. The full BSM policy yet been reviewed and finalized by the board of directors or sent to COA (see Appendix B). Through writing this I learned all of the nuanced aspects of how nonprofits work to benefit at-risk youth and provide them with the skills and abilities they will need as they grow older.

DFCS is very particular about how staff at nonprofits can interact with the youth and how careful the staff must be when interacting with the youth.

Working with Advocates for Children to help them become accredited through the Council on Accreditation in order to keep the Flowering Branch Children's Shelter operational exposed the underlying negative effects of the Families First Prevention Services Act that, in its attempts to reduce the need and costs for the foster care system, ultimately harms group shelters and the children who reside there and rely on group homes for safety and security. While I had read about the legislation in my initial research for the proposal of this capstone project, I had not seen the effects of it firsthand until my internship with Advocates. Seeing this firsthand really made me consider the long-term effects of these types of bills. If all of the group homes effectively get shut down or only allow youth to reside there for a maximum of two weeks, where will those children go? The idea behind preventing child abuse and helping children stay with their families, as the Families First Act states, sounds reasonable and positive, but its negative impacts, both on nonprofits attempting to benefit at-risk youth and on the youth themselves, seems to have been overlooked.

While there are nonprofits that help children find foster homes and get adopted, I learned in this internship that this is not the only way that nonprofits support youth in the system. Through the practicum I learned how much Advocates and other nonprofits truly do for the children in their communities: they provide aid to children who have been abused and provide housing to any at-risk youth who needs it. They even provide a living program to help youth ages eighteen to twenty-four adjust to living independently by providing housing and paying bills as well as offer programs where trained professionals will work with families to help prevent child abuse. Without the practicum I would not have seen just how much goes into providing these

services, such as grant writing, training the staff, ensuring the safety of all children on the premises, and partnering with landlords in the area for the youth who are over eighteen and are in the independent living program.

Also, without the practicum I would not have learned how much writing goes into making it possible to provide these services. Along with the obvious, such as grant writing to get funding for the programs, each of the programs requires manuals policies and procedures in order to ensure that all staff members adhere to what is expected of them. In addition to that, each of the policies and procedures also needs to adhere to the standards put forth by the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS). To create these manuals and procedures, the nonprofit requires technical communication. Before starting the practicum, I had not considered just how much technical communication goes into keeping an organization such as this operational.

While writing the BSM policy was the focus of the practicum, I also spent time editing manuals that were already used at by the staff. Working with the many different documents, including the standards used to write the policies and procedures as well as the policies and procedures themselves and the manuals I was editing, required me to remain organized. Through the help of a professional journal, I kept track of what I was doing each day and what I had accomplished. What became helpful specifically was keeping notes of the particular formatting that each document required. Rather than just promise myself that I would remember what I was doing for each document as I typically do, this practicum proved to me that by keeping this type of information in one convenient location, I could more efficiently work in the documents and create a set of documents that were all very clearly meant to be together.

My time in the MAPW program prepared me for this work in three very specific ways: (1) researching by asking questions and getting answers from many people, (2) looking at standards and requirements and producing a deliverable to meet those requirements, and (3) writing under strict deadlines. My classes in the MAPW program, particularly Issues and Research and Careers in the Literary Arts, required me to ask many questions in order to find the answers I needed, which prepared me to approach different members the administration at Advocates to find the answers about what the standards required. As well as knowing what questions to ask to find the answers that were needed, the MAPW program prepared me to be able to write deliverables that meet the standards required. Through classes such as Technical Writing and Grant and Proposal Writing, I learned how to meet specific standards.

Researching the history of the foster care system and the types of writing that nonprofits require, along with the classes I took in the MAPW program, prepared me to begin my practicum with Advocates for Children. Without having done research prior to the practicum and without having the experience provided by the MAPW program, I would not have been able to produce the materials that I needed to for the nonprofit.

Conclusion

Going into this practicum I felt confident that my time in the MAPW program, both from the classes offered and the opportunity to be a graduate research assistant, fully prepared me for the practicum and all the tasks and duties that came along with it. Through classes such as Technical Writing, I was able to learn the fundamentals of writing in that type of style while other classes such as Issues and Research taught me how to work through large projects and get the information necessary for that project to be successful. One of the last classes I had the privilege to take in this program, Careers in the Literary Arts, provided an opportunity to work on and manage a community-engaged project for a nonprofit. What was perhaps the most valuable part of the MAPW program that truly prepared me for the practicum was my graduate research assistantship which provided me the chance to hone my professional writing and editing skills and to learn stronger researching and learn project management skills. Throughout the master's program I managed a full load of classes, an internship, and a graduate research position, which prepared me for how quickly the process of writing the policies for Advocates needed to go. I knew how to ensure that I could get the work done.

