

A Shared Enthusiasm: An American Student's Perspective of Counselor Education in Malawi

By Paul H. Smith and Wendi K. Schweiger

The Guidance, Counselling and Youth Development Centre for Africa opened its doors in 2007, in Lilongwe, Malawi. Since this time, GCYDCA staff led by Dr. Kenneth Hamwaka, under the guidance of a board of directors comprised of African ministers of education, has dedicated itself to developing and implementing programs that benefit African youth. This has included developing counselor education diploma and degree programs. GCYDCA has also implemented the Mental Health Facilitator (MHF) program in schools in partnership with NBCC-I and has been instrumental in advising NBCC-I in other collaborations in Africa.

GCYDCA staff and board members have warmly hosted NBCC Board members and NBCC/NBCC-I staff visiting for meetings to further develop collaborations. Likewise, NBCC Board members and staff have hosted Dr. Hamwaka during trips to the United States. One of NBCC-I's purposes is to facilitate the development of international relationships, and during his most recent trip, Dr. Hamwaka was invited to Wake Forest University. He was welcomed by students and faculty, and his conversation with one student led to a mutual opportunity for GCYDCA and that student, Paul Smith. Below are Paul's reflections on his time at GCYDCA.



Paul H. Smith

As I look back on my time in Malawi during the summer of 2012, my memories are filled with many occasions of generous hospitality.

Malawi is known as the Warm Heart of Africa, and my time at GCYDCA certainly demonstrated why. I was welcomed into GCYDCA to observe the counselor education program and compare it to U.S. programs. Months prior, I met the director of the center, Dr. Kenneth Hamwaka, during an NBCC-I visit to the counseling department of Wake Forest University. After conversing with him about my research project, I applied for and was granted funding by the Richter Memorial Fund, which supports graduate students at Wake Forest University conducting international

research. Being a student in a U.S. counseling program made my research question especially salient and appropriate: How does this particular counseling program in Malawi differ from mine? It was as much a research question as it was an opportunity to expand my understanding of counselor education in our global environment.

As I reflect on what I learned during this journey, I note the differences of programming and the commonalities in the spirit of counseling I found at GCYDCA. There were sociocultural differences present in the content of classes, occupations of the students, and modalities of teaching. Much of the counselor education focus in Malawi is centered on African youth, health-based interventions, and training of employed teachers and NGO (nongovernmental organization) workers. While I experienced differences in the nature of counselor education in Malawi and in the United States, the shared spirit of counseling transcended the

vast geographical divide. In addition, the enthusiasm about the profession at GCYDCA was infectious and hopeful.

I am thankful for this unique opportunity to spend time with counselors on the other side of the globe, observing the differences in the education program and the strands of commonality that connect us all. As I move forward in my counseling journey, I hope to carry with me the lessons I learned in Malawi, of the need to be culturally humble and intellectually curious wherever I work. I am deeply grateful for learning these principles in the beautiful and hospitable locale of Malawi.

Mr. Smith is a master's student in Wake Forest University's Department of Counseling. Dr. Schweiger is the associate vice president of NBCC International.