

Not just classroom stories

Rosedale students intern with Anti-Human Trafficking Program

By Vicki Sairs

ROSEDALE, Ohio—When Karissa Brenneman and Taylor Herr arrived at Rosedale Bible College as students last year, they couldn't have known that in 2015 they would be hopping in a van with Salvation Army staff workers, looking for trafficking victims on the streets of Columbus.

Both students are pioneers in a new RBC venture: Bridge, a nine-month internship program that pairs study and reflection with ministry and vocational exploration.

The venture is new, but the motivation is not. Rosedale Bible College has always emphasized practical outcomes for an education grounded in Scripture. In 1952, fulfilling the school's goal "to nurture and guide our youth in Christian service" included sending out Gospel team quartets to churches and "mission stations" in several states.

Today, musical groups still go out to churches and schools, and students volunteer with local agencies. Bridge offers a more in-depth experience, allowing interns to serve with area ministries and study part-time in a context of mentoring and discipleship.

Karissa and Taylor are working with the Salvation Army's Anti-Human Trafficking program. They do street outreach several nights a month and assist on Tuesdays at The Well, a drop-in center for women who are trafficked or sexually exploited.

Both have found Bridge helpful in giving them direction for the future. Karissa has decided to pursue a BSW, something she "would never have done without Bridge." She wanted to know if she'd be good at a career and find it meaningful before investing so much "time and energy and money" in a degree.

Bridge has clarified things for her. Working at the Salvation Army is "one of the most fulfilling things" she's ever done.

It's draining, she said. The magnitude of the issues the women are facing can be overwhelming, but "there are all the good stories." She can celebrate with people who are "nine months clean" and women who have spent their first week without being high.

"Hearing that progress makes you feel like the support you're giving is really doing something," she said.

The support she and Taylor give includes arriving early to set up tables and chairs for The Well, making sure food is scheduled for the meal, attending staff meetings to discuss the day's activities, and being available to help with those activities.

Created to be a safe space for sexually exploited women, The Well offers food, Bible study, and Empower Hour, a time devoted to helping the women enjoy themselves and also sharpen life skills.

Karissa had expected to see young, pretty women, "all glammed up," but for the most part, the women are in their late 30s and 40s. "Some are still under pimp control, most are not," but they're still struggling with their addictions "and they want out," she said.

She has been touched by how much the women "want to see each other succeed and be free, and how willing they are to pull each other into support circles."

When she studies Counseling Theories at Frostburg, "it won't just be classroom stories," she said. She'll be able to look back and say this is how this person behaved and this is why. "My experience will make my classroom learning so much richer and more connected, more grounded."

Taylor Herr already knew he wanted to go into law enforcement. Now he's looking at specializing as a detective in Anti-Human Trafficking. "I now have a better idea of what is needed from law enforcement in that field," he said.

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Women who come to the Salvation Army's drop-in center, The Well, can participate in making "fashion fabric products" for Belts Breaking Bondage, a program that generates funds for survivors and for raising public awareness of human trafficking.

Photo credits Karissa Brenneman

Dean of Students Matt Showalter is pleased with the way next year's Bridge intern cohort is shaping up. It's not too late to apply!



Intern Opportunities

IFI (working with international students)

Salvation Army (Anti-Human Trafficking Program)

Mentoring at-risk kids in area schools

London Christian Fellowship (pastoral intern)

London Correctional Facility

Agora (children's ministry)

Graphic design

Occupational therapy

Matt sees these openings as serious ministry opportunities; in particular, the internships with IFI, The Salvation Army, and area schools are places "where we're needed."

In addition to serving with area ministries, Bridge interns take courses at RBC (half-time status) and take part in an ongoing mentoring and discipleship program.

More info

rosedale.edu/bridge

Andrew Sauder (Bridge director)
asauder@rosedale.edu

the perspective of the victims and of the people who work with them." He understands more about the victims' mindset, what they can and can't do on their own.

It won't work, he said, to say: "Turn in your trafficker, and I'll let you go."

A victim's mindset is shaped by many things: abuse, substance abuse, PTSD, growing up on the wrong side of the law, and fear. "A lot of them still care about their pimp and want to believe he loves them." Or they're afraid of losing their trafficker: where will they get their drugs, food and shelter?

Right now, Taylor plans to get a BS in criminal justice. If given the opportunity, he would work in anti-trafficking. This would mean attending police academy and working his way up to detective first.

Taylor is "the only guy in the program on a regular basis." Not even boys over 10 are allowed in The Well, but Taylor says, "They've accepted me."

He accompanies Karissa and the Salvation Army staff members who do street outreach in Columbus. When they see someone, two women hop out of the van, one with a bag of toiletries and food, one with a card for The Well. They say, "Hey, we're from the Salvation Army. Would you like something?"

If the woman says yes, they ask how she's doing and tell her about The Well and the 24-hour hotline she can contact.

Is this dangerous? "Sometimes," said Karissa. They follow strict safety protocols. Once, a car pulled up right behind them when they hopped out to hand things out. "Everybody back in the van!" The car followed them for a while.

Taylor stressed that Salvation Army policies are in place, watching his safety so he can take care of other people. "We feel God's calling, even if it's dangerous," he said. "Going overseas is not safe. Being safe wasn't Jesus' goal for his disciples."

Jillian Potter-Bonsell, a clinical specialist in the Anti-Human Trafficking Program, supervises Taylor and Karissa. They are both, she said, "tremendously helpful to The Well." Describing them as "humble and selfless and willing to serve in any way they can," she added that "much of what they do is behind the scenes, but at the end of the day, I think, what would I do without them?"

An edited version of this story appeared in the April 27, 2015 issue of the Mennonite World Review.

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Rosedale Bible College students Karissa Brennehan, Grantsville, Md., and Taylor Herr, Lititz, Pa., are part of the first cohort of RBC Bridge interns. They are working with the Salvation Army's Anti-Human Trafficking Program in Columbus, Ohio.

Photo credit Vicki Sairs