

# Sacred Heart Internship Program

## THEY CALL HER Mama K.

It's not an obvious nickname for this petite young woman, but her passionate and caring heart has earned her the moniker. At 21, Kaitlin Liroff is the oldest of the four young adults who participated in the pilot of the Sacred Heart Internship Program (SHIP), and she tended to watch over the others. These remarkable women spent five life-changing weeks in Washington, DC, working at non-profits, blogging, sharing and learning from one another. And they've only just begun. This internship includes a collaborative advocacy project. The four alumnae of the Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills – Liroff, Shannon Lewry, Oyinkan Osobamiro and Laura Spinelli – are working on a social justice website.

It all started with an exciting proposition. In April, 2010, Liroff and her friend Amanda Waske, also a Bloomfield Hills alumna, were part of a group that presented at the 2010 RSCJ Conference on Young People and later developed the plan for an immersion experience for college-aged women that would offer opportunities to engage in social justice work. Using the Goals and Criteria for Sacred Heart Schools as their guide, Liroff and Waske developed SHIP to include an internship, assigned reading, reflection, seminars, communal living (at the Center for Educational Design and Communication, a Sacred Heart ministry) and the extended advocacy project for the ten months after their time in Washington.

But wait. Perhaps that proposal in 2010 isn't where it all began. In fact, all four young women had plenty of service experience while Sacred Heart students. As Liroff and Waske wrote in their proposal, "These experiences in high school inspired us to take our learning to the next level." Out of a required social justice class grew a student group called P.E.A.C.E. (People Educating Adults and Children Everywhere).





Above: When not at their internships, Bloomfield Hills alumnae Oyinkan Osobamiro, Laura Spinelli, Kaitlin Liroff and Shannon Lewry hit the tourist spots in DC.

Below: Liroff at work at the Franciscan Action Network.



Its goal was to build bridges between the school and the global community by increasing awareness of social justice issues both domestically and abroad.

“The uniqueness of both the PEACE initiative and the current internship initiative is that both were designed and run by the students,” said Margaret Causey, RSCJ, provincial team member and SHIP supervisor. “While several of us were there to mentor them through both, they really took the leadership and full responsibility for implementation of both programs.”

“We believed we could do something,” Liroff, now at the University of Michigan, said. “The adults trusted me enough to allow me to investigate my world, while simultaneously offering support. That trust instilled confidence, the belief that I have the power to do something.”

Spinelli added, “High school instilled the idea that you’re supposed to do something. If you see something you don’t like, change it. This experience has deepened that conviction.”

Working for change is at the heart of this program. Each intern followed her passion in choosing her service site. Spinelli worked at Living Wages, a community-based organization that provides adult education, alongside Elizabeth Hartson, RSCJ, one of the founders of the organization. Spinelli spent time tutoring adult learners, working on the website and producing a marketing video – real world experience.

Lewry and Osobamiro both chose to serve at the Perry School Community Services Center. Osobamiro, who plans to pursue a medical degree, worked primarily in the health clinic, where she shadowed a doctor, worked on brochures and did general administrative work. Lewry worked in the finance office (with

Victoria Rajca, RSCJ) and development office, where she researched grants and worked on the website. Both women were touched by the lives of the underserved people who came to the Center for help. “Sometimes it seems like it’s a sin to be poor,” Osobamiro noted. “It was important to treat them with dignity. They’re not getting that anywhere else.”

Liroff’s experience at the Franciscan Action Network did not involve direct service, and that in itself was eye-opening for her. She spent her internship doing research and writing reports, including case studies about human trafficking that were presented to the United Nations Human Rights Special Rapporteur. She was impressed by the way the people around her lived a consistent ethic of life, especially the Gospel mandate to “welcome the stranger.” But she learned that she needs to work directly with people to see that her work makes a difference in a tangible way – an important lesson for someone who has been considering a career in politics.

## An Education Beyond the Classroom

Sacred Heart educators have long known that education cannot be confined to the classroom. The four interns learned important life skills, including patience, collaboration and the art of compromise. In the process, they came to know themselves and their friends in a different light. Liroff, for instance, learned she's "a lot more maternal than I realized." Hence, the nickname Mama K.

