

Albert Schweitzer Fellowship – Final Report

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Introduction

Our service project begins with the definition of the title; Self Awareness/Healthy Attitude. When used as an acronym (SAHA), transcends culture and language and moves into a spiritual sphere of multiculturalism. When SAHA is used as a word, it takes on the meaning of wellness in the Arabic language. SAHA encompasses a holistic view that balances physical, mental and spiritual health. Zaman is a poverty alleviation organization working with women and children living in extreme marginalization. One hundred percent of their clients live below \$20,000.00 per year while 49% live below \$12,500.00. Their mission is to alleviate poverty by providing women and children with basic human needs essential to all humankind. They accomplish their mission through a case management wraparound services model where the client is at the core of every aspect of the organization. Their vision is to enable women to break their cycle of poverty and self-direct their futures through literacy and vocational training that leads to increased household income. Zaman was looking to begin a health initiative. In response we created Project Passport SAHA to be integrated into the already existing wrap around services provided at Zaman to create Self Awareness and Healthy Attitudes. Passport SAHA begins with ownership of one's health and freedom to make life choices that can prevent chronic illness. We choose a passport concept because for many immigrants, and especially refugees, it is a symbol of movement and freedom. It is coveted and often means you leave something behind to travel to something better. It is often something carried in your purse, so it becomes a portable guideline for their health, especially if going to the ER. The SAHA Passport

contains basic health information. We believe based on our Osteopathic background that a holistic approach is a must. In doing so we designed, secured, and implemented workshops for hypertension, diabetes, women's health, mindfulness and self-esteem projects. Additionally, the SAHA Passport project includes health maintenance activities including but not limited to classes regarding nutrition, cooking budget friendly meals, exercise, and mental health activities. Lastly, the program also creates a safe and reliable referral system for these women and children.

Our Plan

Our plan for passport SAHA was to create a method for marginalized women and refugees to document their medical histories and allow them to communicate effectively with their health care providers. Below are the objectives we set for ourselves:

- Meet with local physicians who have experience working with marginalized women, particularly refugees, to understand their perspective on the most important aspects to include within the project.
- Meet with Zaman social workers and directors to understand, from their perspective, what are the wants and needs of the Zaman clientele when it comes to personal health. Additionally, this meeting will also allow us to create a schedule and begin to work out the logistical aspects of this project. Lastly, they will be able provide a more detailed look at the health and social determinants these women face.

- Meet with some of the Zaman clientele who are have been with Zaman and have completed the vocational education classes to understand what topics, workshops, and services they would consider to be of utmost importance.
- To create a prototype of the hard copy passport used for this project. This would entail encompassing all the information from the meetings listed above.
- Reach out to experts in their respected field to assist and lead in the weekly activities that we will create.
- Create an incentive program to encourage participation amongst the clients.
- Provide biweekly courses for the clients discussing a range of topics explained above.
- Empower these women to take control of their health.

Review of Plan

The first three objectives listed above were more time consuming than expected but generated great insight for the development of the passport and were achieved. In total we meet with over five local physicians from multiple specialties including Dr. Ali Dakroub, a Med-Peds physician, who was of great assistance. He shared his insight on the importance of the work we are doing as well as ways to connect/relate to our population. Key takeaways from all of these dialogues included the lack of trust many individuals have with the medical community based on previous experiences in foreign countries, high rates of medication noncompliance, fear of medical settings because of language barriers, and the high rate of diabetes, hypertension, strokes and smoking. Our discussions with social workers and director of the

BOOST (Building Ongoing Opportunities through Skills Training) Program, Gigi Salka, reaffirmed the information shared with us by the physician base. Additionally, the staff at Zaman International were of great help with formatting and creating the passport. A few of the many recommendations were, including a space for refugee status, medical concerns and a chart for recording vitals and medications. Lastly, albeit later than desired, we did have an opportunity to talk to a few of the Zaman clients who expressed the need to have a translator present at all times of our discussions.

Our next objective was creating the health passport itself which was a great success. The most important aspect of the passport to us was for it to be user friendly. To make it desirable to the clientele we worked with, a graphic designer formatted Passport SAHA to ensure it was pleasing to the eye with a vibrant color scheme and a fun cover. On the inside we used larger fonts and left an abundance of space to accommodate the literacy training that these clients were currently undergoing. With regards to printing we were fortunate enough to find a local printing shop who was willing to print the passport free of charge as a result of his appreciation for our mission.