While the GRA position taught me valuable research and project management skills that I needed for this practicum, what it prepared me for the most was the writing and editing that I did during my time with Advocates. My GRA position allowed me to continue working with Green Card Voices to help edit other books for publication and gave me confidence that I could do what Advocates needed. The time spent with GCV and in the MAPW program provided the experience necessary to enter a nonprofit supporting the foster care system and produce the written materials, in this case the BSM policy and procedure, that was required. In addition, working with GCV, particularly the Atlanta edition of the book that included DACA-impacted

individuals, demonstrated how important careful language is, which prepared me for how careful the language regarding at-risk youth in the foster care system needs to be. Having spent two years before the practicum working with national nonprofit, I had a basic understanding of what it might be like to work with a local nonprofit for the practicum. That prior experience helped me in the practicum because I had become comfortable with that type of work.

As well as the experiences in and out of class that prepared me for the practicum, the independent research into the types of writing that nonprofits need and into the history of the foster care system made the practicum experience more valuable. Without that type of research and without the classes and extracurricular experiences during the MAPW program, I would not have been as prepared to write the deliverables that Advocates needed. Writing programs, specifically those that offer chances for community engagement, can prepare students to enter the nonprofit sector. Community engagement projects and courses provide the type of experience necessary to succeed in professional settings because these types of projects and courses take students out of the classroom and allow them to develop skills in a professional setting. The community engagement projects of the MAPW program allowed me to excel in the practicum and put my skills to use on a meaningful project.

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Appendix A

Policy Name:	Behavior Support and Management: Environmental Safety and Crisis Prevention
Domain:	Organizational Policies & Procedures
Scope:	Entire Organization
Policy Location:	Organizational Policies & Procedures and FBCS Handbook
Date of Adoption:	3/18/2020
Effective Date:	4/1/2020
Date(s) of Revision:	

Introduction

Advocates for Bartow's Children, Inc. (Advocates) is dedicated to providing a safe environment for our clients, personnel, and stakeholders and to prevent crises whenever possible. As such, we strive to provide the necessary supports and resources that keep personnel and clients safe and enhance the client's quality of life. In addition, we work to teach, strengthen, and expand upon positive behaviors so that we can minimize the use of crisis interventions.

Policy

It is the policy of Advocates to prioritize the safety and well-being of every client within the programs we provide. All rules and policies are designed to keep each client and staff member safe from harm and prevent the need for crisis interventions. The use of individualized, proactive interventions to identify challenging behaviors, their antecedents, and how to help the service recipient cope and de-escalate are unique to each department and program type. Each staff member is allowed to practice crisis intervention strategies such as isolation, restraints, etc. based on their individual levels of training within the scope of their current position and program.

The organization's behavior support and management policies and practices promote positive behavior and protect the safety of service recipients and staff. The challenging behaviors that invoke crisis interventions are often times rooted in the individual's personal trauma and crisis interventions, whether or not they are restrictive, run the risk of retraumatizing the individual. The literature on trauma informed care identifies six core strategies for reducing the need for crisis interventions:
- leadership toward organizational change
- use of data to inform practice
- workforce development
- use of restraint and seclusion reduction tools
- improved the service recipient's role
- debriefing techniques

Advocates implements these strategies to decrease the chance of retraumatizing clients, provide a safe environment, and prevent the need for crisis interventions.

In the event of a crisis, Advocates' staff are expected to use de-escalation techniques to mitigate the crisis if possible. If de-escalation fails or if there is imminent threat of harm, Advocates' staff are to remain calm, remove others from danger, and practice the procedures appropriate to their current position and program for crisis intervention.

Any time a crisis situation occurs, staff are required to write a crisis incident report, and to submit that report to the chair of the Risk Prevention and Management Committee within 24–48 hours.

