

Summer Internship Report 2017

Emma Chinn, C'19

Hometown: Oak Ridge, Tennessee



**Bridge Refugee Services
Knoxville, TN**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

Bridge Refugee Services, Inc. is a nonprofit refugee resettlement agency with offices in Knoxville and Chattanooga. They are the only refugee resettlement agency in East Tennessee, and have been present in the Knoxville community since 1982. Bridge's mission is to provide opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives, after suffering persecution, so that they become productive, contributing members of the community. In order to accomplish this goal, Bridge provides case management, employment services and the "School Impact Program". Programing includes cultural orientations for new clients, providing job connections and providing access to public assistance.

This summer, I worked at Bridge's Knoxville office as the Cultural Orientation Intern. My main responsibility was administering cultural orientations to new clients and improving the way in which cultural orientations are given. At Bridge, cultural orientation consists of a series of four presentations covering the basics of finance, health and hygiene, community living, safety, public assistance, U.S. laws, cultural adjustment, English, and housing. I gave these presentations to all of the new refugee clients that Bridge received. The presentations were given either in the client's home or at the office, and a translator was always used. I also designed interactive activities and created resources to be used during cultural orientations, in order to better engage clients and increase their understanding of the topics covered. Each client is given a post-test after they have completed cultural orientation, and I was able to administer a few of these myself as well.

During my time at Bridge, I also had the opportunity to do grant research/writing, advocacy work, and research. My main task in the field of grant research was to find grants to support Bridge's School Impact Program, which recently received cuts in funding. This involved researching grant makers, and

researching/collecting data on the School Impact Program itself. By the end of the summer, I was able to draft a Letter of Inquiry to a local Knoxville foundation regarding the School Impact Program. I also researched and collected data for two federal grants.

The advocacy work I had the opportunity to do for Bridge involved collaborating with Bridge's executive director and one of my fellow interns to schedule, create resources for, and attend several meetings with local, state and federal level politicians. During each meeting, we discussed Bridge's role in refugee resettlement and the value that refugees bring to Knoxville. We also communicated the need for better public transportation, more affordable housing for large families, and better job finding networks for refugees and immigrants. Attending these meetings was an incredibly valuable experience for me, as I was able to witness nonprofit advocacy strategies and community building first hand.

The research I did for Bridge involved learning all the details of the Supreme Court's ruling on Trump's Executive Order, "Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States". Few details were available regarding the implementation of the EO at first, so I was tasked with determining how Bridge and its clients would be impacted by the Supreme Court's ruling on the EO. This research was later used in public statements to Bridge's clients, volunteers and supporters.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I would say that my work with cultural orientations made the most tangible difference for Bridge out of all the work I did. Not only did I free up time for the caseworkers by doing a task that would typically fall on them, I created activities and resources that will help them and future interns to better administer cultural orientations. I also left behind a list of other activities and resources to be developed by future interns.

Administering and developing cultural orientations did just as much for me as it did for Bridge, however. Over the course of the summer, I became far more competent in public speaking and I learned how to use a translator effectively. Even more than that, I learned to be comfortable in situations and places that were previously foreign to me. I learned to be both a leader and a listener to people who desperately needed both.

The grant work I did was also mutually beneficial to both Bridge and me. I provided Bridge with useful data, information about grants, and a possible pathway to funding for their School Impact Program. At the same time, I learned infinitely more about the grant writing process and gained confidence in my professional writing skills. I will definitely use what I learned about grant writing in the future, as I am strongly considering a career in the nonprofit sphere.

Attending the advocacy meetings and other unrelated meetings as a representative of Bridge helped me to grow in my professional skills as well. I learned to speak confidently and listen intently. I also learned how to be graceful in situations where I did not agree with others.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

One of the biggest problems I think most interns face is feeling like they have nothing to do and that they aren't having any impact at their place of work. Instead of letting myself feel this way, I decided to take initiative by going the extra mile on every project I was given, and sometimes making my own

work. My time spent in Sewanee's Canale program last year taught me that nonprofits are incredibly busy places, and in order to be effective as an intern at one you have to be a self-starter. There won't always be someone available to direct you, but there will always be plenty of problems in need of solving and projects in need of a leader.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

One problem that I have often encountered when working in a team is the fear of pointing out when someone else on my team is wrong. I think this fear is a result of my desire to be well liked and get along with people. I often collaborated with one of my fellow interns during my time with Bridge, and at one point he sent me a statement he had drafted about Bridge's stance on Trump's EO, "Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States". He wanted my feedback because he knew I had been researching the subject. I noticed that some parts of what he had written were not factual, and I decided to tell him so. It would have been easier for me to avoid confrontation and ignore his errors, but I decided to do what I thought was best for Bridge and correct him. Of course he appreciated my feedback and was not offended. This positive experience gives me the confidence to not be afraid of future confrontations in team situations.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

This internship has definitely made me consider a career working with refugees or policy related to refugees in the future. I'm planning on applying to more internships in this field next summer.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

During my time at Bridge, I worked with people of different backgrounds from my own every single day. I had the opportunity to work with refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, and Burma. As the majority of these people did not speak English, I learned to communicate with body language when there was not a translator. I also learned to be comfortable with silence. When communicating in English was possible or when there was a translator, I learned to listen to their stories and concerns, even when I felt like there was not much I could do to relate or help. One man I worked with from Iraq would always make me coffee or tea after I finished giving him cultural orientation. We had tea on my last day working for Bridge, and I told him that I would be leaving for study abroad in Thailand the next week. He gave me advice on how to engage with a new and different culture and how to learn language quickly, as he had been learning to do both since he arrived in the U.S. Even though our lives are so different, we were able to bond over this shared experience.

The socioeconomic difference between myself and most of the newly-arrived refugees I worked with was another barrier I had to overcome. At first, I felt constantly nervous and uncomfortable when doing things like walking down the hall in low-income apartment complexes or waiting in line at the DHS office to apply for food stamps. But by the end of the summer, I felt like I could walk through any apartment in any part of town with confidence, and I knew the drill at the DHS office.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

One word of advice, make sure you budget plenty of gas money for the summer! Bridge does not reimburse for gas and much of my work involved driving. However, there were other interns who did not have cars, so I'm sure Bridge could work around your needs.