

Kristina Hargie

MCFT social action scholarship award

My first year as a graduate student in the Marriage, Couple, and Family Therapy (MCFT) program has been an eye opener both personally and professionally. While I have always instilled a desire within me to help oppressed groups such as in my work as a special education and Head Start teacher, I do not think I fully understood the complexity of what it means to support and promote social justice. Promoting social justice goes beyond a desire to help the oppressed with a job setting. It entails an action step, a deeper and more personal understanding of how minority groups are being oppressed, and a deeper knowledge of what steps need to be done to *empower* oppressed groups.

The professors in the MCFT program have challenged me to learn not only about what social justice means but also to challenge myself to take the next steps towards actively promoting it in my work as a future MCFT and within my personal life. I embrace this challenge as a means to understand the process of being an activist in my community and my profession and as a human being that values justice and human rights for all people.

Empowering women has been the main focus of my volunteer work over the last year. Since attending the MCFT program at Lewis and Clark College, I have dedicated the last year volunteering at the Portland Women's Crisis Line (PWCL), an organization that focuses on women traumatized by domestic violence and sexual assault. During this time, I have worked on the crisis line to develop and strengthen my clinical skills as well as facilitated and co-facilitated a psycho-education class and process group for survivors of childhood sexual assault.

In addition to volunteering at PWCL, I have dedicated myself to the work that Dr. Brown and Pastor Chappell have been doing over the last year. With my goals to support women, my volunteer work at PWCL, and my drive to learn more about the African American community, Dr. Brown and I decided this would be a great opportunity for growth.

Since coming back from Uganda, I have collaborated with Pastor Chappell and Dr. Brown along with Gabby Santos from the Oregon Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCADSV) to bring awareness to the community about the harms of domestic violence among families. My roles in this work is to support Pastor Chappell, Dr. Brown, and Gabby Santos in their work as well as present information on domestic violence to women and in the near future to adolescents. My reasons for getting involved in this work are twofold. First, I want to know more about the African American community. As Dr. Brown mentioned in clinical skills class, it is our responsibility to be knowledgeable about all groups so we don't become an oppressor. Meeting few African American men and women growing up, I decided to learn as much as I could by reading books from Bell Hooks, Nancy Boyd-Franklin, and A.J. Franklin along with being mentored by an African American women, and getting involved in the African American community. Second, going to Uganda made me realize how much I loved working in the community. True change comes from collaborating with community members to "empower" rather than "help" them build the change they need.

From the work that I have been doing, I have realized that change is not static but dynamic. Empowering individuals, families, and the whole community such as pastors or police officers, for example, is the catalyst for social equality and change. Professionals

in MCFT can help change the family and community by bringing the knowledge and work from a scholastic level down to a level that is practical and easily applicable for the entire community to integrate into their lives. Change at a community level does not occur when professionals do not apply their works and research findings to a level that everyone can comprehend and apply. Containing information at this level keeps professionals in a hierarchical “one-up” position over clients where professionals have power over clients rather than power with clients. By dispersing information at community level, it provides the community and professionals with the opportunity to bring about change collaboratively and empowers clients to make their own decisions for change. The work that I have been doing with Dr. Brown and Pastor Chappell brings knowledge about domestic violence to community partners and empowers these people to bring this information throughout their community. It gives them power to tailor it to the needs of their community, which sends a ripple effect from professionals down to families.

Since doing this work, I have learned that I have a responsibility as a MCFT to empower the oppressed. Social justice means putting the power into the hands of the people so they can empower themselves. Since MCFT's do have power, which we cannot deny, I feel it is my responsibility empower the oppressed by supporting social change through collaborative efforts, distributing of knowledge and resources, and seeking reform as a group through political means. As Dr. Brown has taught me, it takes risk to make change. Risk is not by being silent and hiding behind a title rather it is giving a voice to the voiceless by standing with them and uniting as a more powerful group to establish “equality and justice for all”.