Definitions

- Resident: any youth in one of the residential service programs
- Client: any person or stakeholder receiving services directly or indirectly from the organization
- Behavior Support and Management: the principles and techniques used to assist a child in facilitating self-control, addressing inappropriate behavior, and achieving positive outcomes in a constructive and safe manner
- Direct Care staff: the staff trained to interact with residents and/or clients
- HELP training: an intervention technique designed for residential treatment facilities, healthcare facilities, and education programs
- Trauma-Informed Care: a strength-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors
- Individualized Service Plan: a plan created collaboratively between staff and clients that details the progress the client makes while working with or residing at one of Advocates' programs

Behavior Management

Behavior management refers to the guiding principles and techniques that Advocates utilizes to assist the clients within the programs. These techniques allow clients to learn methods for self-control, to address inappropriate behavior, and to achieve positive outcomes in a constructive and safe manner. This policy will outline the approved techniques that Advocates uses as well as those that are prohibited. In addition, this policy will detail the types of clients served within each program, the anticipated behavioral challenges, and the acceptable methods of managing those behaviors when necessary.

Procedures

In the event of a crisis situation, all staff must remain calm. If the crisis involves an individual who is a threat to others, do not attempt to hold or restrain the individual. Remove any other clients and/or staff from the immediate area to ensure their safety, and practice the procedures appropriate to their current position and program for crisis intervention

Advocates for Children's Administration Departments and all Programs other than the Flowering Branch Children's Shelter (FBCS)

Advocates seeks to offer a safe environment for all clients within our programs and prevent the need for crisis interventions. To do this we ensure that all meetings with clients and potential clients are conducted in spaces conducive to comfort: the spaces are designed so as not to reintroduce trauma with elements such as natural light. From the very first meeting with clients and potential clients, Advocates utilizes strengths-based trauma-informed care to minimize the need for crisis intervention.

Through assessment tests and observation, Advocates learns what type of care each client needs and what types of interventions work for them. All staff are informed of how to perform de-escalation techniques for each client with whom the staff interacts.

Under no circumstances may any program or department outside of FBCS practice any restrictive interventions. Should a crisis situation arise, each program and department must use strategies to prevent harm to the clients and the staff. In the event that de-escalation fails, or there is the threat of immediate harm, staff should:

1) Remove themselves and other bystanders from the immediate area.
2) Contact the appropriate emergency services or law enforcement and allow them to assume control of the situation.
3) Confirm the safety and well-being of everyone removed from the area of the crisis situation.
4) Once the crisis is resolved and the threat of harm is no longer present, staff should refer to their individual program manuals to determine consequences to the individual(s) involved if any, such as removal from program, suspension of services, etc.

Any time a crisis situation occurs, staff are required to write a crisis incident report, and to submit that report to the chair of the Risk Prevention and Management Committee within 24–48 hours.

Advocates for Children's Flowering Branch Children's Shelter (FBCS)

FBCS is a Base Level Care Facility that serves youth with minimal mental health and/or physical needs. All staff are trained in Trauma-Informed Care in order to foster an environment in which each youth develops trusting relationships with staff. These relationships promote positive behavior and help maintain a safe environment for the youth. In addition, the trust built between the staff and residents becomes important in the event of escalated behavior: a strong relationship will create trust between the resident and the staff and may help the resident better accept the consequences of negative or escalated behavior.

To form these trusting relationships and maintain a safe environment for the clients, Direct Care staff provide:

- support as positive role models
- nurturance, structure, support, respect, and active involvement in the residents' lives
- predictable limit-setting
- flexibility when appropriate and in the resident's best interest
- guided practices to learn effective communication, positive social interaction, and problem-solving skills
- education and skills training

The goal of these strong relationships is to prevent the need for crisis intervention, which is always the last resort.

The Direct Care staff build on each client's strengths by reinforcing positive behavior to help prevent crisis situations. Behavior management is individualized and specific to each resident and is determined by the Individual Service Plan (ISP). As each ISP is unique to each resident, all staff members are to consult the ISPs regularly to ensure that they are familiar with the youth's needs challenging behaviors, possible triggers, coping skills, and progress made towards positive behavior. This allows staff to identify challenging behaviors and their antecedents and assists staff in helping the client cope and de-escalate. Working with the youth with their ISPs will aid in teaching the youth self-control.

Should corrective action become necessary, it must be a fitting consequence in proportion to the seriousness of the inappropriate behavior exhibited. Staff should remember that behavior should be monitored with realistic expectations utilizing their Trauma-Informed Care training.

Depending on the youth's behavior and the resulting consequence, a resident may become inconsolable or uncontrollable. In the event that the resident begins exhibiting increased behavioral problems, the staff member or a fellow staff member should use communication techniques as dictated in Human Empowerment Leadership Principles (HELP) training.

