This summer I interned with the Magdalene Community and Thistle Farms in Nashville, Tennessee. The Magdalene Community serves women recovering from addiction, prostitution, abuse, homelessness, and imprisonment. For two years, the program offers participants housing, food, medical and dental needs, therapy, education and job training, all free of charge. Thistle Farms is the social enterprise component of the community that is run by the women of Magdalene. Thistle Farms manufactures and sells all-natural home goods such as candles, soaps, papers, and lip balms.

I worked exclusively at the Lena House, the largest of Magdalene’s six residential facilities, shadowing the program directors and exploring the demands of social work and non-profit management. I primarily followed assistant program director, Keri Seay and program director, Donna Grayer, learning to manage the residents’ appointments, medications, finances, and records. The Magdalene program is a “housing first” model of rehabilitation and features intensive case management of the residents. My daily tasks included returning phone calls, interviewing perspective residents, organizing and updating resident charts, and setting up appointments. Also, I absorbed any random project that floated by, enabling me to blog, garden, craft paper, participate in group therapies, design budgets, interview residents, and write grants.

Until my work at Magdalene, I worried I wouldn’t be able to endure the emotional strain of social work. On the contrary, I never felt overwhelmed emotionally. In fact, I’ve found I am calm, logical, and detached in chaotic situations. However, the nature of intensive case management necessitates long circuitous conversations that exhaust me. I approach problems with plans, and felt frustrated with the amount of talk and the lack of action. Reflecting on my internship, I realize while I possess the resilience and compassion for case management, I lack the patience.

Now, I find myself drawn to the management of a service non-profit. Crafting messaging, clarifying agency goals, writing grants, fundraising, maintaining board relations, and organizational development excite me and allow me to utilize my creativity as well as my communication and organizational skills. After working with Magdalene, I now discern non-profit management as my path to the service of disadvantaged women.