The interns found community life to be full of challenges as well as joys, as they negotiated how to spend their joint food budget, prepared meals together and talked late into the night. Indeed, all four young women agreed that the communal lifestyle was the best, most important part of their experience. They talked about everything under the sun. Osobamiro – a self-described meat-eater – even learned to like veggie burgers!

"I knew the internship would be a good experience, and I knew I would have fun. I didn't realize how much I would learn about myself and how much I would grow," said Osobamiro. She smiled as she noted that her mother always told her never to discuss politics and religion in company. "Here we talked politics and religion at every dinner!" But, as Lewry pointed out, "Every conversation was respectful, deep and rewarding."

The interns were not completely on their own. Their support team included the staff at the CEDC, Sister Causey and Religious of the Sacred Heart Anne Byrne, Mary Pat White, Lisa Buscher, and the other RSCJ in Washington who met with them for weekly reflection and discussion. The young women valued this opportunity to get to know the RSCJ better. "To see how they live their charism together, to see what real faith is and what it can motivate people to do, is really beautiful," Liroff said.

This internship program is just one example of how a Sacred Heart education continues throughout a lifetime. The four interns believe this experience has changed them, and it will change the way they live. They are better listeners, more open, slower to judge. Osobamiro noted that her concept of service has deepened. "This experience was not 'I'm helping this person,'" she said. "It's about giving and taking as equals, striving to understand where the other person is coming from." Or, as Lewry put it, "Service is about relationships. This is the Goals and Criteria, living and breathing." ❖

*(The Sacred Heart interns maintained a blog about their experiences in the District of Columbia. It is still available at <http://sacredheartinternship.tumblr.com>. The trial for the Sacred Heart Internship Program has been extended for a second year. To apply, contact Sister Meg Causey at [mcausey@rscj.org](mailto:mcausey@rscj.org).)*



Meg Causey, RSCJ, center, credits Kaitlin Liroff (left) and Amanda Waske, both graduates of Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, for developing the new Sacred Heart Internship Program.

Working for change is at the heart of this program. Each intern followed her passion in choosing her service site.

Oyinkan Osobamiro and Laura Spinelli at the reception the interns hosted for those who helped them during their stay.



# FIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS SHARE NEW

FOR EIGHT WEEKS DURING THIS SUMMER, five young people traveled to Washington, DC to participate in SHIP – Sacred Heart Internship Program. This was the second, year of the internship program that is run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart with two young Sacred Heart Alumnae Coordinators.

The program was designed by two graduates of The Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills. Seeking more opportunities to work in advocacy and social service after high school, SHIP was created to engage young people in a service-learning summer internship to grow personally while gaining valuable working experience in a field of choice, according to its founders, Kaitlin Liroff, Bloomfield Hills '08, and Amanda Waske, Bloomfield Hills '09.

“During high school, our investment in social justice and advocacy was fostered and encouraged,” say Kaitlin and Amanda. “SHIP is designed to give those who want to continue in these fields to intern at a choice of social justice based organizations or other placements in Washington. Working on SHIP has truly changed our lives.”

Interns work with the RSCJ in their different advocacy projects and live in community at CEDC – the Center for Educational Design and Communications – a social justice technology, communication and conference center run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

The SHIP Program is financed through a grant from the Society of the Sacred Heart. Interns board at CEDC; receive a Metro card for transportation to and from their internship site; and at the end of the Internship, each one receives a stipend. The hope is that, in the future, outside funding can be found to enable even more young alumnae/i to take part in the program.

For participants, the program does not end with the eight-weeks in Washington. For the following 10 months, they work on an advocacy project for an issue developed by the interns themselves.

The program is open to Sacred Heart Alumnae/i who have completed their first or second year of college. The five 2012 interns included one who was not a Sacred Heart graduate, but who came through the Franciscan Action Network. Because the SHIP program was designed by students at Bloomfield Hills, most of the interns have been its graduates, but 2012 shows how that is changing.



*The 2012 SHIP Interns take time to gather for a group photo. The five alums spent two months in Washington, each pursuing experience as advocates and social service volunteers in their fields of interest. Shown above are: Top Row: Sean Reidy, Amanda Waske, Ashton Wills Front row: Laura Spinelli, Meg Scamardo.*

The 2012 interns are:

**Amanda Waske, Bloomfield Hills '09**, was one of the original designers of SHIP and acted as student coordinator. She is now a senior at University of Michigan. Her internship placement was at Franciscan Action Network in Northeast Washington.