Intervention by Law Enforcement is appropriate only if the child's behaviors escalate to the point of exceeding the ability of properly trained staff to manage the child safely and the issues poses a physical danger to the child, staff, or other children. If there is imminent threat of harm, Advocates' staff are to remain calm, remove others from danger, and call 911.

Any time a crisis situation occurs, staff are required to write a crisis incident report, and to submit that report to the chair of the Risk Prevention and Management Committee within 24 – 48 hours.

Approved Practices for Corrective Action

Consequences must be in proportion to the seriousness of the inappropriate behavior exhibited. Approved corrective actions include:

- Restricting TV
- Restricting video games
- Enforcing an early bedtime
- Removing a radio
- Confiscating any toy
- Not permitting access into the boys/girl's common area to socialize.
- Restricting the pool table
- Restricting outing privileges
- Enforcing a time in with the resident must write a paragraph/essay on a related topic
- Restricting Facebook or social media privileges
- Separating from other clients
- Not permitting a prudent parenting phone call. Note: *Under no circumstances are the removal of telephone calls or visitation with caregivers to be used as a method for addressing disciplinary problems.*

Prohibited Practices for Corrective Action

No physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse will be used in disciplining a youth. The organization prohibits the use of restrictive interventions. In compliance with the Department of Family and Children Services, the following forms of behavior management **shall not** be used:

- Spanking, slapping, switching, or hitting a child with your hand or any object
- Shaking, pinching, or biting
- Tying a child with a rope or similar item
- Withholding of meals or hydration
- Denying the child of contact, communication, and visits with approved family members or other visiting resources
- Criticizing the child's family or the child's experiences with the family

- Humiliating or degrading punishment which subjects the child to ridicule, such as:
  - Cutting or combing the child's hair for punishment
  - Name calling and public scolding
  - Forcing any child to wear clothing or accessories usually associated with the other sex
- Threatening a child with removal from the group home
- Locking a child in a room/closet or outside the home
- Punishing the group for the misbehavior of an individual child
- Participating in the behavior management of other children or disciplining other children
- Destroying the child's property
- Assigning of excessive or unreasonable work tasks that are not related to the resident's misbehaviors
- Denying the child of sleep
- Denying the child of shelter, clothing, or essential personal needs
- Denying the child of essential program services
- Conducting interventions that involve withholding nutrition or hydration or that inflict physical or psychological pain (i.e. withholding of meals or hydration, the use of demeaning, shaming, or degrading language and bullying activities)
- Unnecessarily punitive restrictions including restricting contact with family, criticizing the child's family or the child's experiences with the family, forcing physical exercise to eliminate behaviors
- Using unwarranted, invasive procedures or activities as a disciplinary action
- Using manual holds, chemical restraints, or mechanical restraints by anyone not adequately trained in accordance with policy, federal, state (RCCL), and local legal and regulatory requirements, and approved family members or visiting resources
- Locking the child in a secluded area

Appendix B

Policy Name:	Behavior Support and Management: Environmental Safety and Crisis Prevention
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Advocates complies with federal, state and local legal and regulatory requirements.

The organization's behavior support and management policies and practices promote positive behavior and protect the safety of service recipients and staff. The challenging behaviors that invoke crisis interventions are often times rooted in the individual's personal trauma and crisis interventions, whether or not they are restrictive, run the risk of retraumatizing the individual. The literature on trauma informed care identifies six core strategies for reducing the need for crisis interventions:

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- debriefing techniques

Advocates implements these strategies to decrease the chance of retraumatizing clients, provide a safe environment, and prevent the need for crisis interventions.

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- Individualized Service Plan: a plan created collaboratively between staff and clients that details the progress the client makes while working with or residing at one of Advocates' programs
- Resident: any youth in one of the residential service programs
- Trauma-Informed Care: a strength-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors

Behavior Management

Behavior management refers to the guiding principles and techniques that Advocates utilizes to assist the clients within the programs. These techniques allow clients to learn methods for self-control, to address inappropriate behavior, and to achieve positive outcomes in a constructive and safe manner. This policy will outline the approved techniques that Advocates uses as well as those that are prohibited. In addition, this policy will detail the types of clients served within each program, the anticipated behavioral challenges, and the acceptable methods of managing those behaviors when necessary.

