

Reflections from CFCC Student Fellows (continued)

Navneet Pal, Second-Year Law Student (continued)

As a Student Fellow, I've learned that there are many underlying causes of truancy. The CFCC staff and Student Fellows spend a considerable amount of time thinking about and discussing their TCP participants... If we can identify and address the root causes of their truant behavior, we can help them overcome it. It is unfortunate that we cannot reach every student who has truancy issues... but I am glad that we help the ones that we can, and that those students are able to improve their academic and personal lives in the process.

Samantha Richmond, Second-Year Law Student

I have always had a strong desire to give back to the community... [so] I decided to enroll in the [CFCC Student Fellows Program]. The TCP allows students the opportunity to work alongside judges, school administrators, counselors, social workers, CFCC staff, students, and parents in addressing the causes of students' truant behavior... During my first semester with TCP, I participated in the program at the National Academy Foundation Middle and High School (NAF)... Although it took time for students to become acclimated with our team, by the end of our sessions, students were always willing to share with us their excuse for missing school or the positive changes they made in order to attend school on time each day. The TCP is a voluntary program and it was clear that students enjoyed participating in our program as many of them arrived early for our program each week.

During my second semester... I decided to participate in the program at Collington Square Elementary and Middle School... [where I] realize[d] the vital role parents play in students' lives. It was clear that many elementary school students should not be held responsible for their parents' failure to bring them to school on time... The students came to our table every week with a smile on their faces ready to share with us stories from their previous week. I looked forward to hearing their stories every Thursday. I think the students truly understood that all members participating in the TCP cared about their attendance and performance in school. It was a very rewarding experience... I plan to volunteer for the TCP [in the future] as **I believe this is a great program that will change the lives of many students and help them succeed in school in order to achieve their goals.**

Catherine Villareale, Third-Year Law Student

The past year as a CFCC Student Fellow in the Truancy Court Program at Violetville Elementary and Middle School was an extremely rewarding experience. Working as a team, we met with the TCP students each week to find out why they were

truant and how we could work together with the students and their families to improve their attendance. For some students, the reasons were as simple as needing an alarm clock to get them up in the morning. Yet other students faced far more complex problems such as domestic violence and homelessness. We were able to connect students and families to resources. The students responded positively to this therapeutic approach. During the course of the program, I could see many students progress... they believed we were there to help and they opened up about their challenges at home and at school. I have seen some students really blossom and thrive as a result of the positive encouragement and mentoring they received in the TCP and I am proud to have been part of the program.

Carly Weitzman, Third-Year Law Student

This semester I worked with Patterson High School (PHS) 9th graders... [and] this experience differed greatly from my previous semester at Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School (WPC).

One difference relates to the student population itself... At WPC, a lot of conversation focused on homework, family, and reasons for lateness. Conversations at PHS, while often discussing the same issues, also dealt with larger issues surrounding mental health, gangs, and getting along with peers and/or authority figures. Another difference in working in the two schools relates to the fact that while [i]t took more time and sessions to connect with the [Patterson High] students... I really think we got through to them on a deeper level. When the program first started in the Spring, I was not sure if we would be able to make any difference in these “tough” 9th graders, but I was pleasantly surprised to find that they were listening and taking in what we said.

Rexanah Wyse, Third-Year Law Student

I first learned about the Truancy Court Program (TCP) while working as an intern for the University of Maryland Institute for Governmental Service and Research... As a result, I wanted to be involved with TCP in any capacity possible. During the 2011-2012 academic year, I began as a student volunteer, mentoring and tutoring students. After, I then decided to sign up for the CFCC Student Fellows Program. I was placed at a local elementary school for the TCP court session.

What I found most rewarding was being able to interact with the students first-hand to determine the underlying causes for their truancy. By listening to the children’s stories—ranging from not having an alarm clock to severe medical issues—and showing that I, along with the TCP team, cared, a trusting environment was created in which the students and their families were able to openly share their frustrations and worries.