We originally brainstormed at great length about how to incentivize the clients to attend and engage in the class sessions. In doing so we came up the idea of creating a stamp concept (relating to the idea of a stamp in one's passport when visiting a country) and then using the stamps as a tally system for a raffle. The raffle prize would be a Fitbit to go along with the healthy living theme of our project. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful at this. This was a result of us not taking the clients transportation into account. Many of the clients had unreliable transportation and while they desired to be in class they simply could not attend. To

that point some clients began to feel punished over a situation that was out of their control. Ultimately, this was a great lesson for us to always think about the effects of our decisions beyond the surface. On the bright side, however, the engagement and participation was never a problem and we were greatly pleased by the desire these women had to learn.

Although slightly behind our desired schedule we began to reach out to local members of the community to lead and assist with the biweekly sessions. This was the first objective that we truly struggled with. By this time, it was agreed upon that Passport SAHA would be piloted primarily through the BOOST program. As a result, the only time that would be available for our sessions was between 12-1pm on Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday. This midday and multiple days of the week situation made it extremely difficult to find presenters. To accommodate this situation, we began to perform the sessions ourselves as we continued to search for a solution. Ultimately, we realized our best course of action was to find multiple individuals who can speak on the same topic. In hindsight we should have foreseen this issue much sooner and in the future semesters we hope that whomever is leading the Passport SAHA initiative will be more involved during the BOOST scheduling.

Holding the biweekly sessions was truly enjoyable for us as we got to interact with the clients face to face. During our first few sessions we sat down with our clients and their tutors to explain and fill out the passport together. As a group we reflected on medical histories and documented them in the passport. Many of our clients felt relieved knowing that all their information was going to be safely documented in this passport. After filling out the passports, and as mentioned above, we then began bringing in medical professionals from the community to speak to our clients. We successfully held workshops that allowed for open discussion on

common topics such as hypertension, stroke prevention, diabetes management, women's health, and exercise.

Our last objective was to empower the clients to take control of their health. Using pre- and post-survey feedback based on a numerical/picture scale we asked the clients to rank satisfaction with current health, level of control over health, current health knowledge, and the importance of health. Our results showed that 62.5% of the clients deemed health as more important to them at the conclusion of our project compared to the start. Additionally, 75% of the clients believe their health knowledge increased while 58% felt that they have control over their health now compared to the start of the project.

Sustainability

Although not completed yet we are glad to say that our project is projected to be sustainable! We are currently completing a manual that states the objectives of the project and how we went about completing them. Furthermore, within the manual are the lesson plans, contact information for speakers, and most importantly information about our struggles, our solutions, and feedback from the instructors, staff and clients. In its entirety we hope that this manual will continue to grow with new experiences and users with time. It is important to note that we have also collaborated with medical student organizations (i.e. IMSA at MSUCOM and Wayne State) in efforts to create a cycle of volunteers and leaders for this project. Lastly, although still in progress is a collaboration with Bayt Al-Zahra, Zaman's flagship urgent needs program, to incorporate the health passport into their intake process. To this point our passport was translated to Arabic and that version has been very popular, as many of the

clients are completely fluent in the language. We are thankful that we found a supportive community within Zaman that would be willing to continue utilizing Passport SAHA and its programs.

Community Service High Points

Throughout this project there were many high points that we experienced. From a community service standpoint, a significant highpoint was seeing how eager local community professionals were to contribute their knowledge, time or resources to the project. It was reassuring to see that regardless of how busy individuals are with their own personal lives, they are still willing to make a difference in the lives of those who need assistance.

A second community service high point was working with the social workers at Zaman. This was our first working interaction with social workers. It was awesome to be able to learn from the social workers in regards to how they build trust with their clients. We were truly fascinated about the wonderful work that social workers do and grateful that we have a strong understanding of their impact.

One last community service high point was embracing the excitement of the clients. At the onset of this project one of our biggest concerns was the interest level of the clients. We were thrilled to find out these clients did not only desire to learn but also learn about a wide range of topics. One of the most memorable moments was during a stroke presentation that we conducted in January. When planning to discuss strokes we were initially worried that the topic maybe too far advanced for the clients. However, we were glad to be wrong. At the start

of the session we asked the clients to share with us what they know about strokes and unfortunately so many of them have had a relative or friend who have experienced one. The emotional appeal that was then created build a strong sense of not only interest but intimacy amongst the members as they were able to learn from one another in addition to us. We love that fact that we are still learning each week about what is the best way to teach them new concepts and expand their horizons.