Procedures

FBCS is a Base Level Care Facility that serves youth with minimal mental health and/or physical needs. All staff are trained in Trauma-Informed Care in order to foster an environment in which each youth develops trusting relationships with staff. These relationships promote positive behavior and help maintain a safe environment for the youth. In addition, the trust built between the staff and residents becomes important in the event of escalated behavior: a strong relationship will create trust between the resident and the staff and may help the resident better accept the consequences of negative or escalated behavior.

To form these trusting relationships and maintain a safe environment for the clients, Direct Care staff provide:
- support as positive role models
- nurturance, structure, support, respect, and active involvement in the residents' lives
- predictable limit-setting
- flexibility when appropriate and in the resident's best interest
- guided practices to learn effective communication, positive social interaction, and problem-solving skills
- education and skills training

The goal of these strong relationships is to prevent the need for crisis intervention, which is always the last resort.

The Direct Care staff build on each client's strengths by reinforcing positive behavior to help prevent crisis situations. Behavior management is individualized and specific to each resident and is determined by the Individual Service Plan (ISP). As each ISP is unique to each resident, all staff members are to consult the ISPs regularly to ensure that they are familiar with the youth's needs challenging behaviors, possible triggers, coping skills, and progress made towards positive behavior. This allows staff to identify challenging behaviors and their antecedents and assists staff in helping the client cope and de-escalate. Working with the youth with their ISPs will aid in teaching the youth self-control.

Should corrective action become necessary, it must be a fitting consequence in proportion to the seriousness of the inappropriate behavior exhibited. Staff should remember that behavior should be monitored with realistic expectations utilizing their Trauma-Informed Care training.

Depending on the youth's behavior and the resulting consequence, a resident may become inconsolable or uncontrollable. In the event that the resident begins exhibiting increased behavioral problems, the staff member or a fellow staff member should use communication techniques as dictated in Human Empowerment Leadership Principles (HELP) training.

HELP training has two parts—a communication lesson and an emergency safety intervention lesson. The communication lesson teaches listening and communication techniques, involving the youth in regaining control, encouraging coping skills to self-regulate, separating individuals in an altercation, offering a voluntary escort to guide the person to a safe location, voluntary withdrawal from the group to allow the person to calm down, and other de-escalation techniques.

In the event of a crisis situation, all staff must remain calm. If the crisis involves an individual who is a threat to others, do not attempt to hold or restrain the individual. Remove any other clients and/or staff from the immediate area to ensure their safety and practice the procedures appropriate to their current position and program for crisis intervention.

Intervention by Law Enforcement is appropriate only if the child's behaviors escalate to the point of exceeding the ability of properly trained staff to manage the child safely and the issues poses a physical danger to the child, staff, or other children. If there is imminent threat of harm, Advocates' staff are to remain calm, remove others from danger, and call 911.

Any time a crisis situation occurs, staff are required to write a crisis incident report, and to submit that report to the chair of the Risk Prevention and Management Committee within 24–48 hours.

Staff involved with a crisis intervention situation must notify the program director immediately. The program director will review the incident no later than one business day after the report to examine the following:
- if preemptive measures were taken to avoid the crisis intervention
- if the individual's behavior support and management plan was followed
- if the measures taken were effective.

The program director must also review what strategies were utilized in response to the crisis intervention, including whether or not the police were called and if the individual was removed from the program.

Approved Practices for Corrective Action

Consequences must be in proportion to the seriousness of the inappropriate behavior exhibited. Approved corrective actions include:

- Restricting TV
- Restricting video games
- Enforcing an early bedtime
- Removing a radio
- Confiscating any toy
- Not permitting access into the boys/girl's common area to socialize.
- Restricting the pool table
- Restricting outing privileges
- Enforcing a time in with the resident must write a paragraph/essay on a related topic
- Restricting Facebook or social media privileges
- Separating from other clients
- Not permitting a prudent parenting phone call. Note: *Under no circumstances are the removal of telephone calls or visitation with caregivers to be used as a method for addressing disciplinary problems.*

Prohibited Practices for Corrective Action

No physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse will be used in disciplining a youth. The organization prohibits the use of restrictive interventions. In compliance with the Department of Family and Children Services, the following forms of behavior management **shall not** be used:

- Spanking, slapping, switching, or hitting a child with your hand or any object
- Shaking, pinching, or biting
- Tying a child with a rope or similar item
- Withholding of meals or hydration
- Denying the child of contact, communication, and visits with approved family members or other visiting resources
- Criticizing the child's family or the child's experiences with the family
- Humiliating or degrading punishment which subjects the child to ridicule, such as:
  - Cutting or combing the child's hair for punishment
  - Name calling and public scolding
  - Forcing any child to wear clothing or accessories usually associated with the other sex
- Threatening a child with removal from the group home
- Locking a child in a room/closet or outside the home
- Punishing the group for the misbehavior of an individual child
- Participating in the behavior management of other children or disciplining other children
- Destroying the child's property
- Assigning of excessive or unreasonable work tasks that are not related to the resident's misbehaviors
- Denying the child of sleep
- Denying the child of shelter, clothing, or essential personal needs
- Denying the child of essential program services

- Conducting interventions that involve withholding nutrition or hydration or that inflict physical or psychological pain (i.e. withholding of meals or hydration, the use of demeaning, shaming, or degrading language and bullying activities)
- Unnecessarily punitive restrictions including restricting contact with family, criticizing the child's family or the child's experiences with the family, forcing physical exercise to eliminate behaviors
- Using unwarranted, invasive procedures or activities as a disciplinary action
- Using manual holds, chemical restraints, or mechanical restraints by anyone not adequately trained in accordance with policy, federal, state (RCCL), and local legal and regulatory requirements, and approved family members or visiting resources
- Locking the child in a secluded area

Reviewing BSM Practices

A committee comprised of all levels of staff will conduct regular reviews of the use of behavior support and management intervention.

This committee will determine whether Advocates' BSM practices are current and effective and evaluate any crisis intervention situations that occurred between reviews. Information regarding staff's responses to crisis situations will be collected and reviewed, including how often staff had to turn to last resort intervention (e.g., remove from program or calling the police).

The committee will determine if the current practices used are up-to-date with federal standards. Should the practices need to be updated, this committee will inform the staff and set up new training measures for the staff's continued education as well as update all policies and procedures where appropriate. The committee will establish whether staff need additional resources and will provide those resources as necessary.

Efforts should also be taken to minimize the use of crisis interventions. The data on the frequency of crisis interventions and their outcomes will allow the committee to monitor the progress Advocates is making towards achieving treatment outcomes and identifying when more supportive resources are needed so that these resources can be supplied or a plan can be made to supply them.

Advocates recognizes that the prevention of crisis interventions is not achieved with a single intervention and thus strives to find the root causes of the youths' problems and the approaches for responding to them. This committee will re-evaluate Advocates' approach to crisis interventions to ensure that our approaches are effective and up-to-date and support continuous improvement.

Information Shared with the Youths' Parents or Guardians

At admission into FBCS, parents or legal guardians and clients will receive a copy of Advocates' written behavior support and management philosophy and procedures. Parents, legal guardians, or case workers are involved in the development of each individual service plan (ISP) which outlines individualized behavioral needs and how FBCS works to provide a safe environment to prevent the need for restrictive behavior management interventions.

Each ISP records the youth's needs, challenging behaviors, possible triggers, coping skills, and progress made towards positive behavior. Consideration is given to past experiences with restrictive behavior management interventions; antecedents and emotional triggers; medical,

psychological, or social factors; perception of emotional and physical safety; and past use of coping skills to mitigate the need for an emergency situation intervention (ESI). The ISP outlines a behavior support and management plan for each child. This ISP will identify strengths-based strategies that may help deescalate behavior and intervention methods that may be used in the event of an ESI; it will be updated regularly with the consent of the child, legal guardian, and FBCS personnel.

In the event of an incident involving harassment or violence and a minor, the staff will inform the parents/guardians of the incident and the steps taken to prevent recurrence.

Personnel Training

All personnel must receive behavior support training that promotes a safe and therapeutic service environment, ensures all Advocates' personnel are responsive to individual triggers, and takes a trauma-informed approach. Staff are trained in practices that promote positive behavior and that decrease the chance of retraumatization. Staff are also trained to recognize challenging behaviors that are a threat to self or others and medical conditions. Trauma-informed training must be included as psychosocial issues from clients' past traumas may play a role in challenging behaviors.

This training informs the staff of the impact of the physical environment and other contributing factors that may lead to a crisis, so that it might be prevented, and the impact of staff behavior and responses on the behaviors of service recipients.

