On Wednesday, September 12, 2018, Teresa Palmer began her social work field placement at Stow Away Children and Family Services located 1229 Graham Road, Arrowhead, Ohio (239-451-3820). Stow Away is a multi-service agency with a formal agreement and an established relationship with the local medical center. In the past, some field students spent field hours split between the multi-service center and the medical center. Teresa attended two days of her new field placement on Wednesday and Friday for the total number of hours needed for her assigned program.

The week prior to Teresa's scheduled hours at her field education experience, she sent an email to the agency followed by a phone call confirming the date, the location for her first day, and the individual she was supposed to report to upon her arrival the following week. Teresa was assigned her Faculty Field Liaison, Professor Marcia Auspicious. Professor Auspicious is scheduled for the mandatory site visit required for all field students within the first five weeks of her field placement.

Teresa arrived to the agency at the scheduled time on Wednesday, and was greeted by her field instructor-Larry Levelhead. Larry immediately accompanied Teresa to her assigned work area. As Teresa placed her workbag in the drawer of her assigned desk, Larry said it was time to meet the staff. He walked Teresa around the agency introducing her to various people with assigned roles within the agency. Teresa met Lourdes, the office manager and bookkeeper, Anna, the administrative assistant, Jerry, the case aide, Jennifer, Cheryl, and Anna, the social workers, and Monserrat, the director of programs.

After the seventh introduction, Teresa whispered to Larry that she was not sure she could remember all the names. Larry smiled and stated that her concern was understandable and suggested she take notes as he introduced her to people. He continued by saying she could write their name and their role in the agency in her notebook or she could ask for their business card and place this information on the back along with what stood out about them to help with her recollection of each of them. When Teresa stared back at him, he smiled and reassured her that the employees at this agency understood what she was trying to do and would appreciate that she was attempting to remember them. Larry continued by explaining that successful agencies work as a team and even though each person is assigned a role-these roles intersect with one another. There will be many times when the student will have a need and there will also be times when the student is the helper. Larry continued by stating: “Both roles are needed in our agency”.

Once Larry paused, Teresa thought, "What does a successful agency look like? What does it do?” These questions remained in her thoughts and she said nothing.

Larry resumed introducing Teresa to employees of the agency while also taking her on a tour of the agency. Teresa began to write names and relevant information in her notebook or ask for business cards, and placed the business cards in her notebook. Teresa felt awkward doing this but no one seemed to be bothered. Each person waited patiently as she wrote their names, titles, and roles within the agency or eagerly located a business card.

As they entered the waiting room of the agency, Teresa was struck with the level of familiarity that Larry seemed to have with clients in the waiting room. Even though the staff seemed to call each other by first names, the staff, including Larry, called clients by their surname- Mr. Jackson or Ms. James. Teresa also noticed that Larry thanked the clients for patiently waiting to see their worker. Teresa was thinking, "Why the difference? Why such formality with clients and informality with employees? Teresa did not say anything but the potential answers to her growing list of questions in her head were impacting her ability to stay in the moment with Larry. She looked up at the agency clock and realized that it had only been 45 minutes since she arrived to the agency for her first day. She already had so many questions in her head and her emotions vacillated between excitement and paralyzing fear when her field instructor, Larry, interrupted her thoughts and told her that she was in luck- today was their staff meeting. The meeting would begin in one hour and they would meet in the conference room down the long hallway, second door to the left.

Teresa gave Larry a blank stare, he smiled and began to walk her back to her area. As they were walking, Larry began to talk about the many questions he assumed she was contemplating and how overwhelming beginnings were in general for most people. He described an exercise he found useful with new interns and based on the interns’ feedback, the exercise also seemed useful for them. He continued by stating that this exercise can also be temporarily used as their agenda for their required weekly one hour face to face supervision. Larry did not know that Teresa was ready to hide, not work (or maybe he did). As they arrived to Teresa's area, he asked her to take out a regular sheet of paper. He divided the paper into two columns creating a line down the middle of the page. On the left side, she was asked to write the list of questions she was thinking about since arriving to the agency. On the right side (or second column) list the feelings she experienced since arriving to the agency. Larry and Teresa sat down and Larry continued by explaining that he discovered that when- new social work students’ pause and document their questions, thoughts, and feelings, it provides a wealth of developmental information to use for both the student and the field instructor. This documented information provides an opportunity for the students to note either growth or lack of growth by reviewing these notes over a period of time. Even though Teresa was so relieved to sit quietly, she experienced some difficulty focusing her thoughts because of all the new sounds, smells, and sights. Needless to say, after several minutes, she became immersed in writing her initial questions and feelings. The longer she sat quietly, clarity surfaced and she began to think about additional questions she wanted to ask Larry related to her initial experiences at the agency. As she was finalizing her thoughts and feelings on paper, a staff approached her and reminded her that the staff meeting was scheduled to begin in 15 minutes. Teresa thanked the person and wondered (in her head) what was this person’s name and her position in the organization. Teresa wondered about the location of the conference room.

As Teresa realized that she did not remember the location of the conference room and whether or not it was shown to her on the earlier tour of the agency, she decided she had 10 minutes to locate the conference room and if she located it early, it was better to be early than late. Teresa also knew that she did not have a good sense of direction, so this might take her awhile. Teresa picked up her pad and pen and began walking down a long hallway looking for the conference room. She was just beginning to think she was quite lost when she peeked into a room and saw her field instructor hunched over a document editing profusely. While he was preoccupied and did not know she was there, Teresa looked around the room. She quickly said to herself: "This is not a conference room­ this is an office with table and chairs." It was at this moment that Larry looked up, smiled and said: "Early bird gets the worm!" Teresa smiled and had no idea what he was talking about but he seemed quite pleased she was early for the staff meeting.

Teresa sat quietly next to Larry as he resumed his task. Teresa's mind began to generate questions: What was expected of her during this staff meeting? How would the staff respond to her? What if she had to talk? Teresa remembered 'pause' and 'document'. She glanced quickly at her field instructor, pulled out her pad and began to write her thoughts, her questions. Teresa was so immersed in her writing that she was startled when she heard laughter. Several staff had entered the conference room and saw both her and Larry working and began to tease Larry about how hard he was on the new intern so early in her field placement. Teresa was embarrassed, yet the laughter seemed to be good. Larry was laughing and the group seemed to understand each other. Larry proceeded to introduce Teresa. He stated to the group that over the upcoming weeks they would create a developmental plan for Teresa's academic year- two consecutive semesters with them.

He shared with the group that at The University of Akron, this developmental plan was known as a Student Integrative Learning Contract or the learning contract. Larry continued and said he expected Teresa to be able to work effectively with their clientele using the four core social work skills: engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation, have her own caseload of a minimum of two clients prior to leaving the agency, learn how to effectively document service delivery on their electronic case record and create a 'cheat sheet' for new interns who would use their electronic case recording/management system. Larry then turned to Teresa and explained that their electronic case recording system is less than one year old and it is still quite new for the majority of the agency staff. Another staff shouted out that everyone is still learning so they may need that 'cheat sheet' also. Everyone began to laugh. Teresa also laughed but she had additional thoughts in her head. The staff acknowledged the importance of the projects and then each staff person began to add additional possibilities. Teresa's initial thought was "What is wrong with these people?”. Her thoughts continued: ''This placement could be amazing. I would love to learn how to do what they are asking”.

After the meeting, Larry stated it was time to '”pause and document”. After this “pause and document” time, field instructor and student could meet about the entire day. The following day was similar to the first day. Teresa paused and documented as she began to get oriented to her agency.

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