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Senior Capstone

Ms. Stone

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### **The Project**

My Capstone changed a lot from beginning to end. I had an idea in mind but I didn't really know where to go with it. I knew I wanted to help and make an impact on people but I wasn't sure how. Originally, I was going to gain donations of different sorts of entertainment for the patients in the Crisis Stability Unit at the Canton Crisis Center. However, in the summer of 2018, the Crisis Center was bought out by Coleman Professional Services and the CSU ceased to exist. My mother, the former HR director at the Canton Crisis Center, gave me the contact information of a woman named Robin Holland, the Supportive Living Coordinator at a place called the Hunter House. The Hunter House is an apartment-like building located in Canton, Ohio and is the home of 48 men and women who have both a mental illness and drug addiction. I had never heard of the Hunter House until I became in contact with Robin, and little did I know how much passion and love these people would instill in me.

Robin Holland is a passionate woman with a big heart for her residents. I knew from the moment I began working with her, I was moving in the right direction with my project. Her past experiences with mental illness and substance abuse allow her to fully understand the residents and connect with them on a more personal level. Around age thirteen, Robin began feeling severely depressed, causing her to begin drinking. "I drank to take the pain away," she said to me during my visit to the Hunter House. After doctors diagnosed Robin with depression, she

remembered, “the pain of hearing that I had a mental illness was worse than being told I was an alcoholic.” Little did she know that years after becoming sober, she would use the strength and experience she gained to help people in situations similar to her’s.

After first beginning to talk with Robin, I asked her several questions to get an idea of what I could do, and who exactly I was doing it for. As explained by Robin, the Hunter House is a place of rehabilitation and growth. It is where those who have suffered tremendously from addiction, mental illness and childhood trauma receive help to get back on their feet. The three employees of the Hunter House, Robin and two others, each have sixteen residents on their caseload and meet with them weekly to talk and check up on them. On a consistent basis, the residents are driven to the grocery store, pharmacy, medical appointments and food/ clothing pantries. When a new resident moves in-- men typically come from the Refuge of Hope and the women from YWCA-- they are assisted with applying for a food card, medical insurance and Social Security. There are also groups held frequently that are used as a tool to educate the residents on how to change their current lifestyle. The three employees of the Hunter House assist the residents in almost every way possible, and develop close bonds with a lot of them. Robin described the residents as “good people who just lost their way.” They are the ones society chooses to ignore and forget.

With the new information I had, I was starting to get a feel for what I wanted to do. I figured I’d stick with a plan similar to my original one and make goodie bags for the 48 residents at the Hunter House and deliver them mid-February. Robin explained that the residents love candy and snacks, as they don’t get treats very often. I began emailing different places asking for donations of the candy, snacks, and also items like socks and hats since we were having such a

cold winter. In the end, Spangler candy donated a large bag of 300 Dum Dum suckers, Campbell's Soup donated a box of about 300 mini bags of goldfish crackers, and Mercy Hospital generously donated two boxes of warm socks. At school, I began talking to Key Club, which I am a member of, to set up a service opportunity to make Valentine's Day cards for the residents. On January 29, about fifteen other Key Club members and I made Valentine's Day cards in the school commons for about an hour after school. Overall, we made 50 cards with supplies I had at my house or bought from the store. It was an easy and fun service opportunity that I think we all enjoyed. Along with the Valentine's Day cards, members of Key Club also donated over 50 bags of candy. Student council also generously donated 50 winter hats.

With everything I had gathered, I was finally ready to put the goodie bags together. Each resident received a large bag of candy, a pair of socks, a winter hat, six bags of goldfish and a Valentine's Day card. After stuffing all of the bags, my mom and I loaded them into the car and headed off to the Hunter House to deliver.