Non-direct service personnel must also undergo training to ensure that they are aware of how to respond appropriately to incidents of out-of-control behavior and how to help create a more therapeutic environment. Non-direct service personnel are also trained in safety procedures should an incident escalate to need the last resort measure (e.g., they are trained on when to call the police).

All personnel training takes into consideration the ages of the service recipients to address age-appropriate but potentially dangerous behavior in ways that will not harm the service recipients. The ultimate goal of this training is to help the clients recover.

All personnel are trained in the HELP technique. HELP is a safety management continuum designed for residential treatment facilities, health care facilities, and educational programs. This intervention technique utilizes a two-piece approach using communication skills as a primary intervention technique: the residential staff helps the resident (client in crisis) to focus on safe and functional problem-solving solutions and only uses a physical restraint intervention as a last resort for redirection when a youth is harming his/herself or others.

The HELP restraints should only be used as a last resort after all other less-restrictive options have been exercised. Restraint should only occur if the resident is harming him/herself or others or if the residential staff believes that immediate harm will occur. A resident that is running away from the program should never be restrained unless in immediate danger. A restraint should never be used for the convenience of the staff, as a form of punishment, or in response to property damage that does not involve imminent danger to the youth or others, and a restraint may never be used if it contradicts the ISP. If the child is unable to be calmed down and the behavior continues to escalate, the on-call personnel should be notified to assist in de-escalation.

HELP training is evaluated on an annual basis to ensure that all personnel are aware of the interventions that HELP permits. Staff are taught proper and safe use of interventions, including when it is appropriate to use restrictive interventions and the time limits permitted for restraint. Restraint may only be used for fifteen minutes with children nine years old and younger and for thirty minutes with children ten years old and older. Additional measures such as contacting emergency personnel may be necessary if the child cannot be calmed within the time limits. All restraint will be discontinued immediately if they produce adverse effects such as illness, severe emotional or physical stress, or injury. Only qualified personnel may extend restraint beyond the maximum time limit. These qualified personnel must go through training and evaluation in accordance with federal and state requirements.

All personnel are trained to understand the experience of being placed in seclusion or a restraint, including the medical and therapeutic risks related to the restrictive interventions and the resulting consequence of the misuse of restrictive interventions, including trauma and retraumatization. This training also ensures that personnel know the techniques to prevent and reduce injury to the youth in the event of restraint.

Annual training must include how to evaluate and assess physical and mental status, including signs of physical distress, vital indicators, and nutritional, hydration, and hygiene needs and when to discontinue the use of intervention. Personnel must also be prepared to document and debrief the incident.

To ensure that all personnel are competent in the HELP technique, there will be a post-test evaluation as well as an observation period to discern if all personnel practice HELP properly.

Restrictive behavior management interventions must be used in a manner that protects the safety and well-being of service recipients and personnel in crisis situations when less-restrictive measures have been proven ineffective. Restraint may not be used in routine discipline, compliance, or convenience and must be a last resort.

Personnel are qualified through annual training and evaluation to authorize each restrictive behavior management intervention. In the event of restraint, service recipients are monitored continuously, face-to-face, and assessed at least every fifteen minutes for any harmful health or psychological reactions as well as the need for food, water, and use of bathroom facilities. Personnel must provide access to food, water, and the bathroom facilities when it is safe and appropriate.

Following each incident of restrictive intervention Medicaid requires that a physician or other qualified clinician conducts and documents an initial face-to-face assessment and summary review within one hour of the intervention to evaluate the health and safety of client, the appropriateness of the intervention, and necessary changes to the treatment plan. Organizations should review state Medicaid plans for their state's definition of a qualified clinician and a list of specific elements to be included as part of the assessment.

Documentation and Debriefing
After the use of a restrictive intervention, Advocates will assess the incident, its effects, and its preceding circumstances in order to reduce future preventable occurrences and untoward consequences. All incidents of restrictive behavior management interventions must be documented. This includes documenting the justification, use, circumstances, and length the restraint in the service

recipient's case file as well as any attempts made prior to the restraint to preempt it, including the strategies identified in the service recipient's ISP. Documentation must also include the names of the service recipient and the personnel involved, the reasons for the interventions, and the length of the intervention as well as verification that the personnel maintained continuous visual observation.

Personnel may also include the "5 Whys" of the incident in order to help understand the reasons why a restrictive intervention was necessitated and discover the root cause of the incident. This will allow personnel to analyze more deeply all of the contributing factors and to identify necessary changes.

