INTL/MAS Internship 2010: Internship Evaluation

1. Name and Contact Information: Baptist Child and Family Services: The International Children’s Shelter

Primary Supervisor: Mr. Lupe Fernandez

P.O. Box 762529
San Antonio, Texas 78245

Shelter Director: Ms. Thelma Gutierrez

P.O. Box 762529
San Antonio, Texas 78245

2. Goals and Objectives of the Agency

The International Children’s Shelter (ICS) houses undocumented, unaccompanied minors that are boys, ages twelve to seventeen. ICS is a branch of Baptist Child and Family Services (BCFS) and is contracted by the Division of Unaccompanied Children’s Services (DUCS) and the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The agency’s goals are to provide each minor with legal, educational, medical, psychological, recreational and religious services while his legal case is processed in immigration court. The International Children’s Shelter places unaccompanied minors in the least restrictive environment appropriate for their individual needs and seeks to provide the most natural environment possible given the circumstances.

The boys attend an onsite school Monday through Friday in addition to two weekly group therapy sessions and one individual session. They also meet with their lawyers
and case managers on a weekly basis to resolve their legal status and arrange for possible family reunification. The boys spend an average of three months at the shelter before they are reunified with family, granted special visas, placed in independent living programs or deported. Family reunification and voluntary departure are the two most frequent outcomes of their biweekly immigration hearings.

3. Summary of Tasks

This spring I was the first intern the shelter had ever taken on and because of this my duties were largely self-dictated. In the beginning, I attended immigration court with the boys as a chaperone; I would help tie their ties, listen to them practice what they were going to say to the judge that day, help calm their nerves and plan activities for when the hearing was over. I also taught an interdisciplinary English as a Second Language class three afternoons a week that served as a basis for discussion, organized debates and games. Teaching this class did require preparation on my own time. I also shadowed the case managers to learn more about the family reunification process.

The staff and directors at the shelter were very helpful and grateful to have me. They allowed me to create my own schedule and gave me a lot of freedom when it came to planning activities for the boys. This internship is wonderful for any student who is interested in immigration law, child development or social work. Students should be well aware that working with teenage boys requires a lot of patience and there is a very fragile dynamic to be maintained between being their mentor and being an authority figure. Also, this internship requires absolute dedication. The boys depend on your showing up and look forward to seeing you; an attitude of apathy on their part can easily
set in if you are inconsistent. There is opportunity for an array of internships with both BCFS and the International Children's Shelter. Future students could intern with the teaching staff, mentoring staff, case managers, pro bono lawyers or even RAICES, the nonprofit legal agency that represents the boys. In all of these instances proficiency in the Spanish language would be necessary if not very helpful.