Once we arrived, I immediately felt welcome. Nicole, one of the other workers at the Hunter House, met us in the lobby to help my mom and I carry everything in. She kept telling us how excited everyone was to meet me, which made me nervous. Would they be disappointed with what they receive? What's so exciting about meeting me? I thought she was exaggerating but sure enough, when we walked into the meeting room, there were about fifteen people waiting for me, including Robin. She gave me a big hug after I set the boxes down and said the talk around the Hunter House the previous few weeks had been about the young girl that chose them for her project. The residents were very surprised that I wanted to help and talk to them-- the forgotten ones in society. As I introduced myself and my project to everyone there, a common

question was “why us?” At first I wasn’t sure of the answer. My mom had given me the contact information for Robin, which answers how I began my project, but why? As I walked around handing out the goodie bags, shaking everyone’s hand and learning everyone’s name, I began thinking, “why not them?” All of the residents were so sweet, each one of them personally thanking me and saying “God bless you.” They were normal people that have had more life obstacles than most. One older gentleman named Pete told me all about how the Hunter House was great, but he couldn’t wait to leave because his dream is to move to Australia and live with the kangaroos. Another man named Dean couldn’t stop expressing his appreciation for the Hunter House and all the things Nicole and Robin do for him. “They take me to get my groceries and all my medications. I’m just so blessed and grateful to be here,” he said with a camo duffle bag in hand, as he was about to leave to go to the store. The longest Hunter House resident had been there for six years, and considering it opened in 2012, that’s a pretty long time. She sat in a wheelchair and was probably around seventy years old. When I introduced myself to her, she told me I could call her Grammy and that God will bring good gifts my way. Robin said in the beginning, Grammy was very violent and would hit people with her cane as they walked past her, but as the years had gone on, she calmed down. Unfortunately, after my Hunter House visit, I got an email from Robin saying that Grammy had past away.

One special, and perhaps my favorite, interaction while I was there was with a gentleman named Adam. He was probably in his early thirties and looked like a normal, everyday guy. He came in after everyone else did, while we were packing up. I handed him a bag, shook his hand and introduced myself. He turned to walk away but then suddenly turned back around and pulled

something out of his backpack. “I made this for you, Amelia. It’s a rose made out of paper.

Thank you for choosing us.”

When I left the Hunter House, I couldn’t wipe the smile off my face. I felt so happy and proud. Something that had seemed so small to me, meant the world to these people. I had never felt like I had truly done something great until that day. Yes, I had volunteered at a variety of organizations and have had countless hours of community service but that was nothing like planning a project, executing it myself and having the people personally thank me for what I had done. I felt so much love for these people and I kept wishing there was more I could do. The Hunter House and the residents I met there will always have a special place in my heart, and I hope I helped them realize they are worthy of being chosen.

## **Research**

In the United States, mental health and addiction are two topics that affect almost the whole population in some way, but almost no one enjoys talking about. In recent years, however, more and more people have started to speak out about the mental struggles they face everyday. Famous celebrities have started sharing their own life obstacles to express the need to continue the mental health conversation into the future. Kevin Love recently spoke out about his frequent panic attacks before games, and Demi Lovato told her fans about her struggles with drug addiction and relapse. With the increased amount of talk about mental illness and addiction, the public in the United States is becoming more aware and educated about those around them, and maybe even themselves. But is this talk spreading in other countries also? With having done research on Ecuador in the past and having visited Ireland in 2018, I chose these two countries to

look at in comparison to the United States and see whether or not they're putting in effort to spread awareness of mental illness within their country.

Ecuador is in the lower middle income group with a population of a little over 17 million (Worldometers, 2019). According to the World Health Organization, as of 2011, Ecuador did not have an official mental health policy, but rather a general health policy which included components relating to mental health (WHO, 2011). These components included the funding for the implementation of mental health efforts, which the country did not previously have. While gaining funding for these efforts is a great success, there is still a need for Ecuador to have a mental health policy. Globally Minded, a website providing information on global health, named depression as the leading mental illness in Ecuador, which is followed by stress, anxiety and polysubstance abuse (Aguirre, 2017). To test these facts, a group of psychologists studied the mental health of 1092 students at Technical Particular University in Loja, Ecuador and published their findings in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (Tchounwou, 2017). Their findings stated, "Prevalence of positive screens was 6.2% for prevalence of major depressive episodes, 0.02% for generalized anxiety disorders, 2.2% for panic disorders, 32.0% for eating disorders, 13.1% for suicidal risk" (Tchounwou, 2017). Because this data only includes one age group, it is difficult to compare the results to the whole population. However, when looking at just the college students, we can see there are many mental health problems the people in the young age group are facing. 6.2% of the group had major depressive disorders, which is about 68 students. While 68 out of the total 1092 students doesn't seem like that much, this data is only including the major depressive disorders and leaving out the more minor symptoms and students under stress. Also, with 32.0% (about 350

students) of the group having eating disorders and 13.1% (about 143 students) being at risk for suicide, it opens the doors to wondering the underlying causes of such high numbers. The research conducted with this study group tried to dig up the reasons for the increasing percentages of young-adults with mental disorders. However, there are numerous individual and environmental complex causes for these disorders, it is impossible to pinpoint them all.

