

I was able to spend two hours at Project Harmony under the direction of Nick Zadina. He first started off by explaining what child advocacy was and shared with us a story describing a typical process that a child goes through when they tell an adult that they have been sexually abused. I learned that the first person a child usually tells is their school teacher, then their nurse and then their counselor. From there on, they will talk with at least seventeen different individuals, retelling their story as they go. Project Harmony's job is to secure one person (called the Forensic Interviewer) to talk with the child. That way, the child only has to share their story at least 2-3 times. It was really fascinating to learn about all the different fields that come together to share their talents and hopefully make a child's life better. After talking for about an hour and going through the scenario(s), we asked him questions. I asked what the age range is for the children they receive, and he said that 60% of all the patients they receive are under the age of 6. He also said it takes on average 9 years for a child to tell an adult that they have been abused. Nick then showed us what they do once the child enters the building, such as the interview, play room, medical examination, picking out clothes in the "boutique" and choosing a toy from the toy closet. Their job is to make the child feel safe and comfortable at Project Harmony. Nick then took us upstairs and showed us a stage that is built on a 360 turn table. It depicts what a "typical" house looks like when they send CPS or investigators. It had trash and drugs everywhere. It was filthy and had roaches and pests. In the bathroom was a weapon, and there were holes in the wall. It was really sad to see an environment where children who get abused usually come from. I couldn't believe that parents would actually raise their children in a trashed place like that.

This shadowing experience actually made me very interested in this field. I absolutely love children, and I knew that I wanted a career working with them. Child Advocacy isn't something that a whole lot of people know about, but it is so important to educate the public on because abuse is very common. One aspect that helped me narrow my choice of careers is the environment that Project Harmony had. It was very upbeat, cheerful and bright. Although I really want to work in the typical hospital setting, this environment also made me want to be there. It was definitely warm and welcome. Another aspect is that the younger generation need a whole lot of love. There are so many kids who are raised by parents who didn't want them in the first place. Some parents neglect, ignore and mistreat their children. It makes me want to step in and be an adult that a child can look up to, a mother figure in some ways. Children need to be guided and reared in a loving way, and they definitely need the support and protection of loving parents. I feel that my job needs to be in a field where parents are not able to/or do not tend to their child's needs. Whether it's in the nursery with preemie babies, or a pediatrician caring for children. One thing I noticed was how much Nick loved his job. He said he wouldn't trade it for anything. He loves coming to work each day, because he's there to make a difference in someone's life, not earn money. It made me realize that I don't have to choose a career that is "boring" or that I have to do something I don't enjoy. As long as it deals with children/babies and it's health related, I am almost positive I will love my job. There are so many positions out there that interact with children in the medical field, and that's where I want to direct my path towards.