

McLane Harrington
WomenAdvocacy Project Peace Fellowship, Summer 2019
Personal Statement
October 2019

Dear JJCF Board Members,

I would like to thank you for providing me with the support I needed to make my Fellowship a reality. This was an incredibly valuable and formative experience and I feel very lucky to have been awarded this grant.

I was drawn to this fellowship, and the Advocacy Project, because of my desire to have hands-on experience in a community-based organization abroad. I wanted this type of field experience because of its collaborative (rather than extractive) nature and because of the potential for lasting impact for the beneficiaries of the work. One of the reasons I accepted this fellowship was in the hopes of having a better – and more genuine – connection to development work and the experiences of individuals living in developing countries. This was my first experience working in, and even travelling to, a developing country. I was excited to have the opportunity to be challenged in new ways, and to have a lifechanging experience living and working for a short time abroad in a marginalized community. While I did not have many expectations going into this experience, I can say that some of my expectations were met while other completely unexpected things took place and for better or worse, I learned quite a lot.

Since a young age volunteering at soup kitchens with my Dad's youth group or working to rebuild homes in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, I have been passionate about community work. That interest broadened to the international sphere when I entered high school, and particularly when I led a club working to bring awareness (and funds) to the issue of child soldiers in Africa. Because I would like to work in the international development field after graduating from the Fletcher School, experience in a developing country is invaluable to me. Furthermore, through this fellowship I was afforded the opportunity to expand my network and gain contacts in this field that will be important for my future work and career.

Since my graduate studies are largely focused on the field of human security, I firmly believe in paying attention to the experiences, perspectives and needs of individuals. This is particularly true when coming into a community as an 'outsider' to make changes and suggestions, as is so often done with international development and human rights work. I effectively took on the role of the outsider in this situation, and it was a formative experience to essentially put my ideas and passion into practice. It was a valuable experience to be so actively aware and conscious of the implicit power and biases that I brought into this work due to my experience as a white American. It is not necessarily a comfortable situation to be in, but one that I think everyone with a degree of privilege should experience at least once in their lives. I tried to remain conscious of

people's expectations of me (whether my presence meant the presence of more aid money), people wanting to illustrate positive results even if reality was different (in case a negative report would reduce funding) or deferring to my opinion on things (since my position made me seem like the 'expert'). The people I worked with were brilliant, compassionate and deeply entrenched in the inner workings of their community. There would never be a way for me to understand this situation – or how to best enable positive change – better than them so their expertise and opinion was always prioritized. My 'capacity building' role was more for technical matters such as website development, email communication, survey tools, grant-writing, etc. I feel that we all learned a great deal from each other over the 10 weeks of my Fellowship.

I am proud of what my host organization was able to accomplish during my time in Zimbabwe and the part that I played in making that possible. Perhaps most tangibly, the embroidery squares that were produced by young women in WAP's program as part of my fellowship (depicting various aspects and experiences of child marriage) will be presented at a forthcoming UN summit on women's health in Nairobi (ICPD25). WAP has also launched soap training and product development/sales for 60 girls in Harare with the money I raised through crowdfunding this summer, and based on the project plan I created with WAP.

Thank you once again.

Sincerely,
McLane