One main aspect that may be hurting the mental health of everyone in the country is the negative stigma surrounding mental health. Because of this stigma, Ecuadorians are less likely to go out and seek treatment (Aguirre, 2017). Globally Minded stated in their research, “People may be reluctant to see mental health professionals when experiencing symptoms of depression. This is due to stigma around mental illnesses, lack of resources in mental health, low socioeconomic status and poor education” (Aguirre, 2017). People are too embarrassed and ashamed of having a mental illness to seek treatment, not aware of the many people around them that feel the same way. Spreading awareness and changing the stigma of mental illness may motivate people to find the help they need for themselves, which would then decrease the rates of untreated depression, anxiety, eating disorders, etc.

Way back in 1986, a man named Tyler Bridges wrote in an article in the Washington Post and said, “if Ecuador does not begin tackling its growing drug problem, in a few years it will have to contend with an epidemic and with the kind of powerful drug syndicate that exists in the neighboring countries” (Bridges, 1986). Ecuador lies right next to Colombia, the largest cocaine producing company in the world, which makes it a large cocaine transit country (Narconon). Drugs in Ecuador may be easy to find, but also easy to be caught with. Ecuador has one of the harshest drug laws in Latin America, with long sentences and severe punishment for those

selling the drugs (Bradley, 2016). However, the consumption of drugs is not considered a crime, but labelled as a public health problem, basically legalizing the consumption of all drugs (Gray, 2015). While there isn't much data on the drug abuse and treatment in Ecuador, most research has been done on their unique drug policy, and how consumption of drugs is legal. Because of this, it can be assumed that there are many people around the country abusing drugs. However, the drug laws are so tough, the ways of receiving these drugs may be limited.

Ireland is the third-largest country in Europe and has a population of about 4.4 million (Worldometers, 2019). In 2018, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development came out with a report stating that Ireland spends over 8.2 billion euros on mental health problems every year (Cullen, 2018). The amount of money spent is so high because Ireland “has one of the highest rates of mental health illness in Europe” (Cullen, 2018). In 2016, approximately 18.5% of the population reported having a mental illness, which included anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol abuse and schizophrenia. According to Paul Cullen from the Irish Times, “Rates of depression were also well above the European average for both men and women in Ireland.” Even children reported having mental health disorders due to bullying at school (Cullen, 2018).

With the rates of mental illnesses in Ireland being so high, one would think the population would be more accepting of those with a disorder, however this is not the case. According to Mental Health Ireland, “People with mental health problems say that the social stigma attached to mental ill health and the discrimination they experience can make their difficulties worse and make it harder to recover” (Mental Health Ireland). The stigma placed against people trying to recover makes it more difficult to find a job, be in a long term



relationship, and find adequate housing (Mental Health Ireland). Because the stigma is so harsh, “almost 30% of people would not tell anyone if they were having suicidal thoughts” (Irish Health). The results of the survey given to 500 adults around Ireland by St. Patrick’s Mental Health Services blatantly show the need for the public to become more educated on the topic of mental health. Of the 500 adults, “61% of people believe that treatment for a mental health problem is a sign of personal failure” and “40% feel that the public should be better protected from people with mental health problems” (Irish Health). The discrimination against those with a mental illness makes it harder for them to fit into a normal lifestyle, and also may make their mental illness worsen due to the feeling of failure.

In Ireland, there is an organization called See Change that works to reduce the stigma against those with mental health disorders. See Change gains insight by talking to people who have suffered from mental illnesses and then goes out to the public and educates people on topics like mental health and stigma. The organization is pushing for a Stigma Reduction Program and organizes different events to raise awareness and money, such as the Green Ribbon Campaign (See Change). Although the stigma and mental health problems are very high in Ireland, there are efforts to try to improve the public’s overall outlook on mental health.