Professional Development High Points

From a professional standpoint, our greatest success was learning how to communicate effectively with our population. At first, we were nervous because it seemed like many of the clients did not feel comfortable asking questions and inquiring for more information at the end of our sessions. But as time went on, more and more women were opening up about their past medical histories and their experiences back home. They were more willing to share their stories and give us insight to who they are. The connections that we were able to develop with our clients truly made the whole experience worthwhile. We both learned how to speak with individuals who have experienced traumatic experiences and also how to communicate in a way that demonstrated our interest in their lives and the issues they may be experiencing. This is very important to us because we both plan to be in the field of medicine. Being able to communicate with your patients effectively is a skill that takes time to develop. We are thankful that we had the opportunity to practice this skill so thoroughly.

Another professional development high point is the importance of trust within the medical field. Too often individuals have had a negative experience with the medical

community that has dramatically changed their belief and trust in health providers. We saw this to be especially true in the refugee populations who came from war-torn countries. To this point, as the one above, we learned the importance of time and the power of listening. Although trust is not something that can be gained or created in a single setting or even after multiple occasions it is something that can always be worked towards with a caring perspective and a positive outlook. To this point we learned that the power of listening will be amongst, if not the most, important tool when it comes to giving back. We hope to carry this lesson of patience and listening to our clinics and workplaces in the future.

From the health professionals that came in to present we learned how to deliver an effect presentation to our client base. Admittedly, at the start of our program we were very context heavy which although was well received it did not have maximum impact. In contrast, providing an active learning environment and using analogies kept clients fully engaged and also raised the level of knowledge retention. For example, during one session we were discussing medication non-compliance and the issue of assuming that all medication that look alike are the same. To accomplish this goal, we used colored candies (M&M, skittles, sweeties etc.) to explain how a similar appearance does not mean same medication. As future physicians with a desire to give back to our local communities we will be using these skillsets to better the health of our patients regardless of their background.

Reflections

Oprah Winfrey once said, “To move forward you have to give back” and when we came across quote it really resonated with both of us and has been the theme our fellowship

experience. As the quote expresses, we have both grown immensely as individuals and as a team throughout this experience. Prior to this fellowship we both felt that we were very content in the way we saw the world. We have come to realize that our contention was due to the blind folds that school, work, and the day to day stressors/obligations have created for us. It bothers us to the core that we were not more in touch with our surroundings and our community. We believe that some of the biggest rewards from this fellowship has been the opportunity to see the world in its truth, create a hunger to make a change and the opportunity to see opportunity. Furthermore, we want to also note how this experience has provided us with an ability to step out of our own comfort zones. Working with marginalized women is at its core heartbreaking, but like we mentioned it's so moving to see the resilience and passion that these women have. Time after time we feel as if we are the ones learning and gaining more than anyone else through this fellowship.

From the fellowship we also learned the importance of maintaining service to humanity in one's life. While attempting to balance personal, academic and fellowship responsibilities we often felt burnt out. Amazingly it was the work of our fellowship that lit a fire within to continue to push forward in all aspects of life. We recall a specific example when both of us where extremely stressed with final exams at school however we had a planned presentation at Zaman. The session focused around mindfulness and throughout the session everyone shared a struggle or burden that they faced. Listening to these women share their stories quickly put life in perspective for us. On top of that the gratitude and joy they shared with us at the conclusion redirected our thought process from an academic struggle to be an academic opportunity.

Ultimately, service to humanity is a two-way road. While you do give, you often receive more, and therefore we hope to always be lifelong servants to humanity.

We cannot believe that a year has already flown by working on this project. Looking back, we remember how overwhelmed we felt with all the work that needed to get done in order to ensure that this project is successful. We took the project one day at a time and are now ending it with a very different outlook than what we started with. We are proud of ourselves for sacrificing throughout the year in order to ensure that adequate time was being given to the project. We are also thankful for the opportunities that we had interacting with the clients at Zaman International and the connections we created on the way. It was fun getting to meet health professionals in our community that also have a passion for community service and teaching others. We also learned a few things about the technicalities of what it takes to put together a community service project. Lots of time and effort is dedicated to finding the right people to bring in on the project. It was a lot of work finding someone to help with the simple things such as finding a local company that would be willing to donate the passports and finding individuals who would be willing to translate our passport. This project taught us how to communicate with those that have had difficult life experiences. This is a lesson that we will carry with us throughout our careers.

In closing, at the conclusion of the project, we feel like many of the clients have become family to us. We sincerely appreciate the way that they have opened about their experiences and have been willing to discuss them with us, looking for advice and guidance. While we hope that they have learned a great deal from us over the course of the year we are proud to say that we have learned just as much from them. The Albert Schweitzer fellowship gave us a

platform to dedicate our time to making a change. We are very grateful that we had the opportunity to be involved and make a difference in this manner. We look forward to carrying the title of Fellow for Life and will always strive to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Albert Schweitzer.