Debriefing must occur within twenty-four hours of the incident in a safe, confidential setting with the service recipient, appropriate personnel, and parents or legal guardian. All attempts to reach the parent or legal guardian within the twenty-four-hour period will be documented, and if Advocates is unable to reach the parent or guardian, we will continue outreach attempts past the twenty-four-hour period to notify them of the incident.

If the service recipient initially refuses to participate, Advocates will make continued attempts to involve the individual. Through a standard set of questions that will be asked in all debriefings, Advocates aims to evaluate the emotional and physical well-being of the service recipient; identify the need for counseling, medical care, or other services related to the incident; identify antecedent behaviors and modify the service plan as appropriate; and facilitate the person's reentry into routine activities.

For any modifications to be made in the ISP, frontline and clinical staff must be in attendance for the debriefing in order to ensure that both perspectives are represented in any modifications. Personnel involved in the restrictive behavior management intervention will be debriefed to assess their current physical and emotional status; discover the precipitating events; and discuss how the incident was handled. This debriefing will also give the personnel an opportunity to suggest any necessary changes to procedures and/or training in order to avoid future incidents.

Any other person involved in or witness to the incident must also be debriefed to identify possible injuries and emotional reactions. This debriefing will include a discussion of factors leading to the incident and other appropriate responses for future situations.

Through debriefing, Advocates hopes to return the environment to pre-incident condition and resume normal program routine.

Advocates aims to ensure all residents and staff of FBCS are protected and in a safe environment.

COURTNEY BRADFORD

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RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Technical Writing Intern, Advocates for Children   **January 2020–Present**
- Document procedures to satisfy standards required by the Council on Accreditation   Cartersville, Georgia
- Edit and revise existing documentation to ensure it meets necessary standards
- Write program procedures and general program information

Technical Writing Intern, DLH Corporation, Inc.   **March 2019–Present**
- Write manuals to explain the accounting team's software   Atlanta, Georgia
- Collaborate with the accounting team to create comprehensive instructions
- Perform tests to ensure accessibility and usability

Graduate Research Assistant, Department of English, Kennesaw State University   **August 2018–Present**
- Edit projects about internships for publication   Kennesaw, Georgia
- Assist in writing about community engagement for publication
- Conduct extensive research for academic projects
- Adapt to multiple style guides, including APA, MLA, and Chicago

Proposal Writing Intern, DLH Corporation, Inc.   **August 2017–January 2018**
- Wrote executive summaries for contract proposals on strict deadlines   Atlanta, Georgia
- Edited and proofread grant proposals with teams of professionals
- Reviewed proposals to provide feedback for writing teams

Student Assistant, Department of Student Life, Kennesaw State University   **January 2015–May 2018**
- Edited student organizations' constitutions to ensure that they   Kennesaw, Georgia
  addressed all necessary requirements
- Copyedited final constitutions for any errors before submission

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Copyeditor, *Green Card STEM Voices: Stories from Minnesota Immigrants Working In*   **August 2019–December 2019**
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math   Kennesaw, Georgia
- Edited eighteen narrative essays to preserve the original author's voice
- Created and copyedited the glossary
- Served as the managing editor of a class editorial team to finish preparing this collection

Co-Lead Editorial Assistant,
Green Card Voices: Immigration Stories from Madison and Milwaukee High Schools   **March 2019–May 2019**
- Wrote and updated instructions for classes to complete this project   Kennesaw, Georgia
- Assisted the editors-in-chief to prepare a glossary
- Collaborated with an editorial team to copyedit and proofread all of the essays

Proposal Writer, Lion Life, Inc.   **January 2019–May 2019**
- Worked with a local nonprofit to expand their educational services to county jails   Kennesaw, Georgia
- Wrote proposals to receive grants to help fund the nonprofit's goals
- Researched different grant opportunities for the nonprofit

Student Editor, *Green Card Voices: Immigration Stories from an Atlanta High School*   **January 2018–January 2019**
- Transcribed recordings and constructed a narrative in an author's voice   Kennesaw, Georgia
- Applied a range of editorial skills to finalize narratives for publication
- Worked closely with an editorial team to prepare final manuscript

EDUCATION

Kennesaw State University, *Master of Arts in Professional Writing*   **Anticipated graduation May 2020**
    Relevant courses: Technical Writing, Grant and Proposal Writing,
    Document Design and Desktop Publishing, Issues and Research

Kennesaw State University, *Bachelor of Arts in English*   **May 2018**