Drug use in Ireland has increasingly become more common in the last few years. According to European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), “Fewer than 2 in 10 adults reported use of any illicit drug during their lifetime in 2002-03, but this figure increased to approximately 3 in 10 in 2014-15” (EMCDDA, 2018). The most common drug is cannabis, followed by the use of ecstasy/MDMA and cocaine. While the use of drugs in Ireland may be relatively low, the abuse of alcohol has become very common. “A report from the World

Health Organisation has revealed that Ireland has the second highest rate of binge drinking in the world” (Hennessey, 2014). Also, in a study done by the WHO, 39% of the Irish population, age fifteen and up, have participated in binge drinking within the last month (Hennessey, 2014). With alcohol being such a prevalent issue, the Alcohol Action Ireland formed to decrease the amount of harm caused by alcohol. The CEO of Alcohol Action Ireland, Suzanne Costello, stated, “Alcohol increases people’s risk of developing more than 200 diseases, including liver cirrhosis and several forms of cancers, and as it is not only the volume of alcohol consumed, but also the pattern of drinking over time that affects the risks of harm, a large amount of Irish people are putting themselves at risk of health harms due to their binge drinking” (Hennessey, 2014). Alcohol kills about three people everyday in Ireland and around 2,000 people are hospitalized every night due to alcohol (Hennessey, 2014). Alcohol Action Ireland hopes to defeat alcohol by targeting companies, which sell and market cheap alcohol.

As concluded by research, the levels of stigma and drug abuse varies between countries. The countries’ locations, governments, etc., affect the populations’ viewpoints on the issues. The one area that the United States, Ireland and Ecuador all have in common is that they are all seeking change. Whether through celebrities speaking out, campaigning for decreased stigma, or stricter drug laws, all three countries are working to improve life for everyone around them.

## **Final Conclusion**

The last four years have been incredibly beneficial. I have done so many things through JAGS that I never would’ve experienced without it. JAGS has taught me how to be a better public speaker, how to empathize with other people, how accept the viewpoints of others, and so

much more. I feel very accomplished and proud being able to conclude my four years as a JAGS student by completing this capstone. I am happy to say that I have covered all four pillars of JAGS with my project, through investigating the world by looking at mental illness and drug abuse in other countries, communicating ideas by talking to Key Club members about my project and trying to get them involved, recognizing perspectives by looking at stigma in my research paper, and finally, taking action at the Hunter House. While it took many hours of stressful planning, frustrating emails, and thorough research, I've come out a better, more knowledgeable person on the other side. Being able to meet all of the wonderful people at the Hunter House and put together this project and research paper on my own has been a very fulfilling experience and I hope to bring these experiences with me as I begin my life as a college student. I am beginning my college years as a Discover Sciences major at the University of Dayton, and I am hoping to eventually conduct my own research on mental illness and substance abuse, rather than reading other people's. One of the most important things I've learned through JAGS is how to step outside of my comfort zone and be a leader for those around me. Thank you JAGS!

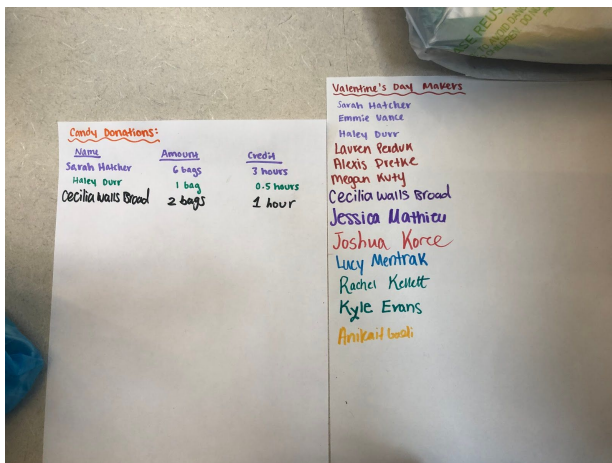
## Pictures



Socks from Mercy Hospital



Goldfish from Campbell's Soup



Volunteers from Key Club that made Valentine's Day cards



Dum-Dum suckers from Spangler

Candy



Valentine's Day cards



Donations of candy from Key Club



Candy separated into bags tied with ribbon



Bags loaded into car, on our way to

Hunter House





Me with the residents at the Hunter House (Dean in the middle eating candy)



Me with residents at the Hunter House



Robin and I at the Hunter House



Adam and I with paper rose



Pete (left) wearing the new hat from his bag and Granny (right)

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