

Entering college, I was blindly idealistic. I imagined myself stopping the modern-day slave trade, ending world hunger, or preventing a genocide, probably by working for a large international NGO, as a diplomat, or as a national politician. While these are all noble goals, my college education has steered me toward something humbler, but ultimately—I believe—more effective. I want to work for a non-profit on the ground with people in their own community instead of dictating from afar how to improve their lives. In my studies, I have learned several examples of top-down, outsider interventions that, while well-intentioned, caused more harm than good. Structural adjustment programs impoverished many people instead of improving their economic situation, daring brothel raids by anti-trafficking NGOs have resulted in the “rescue” of young women who chose a life as sex workers instead of those forced into it, and the Western version of development has exacerbated global inequalities instead of quashing poverty.

When I started learning about all these failures of good intentions, my initial reaction was cynicism. “Maybe,” I thought, “since all of these well-meaning efforts failed so miserably, I just shouldn’t try to help people at all!” I realized, though, that that attitude is untenable when injustice and suffering are a reality in the world and I have been blessed with an education that has allowed me to learn better potential solutions to problems than failed top-down approaches. My education has taught me that in order to truly make a difference in the world—to truly help people—you must understand the complexities of issues and genuinely engage those who are affected by those issues in finding a solution. I believe that the best way to do that is by working on the ground, in the community, with people.

Thus, I want to pursue an internship at a local education-focused non-profit, which excites me since education empowers people to seek their own solutions to the issues they face. For instance, I know from my volunteer experiences at two local non-profits that one teaches very practical English to people who arrive in the U.S. with little knowledge of it and another provides one-on-one reading and writing tutoring to elementary school children to help them catch up or stay ahead at school. Interning at one of these non-profits, I will not only be helping to educate others, but I will be learning a lot myself about how a non-profit works and how they can most effectively bring about change in the community. A field experience scholarship would help cover the cost of the education I would be receiving by helping to pay for tuition, living expenses, or even gas to get to and from the internship. Ultimately, it would help me learn how to help people in a way that truly empowers them.