

One Page Summary

As a summer intern at Thistle Farms, I received firsthand experience with running a social enterprise. Though Magdalene, which is the organization's residential program, helps women struggling with prostitution and/or drug addiction become clean, the women had a tough time acquiring jobs after graduating from Magdalene. In order to help the women obtain jobs, Becca Stevens, who is the founder of Magdalene and a Sewanee graduate, decided to create a business that would provide jobs for the Magdalene women. She created Thistle Farms, which is a natural bath and body product company, and the Magdalene women make all the products by hand. After graduating from Magdalene, not only are the women clean of substance and prostitution, but they also have more than a year of job experience. The women that I met and built friendships with at Thistle Farms are living examples of the social enterprise's success, and I will forever remember the lessons they taught me.

Although I was a marketing volunteer, I was still encouraged to engage with the women and build friendships with them. My primary marketing project was to create a database of all the 150 plus businesses to which we sell, which included their individual purchases for the past two years. Yet, if a woman wanted to speak to me about her life or ask me about my own while I was working, I was urged to take time to speak with her. I feel tremendously grateful for having worked with a business in which the employees worked hard and also enjoyed spending time with each other. My supervisor often advised me to take time away from my work on Microsoft Excel in order to help other departments finish their tasks. Due to the wonderful support I received from my supervisor, I was able to learn how a social enterprise is managed and also spend time developing public relations skills.

Overall, my Thistle Farms internship inspired me to continue dreaming of ways to help those who need it most, since that is how Becca Stevens came to start the social enterprise. Now equipped with the necessary skills for managing a social enterprise, owing to the helpful supervisors at Thistle Farms, I hope to create or work for a similar organization in the future.