

## **Christian's Practicum Experience with Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House**

My name is Christian, a social work student at the University British Columbia. I was a practicum student with Frog Hollow from October 2023 to April 2024. In this entry, I reflect upon my experience with the neighbourhood house, exploring what it was all about!

My experience with Frog Hollow was definitely heartwarming and memorable. Going into my practicum, I was looking to diversify my experiences working with different demographics. I was fortunate to be placed with a very supportive, passionate, and driven team of leaders at Frog Hollow. Supporting a wide array of programs with different staff leaders has allowed me to see how programs and services are run across the neighbourhood house. I learned about the different ways in which the neighbourhood house seeks to promote its mission centred around building community capacity, empowerment, and creating community. Because I reside outside the Hastings-Sunrise neighbourhood, it has been rewarding to learn about the specific needs and challenges facing the community and what Frog Hollow does to address those barriers. I appreciated the opportunity to build relationships with program participants and get to know them over time. I learned the importance of understanding myself in order to understand others. Considering Frog Hollow's mission statement and approaches, I learned that empowerment, connecting people, and strengthening community capacity are important to them. I learned how to build collaborative relationships with the people I work with, as well as see community members as the experts of their own stories. Through my experience, I have a better understanding of what it means to empower, connect, and build community. Everyone involved in the neighbourhood house has a leadership role to play, and I found the opportunity to witness this in action to be extremely rewarding.

As part of my practicum, I took part in numerous online workshops which enhanced my understanding of social work and neighbourhood houses. One workshop that stood out to me was a strategic transformation session hosted by the Association of Neighbourhood Houses (ANH) of British Columbia. Through the workshop, I learned more about the mandate of ANH, particularly its relevance to policy and the delivery of social services. The workshop was a rewarding experience where I felt I was able to connect with like-minded people who share the same passion for building community and fostering a sense of belonging. I was captivated to learn about ANH's focus on land, people, and place. Considering that these areas are the focal point of ANH's goals and objectives in the midst of a strategic transformation, I reflected upon how I can uphold these values in my social work practice in the future. I learned that applying these values involves a commitment to decolonization, confronting oppression and injustice, and continuing to cultivate safe spaces in my work. With respect to the latter point, safe spaces training during team week (a special week at the neighbourhood house which I will explain later on) was extremely valuable for me as a future social worker.

### **My Practicum Project**

A key highlight of my practicum was working with the settlement team on a digital resource toolkit. Going into the new year and having completed several months of my practicum, I was looking to focus on supporting the settlement team. I discovered a newfound interest in settlement work! When the project plan was brought up to me, I was excited and eager to learn more about settlement. The overarching aim of the project was to design a user-friendly settlement resource toolkit in collaboration with the settlement team. In a short span, we established an organized database of settlement-based community resources for the

team. The toolkit included information on local agencies and their programs and services (i.e. digital brochures, posters, documents), as well as resources for staff and volunteers (i.e. self-care tools, training opportunities, weblinks). Through the project, we learned about the newcomer population in Metro Vancouver and their needs. My practicum project fostered personal growth as I gained a comprehensive understanding of community resources for newcomers, in addition to their needs. At the same time, I gained valuable skills in research, critical thinking, project leadership, and collaboration.

### **Programs I was Involved In**

#### *Family Drop-In*

The family drop-in provides the opportunity for families to come together and have their young children participate in hands-on activities, as well as storytelling and singing during circle time. Having had previous experience working with children and families helped me in connecting with them. My favourite part of the experience was playing with the kids during free play time, especially with the cooking set!

#### *Therapeutic Activation Program for Seniors (TAPS)*

The TAPS program for seniors is designed to promote their well-being. My experience supporting the group of TAPS participants was very rewarding. Some of my highlights from TAPS include: joining them for exercise sessions, playing board games, and eating lunch with them! Being in TAPS reinforced the value of showing up and being present in every conversation. I learned that for many seniors, simply showing them that you care by giving them the time and space to share their thoughts and feelings can make a drastic positive impact on them.

### *English Corner*

The English Corner is a program designed for newcomers looking to develop their English language skills in a casual club environment. Leading small groups allowed me to practice my facilitation skills and learn about different cultures. I enjoyed seeing the participants' curiosity to learn more about Canada, as well as their excitement coming into each session with smiles on their faces. Co-facilitating the English Corner allowed me to learn about peoples' stories, how to initiate engaging conversations, and how to help participants make connections with others in the group.

### *Working Opportunities for Women (WOW)*

WOW is a program designed for newcomer women who are interested in working in childcare. I appreciated the opportunity to learn about the importance of promoting empowerment and engaging in meaningful dialogue with participants. From this program, I also learned about participants' unique stories and their lived experiences. I also appreciated the opportunity to be in this program on a weekly basis, as I was able to see them progress through the different steps of the program as they work towards their goals.

### **Other Highlights of my Practicum**

- *Community Events* - Several events come to mind here, including the seniors holiday lunch and winter celebration for families. I learned the steps involved in planning and conducting a major event, while catering to diverse community interests, skills, and needs. Participating in community events allowed me to grow in my ability to connect with people, make a lasting impact, and see first-hand how the community comes together to celebrate unique cultures, talents, and skills.

- *Wellness Delivery Project* - This project is about enhancing well-being through care deliveries to older adults' homes (i.e. groceries, meals, self-care packages). This experience allowed me to step outside my comfort zone. From participating in the project, I continued to gain an appreciation for social justice and human relationships. I learned the true value in practicing humility and being present for people, even through small acts of service such as providing a meal.
- *Interviews with Staff* - The opportunity to interview staff individually about their respective jobs and experiences in the field was very beneficial for me. I was able to better picture what social work practice looks like with communities through hearing different perspectives, and gain a grasp of the challenges that face the community.
- *Team Week* - During this week, the Frog Hollow team comes together and participates in a variety of training, meetings, presentations, and other planning activities. From team week, I learned about the organizational structure, the people involved in the neighbourhood house and their roles, and overall, how the agency operates.
- *Skeena Out-Trip* - During the Holiday season, I joined several members of the team on an out-trip to VanDusen Gardens with folks in local transition housing. This was an amazing experience as it was my first time visiting VanDusen Gardens. As part of our day together, we also made Christmas cards and had pizza together!

### **Final Thoughts**

I would like to thank the Frog Hollow team for welcoming me to the family at the neighbourhood house from day one. Your time, support, and guidance in helping my learning is very much appreciated!