**Ashton Wills** is not a Sacred Heart graduate, and she, too, did her internship at Franciscan Action Network. She is a junior at Central Arkansas State University.

**Laura Spinelli, Bloomfield Hills '10**, returned for her second year as an intern at SIRRUS Radio, and joined the interns for community life and reflection. Laura is a junior at Denison University.

**Sean Reidy, Atherton '11**, was placed at Living Wages – an adult education center in Southeast DC. He is a sophomore at California Polytechnic and the first young man to participate in SHIP.

**Meg Scamardo, Duchesne Academy, Houston '10**, did her internship at Perry Community School. She is a junior at Texas Christian University.

The agenda for each intern was determined by their placement. Some worked with adults; some worked with children; the common denominator was the personal effect and change that each intern expressed from the experiences.

# EXPERIENCES AS 2012 SHIP INTERNS

The interns had weekly reflection sessions with RSCJs in the Area and held Wednesday dinners where they invited local Religious and Social Leaders to share their work and insights on current justice issues. One of the assignments of the Internship was writing a blog – recounting each week’s activities and the learning experience that resulted. Here are some of their thoughts:

**AMANDA** (Reflecting on the International Aids Conference, all Interns had the opportunity to attend) *This past week I was challenged both emotionally and intellectually. In the United States, at least where I’ve grown up, it’s not especially common to meet someone who has contracted HIV. Whether that is because there isn’t a high prevalence or because of the stigma still attached to the virus I’m not sure, but either way it’s not a disease that I have much familiarity. I was able to hear Sir Elton John speak this past week, and to paraphrase his wisdom: HIV is the cause of the disease, but stigma is the cause of the epidemic. Poverty and stigma are the problems, and drugs aren’t the answer.*

**ASHTON** (On attending the return of Nuns On A Bus to DC) *“Reasonable revenue for responsible programs”. That is the mantra Sister Simone Campbell left for her 300+ crowd of faithful DC followers, and the legacy I am sure she and her Sisters left in their wake during the Nuns on the Bus road trip. These women visited nine states, advocating for a Faithful Budget as an alternative to budget cuts to important programs that are crucial for taking care of our poorest Americans. I was blessed and honored to stand with friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers alike to welcome home a bus full of passionate women who had just spent two weeks on the road, advocating for the dignity of all Americans.... It was a day of solidarity, compassion, and good ole American civil rights rallying.*

**SEAN** (On the role of the Church in today’s world) *Wednesday night’s discussion with Father Ed (Edward Vacek, SJ) about the current state of the church, the good and the bad, particularly the role of women, really got me wondering what exactly it is that we need in the church. There are many questions in the church today such as should women be priests, should priests be allowed to marry, how to best handle all the priest abuse scandals, and many others. Personally, I think greatest change will come from the lay people. There is something deep inside that calls for change because we know there is a better way to live. I don’t know the answers to these questions but I do know we need to figure out a reassessment of our values not just as a church but also as a people.*

**MEG** (Reflections on being a white minority at Perry Community Center and race in general) *This week we added two more volunteers to our classroom. However, I’m officially the only other white person these kids know, and I just can’t help to feel like I’m out of place sometimes. Though of course the kids make comments about my pale skin, etc., it’s never been a barrier and I’m pretty sure they all like me. I feel like they listen to the other volunteers more. Maybe it has nothing to do with race and is really all about firmness, but I don’t know: it just makes me think.... I’m so happy that I have the opportunity to spend my summer with the biggest constant reminder of how important it is to have fun.*

**LAURA SPINELLI** was invited to represent young alumnae/i and the SHIP internship at the Assembly of RSCJ in July 2012. At that meeting she had the opportunity to share what her Sacred Heart education meant to her and how the internship program has allowed her to continue her involvement in the mission of the Society. Of her experiences, Laura said: *My favorite part about the Sacred Heart Internship Program is the opportunity it provides to meet so many great people--the fellow interns, non-profit leaders, and RSCJ. It is inspirational to know that we are all connected by the same commitment to make the world a better place.*

As the year passes, the search for answers and understanding will no doubt continue for this newest class of SHIP Interns.

**SHIP...** a program that is growing, a program that works, and a program that honors the Sacred Heart mission.



SHIP Intern Meg Scamardo with some of the children she worked with at a Washington, DC innercity school.