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IES Dialogues on Differences

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**Were you in the position to found an NGO in South Africa, which sector would you choose and why?  Write a mission statement to reflect that.**

In the past, I worked closely with an international NGO called Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC). What I found is that the Ronald McDonald Foundation has a significant worldwide impact on the lives of 6 million families and children. Portions of the charitable non-profit sector provide solutions to the misfortune that comes with caring for a medically challenged child, like the case of little Micah Mueller’s family.

Seven-year old Micah Mueller was not expected to live through the New Year. With his rare heart condition, hypoplastic left heart syndrome, he was mere days away from death when his Christmas wish became a Christmas miracle. The Canton, Ohio child and his family were relieved to hear that Micah was to receive a new heart and would begin to live a normal life if Cleveland Clinic surgeons could successfully perform a transplant (Jordan, 2015). With their rising medical bills, the family, like many others with the misfortune of raising a medically challenged child were hard-pressed in their financial situations. The financial turmoil these families face is detrimental to the families’ stability. They already have the stress of sick children and any additional stressors take time away from focusing on their children’s healing process.

Arguably the most notable organization advocating for social reform of these families’ tragic situations and sponsoring families’ wellbeing while their children receive treatment are Ronald McDonald House Charities. With nearly 350 locations worldwide, the Ronald McDonald House Charities’ network affects tens of thousands of families daily with the support of volunteerism and charitable donations. Believing that a positive change in one family at a time will ultimately positively influence the world, Ronald McDonald House Charities has a strong will and desire to initiate global change. The house itself offers a variety of essential services which are recognized as the core program employed by the organization. Each Ronald McDonald House provides free housing to any patron that can successfully reserve a room and a fully stocked kitchen that can be accessed at any time of the day.

During my time with the organization, I conducted a report that focused on one of the organization’s chapters in much greater depth; the Cleveland Ronald McDonald House, otherwise known as the Cleveland RMH, is a fantastic representative of the international organization’s ideals and a critical activist in its social mission. Since the Cleveland RMH’s founding in 1979 by a group of community leaders, the organization has proven to be a strong supporter of families with medically challenged children by employing a variety of essential programs and services. In its recent years, the Cleveland RMH has chosen to employ a variety of new programs and services designed to effectively fulfil a mission of instilling hope into its patrons. The Family Room program, the Happy Wheels program, and the Red Tree House program act as an extension of the Cleveland RMH’s services and encourage peace of mind and comfort for the families who chose to use the service during their stay.

According to their website, Ronald McDonald House Charities has at least one operating house in Johannesburg, which accounts for their entire outreach in South Africa. I would love to expand the Ronald McDonald House Charities outreach to Cape Town and develop South Africa’s humanitarian social services. There’s no doubt that Cape Town would benefit from such an institution that has been purposed for the public’s use when its members are most vulnerable, such as having hospitalized children. In an area where poverty is abundant, Ronald McDonald House Charities do their greatest work. The foundation caters to underprivileged families who cannot afford housing costs incurred by extended medical treatments. I recommend that anyone with a heart create their own experience with Ronald McDonald Houses. This organization is deserving of any time that prospective volunteers could spare and surely needs the help.

**What kind of leader would it take to promote change in South Africa?  Can you think of any good practices in the U.S. that may help your cause?**

In *Reconciliation*: *The Building of Relationship*,Leberach writes of the four components that can be understood as the foundation for reconciliation. These four components—truth, justice, mercy, peace—also speak well to the qualtiies of a good leader that can promote change in South Africa. Future South African leaders will need to address reconciliation. Although, I think these four characteristics speak to something broader than just reconciliation. They also are mandatory qualities for one to establish good relationships. At the core of a good leader is building good relationships; they are overlapping characteristics.

Leberach notes that “Reconciliation must be proactive in seeking to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationship and share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences with one another, with the goal of creating new perceptions and a new shared experience.” I’d say the same is true of any unselfish and traditionally good leader. Leading is not purposed to elevate one’s own position. Instead, leading is meant to efficiently create change and new opportunities like Leberach’s idea of reconciliation creating new perceptions. Reconciliation and leadership both have this connotation about moving forward, which are facilitated by establishing good relations. South Africa needs a leader that can build peace in a divided society, a person who can merge a divide created by inequality. Barack Obama probably showed the greatest compassion, restraint, and tolerance of any recent United States president. Obama is passionate about improving society, yet remains hunble in acknowldging his faults. His legacy is a testament to the role that leaders should conform to.

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