

The Daily News

University of Arizona student recognized for her contribution to a local organization

As University of Arizona students start nearing the end of their time before graduation, many like to get involved in activities that will be beneficial their future. For many students, this means getting an internship. Internships are a great way for students to be introduced to real life situations within a field relating to their major. Some students, like Brielle Schumpe, like to take advantage of the experience in order to help their organization with an initiative that will have a lasting effect long after they graduate.

Brielle is a junior at The University of Arizona, double majoring in Criminal Justice and Public Management and Policy. From the time she began searching for an internship position, she knew she wanted to do something meaningful and that would further introduce her to her field of study. When she read the description of Dismas Charities, she knew it would be a great fit. Dismas Charities is a nonprofit residential re-entry facility located in Tucson. Dismas provides a range of tailored services that address specific community needs, At Dismas, the staff is dedicated to providing all the tools for successful reintegration. Dismas Charities is under contract with the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to provide services to releasing prisoners

in their own local communities prior to completing their sentences, to increase the level of their services and offer more home confinement alternatives.

Their program is designed to provide employment, education, and support for their residents. They are about reducing crime and victimization by *Healing the Human Spirit* and providing the support that goes beyond the classroom and employment.



As Dismas is dedicated to healing the human spirit, each year, they hold workshops welcome to the community members that they partner with. This year, Dismas had extra help as they have interns from The University of Arizona. For these workshops, they try to focus on areas of their program that need more attention in order to be more effective. This year, the focus of their annual workshop is family reunification. This topic is important as it can be a difficult time for the residents as well as their families. The workshop is focused on teaching the residents, their families, and community members

about the importance of family reunification and how they can help.

Brielle Schumpe was asked to do some research on family reunification in order to help Dismas with the program. When asking the residents their opinions on the issue of family reunification, some common themes were brought up. The residents mentioned that when their families come to visit, they themselves feel as though they are being treated as an inmate. This is due to the Dismas safety regulations that make visitors subject to search. Also, another issue brought to her attention was the lack of space and activities for the visiting children.



With all of this in mind, Brielle began researching to prepare a presentation. Brielle tells us that she was very interested in this subject, as it had been something that she has seen to be very important to the successful reintegration of residents. However, she did not see much being done to better this aspect of reunification at Dismas Charities during her time there this semester. She was excited that she was given the opportunity to help their program and that they trusted her with this aspect of the workshop.

In her research, Brielle thought it was important to ask the opinions of the staff at Dismas so their ideas could be integrated into the workshop. One employee she spoke with took it upon

himself to provide crayons and coloring books for the children who visit Dismas in order to make it a more welcoming environment. The residents say that little things like that go a long way in making their families comfortable while visiting. Brielle suggested that Dismas invest in some board games and other activity book in order to tend to their visitors and make their visit positive and pleasant.

“Incarceration is not just hard in the individual, but for all family members involved as well” Brielle says, “however, re-entry programs have a special role in helping families reunify.” Incarceration comes with a whole bundle of emotions and programs that Dismas has the capacity to provide can aid in the process. A study by the Minnesota Department of Corrections found that visitation can reduce recidivism rates by 13 percent. This shows how important positive visitations can be in “healing the human spirit” which is Dismas charities mission.

Brielle used her presentation to focus on educating family members about their role in reducing recidivism rates. Research shows that a person who returns to an informed and supportive family is less likely to reoffend and return to prison. There are plenty of handbooks for friends and families of inmates that Brielle drew from in order to connect with those attending the workshop.

Brielle focused on three important aspects of family reunification. The first aspect is expectations. Both the inmate as well as the family have expectations of how things will be after reuniting. Part of expectations about family reunification is just talking about how things will be, before the transition actually occurs. Setting guidelines is important in order to make sure both

family and inmate are on the same page.

The second aspect of her presentation highlighted the importance of recognizing the change of roles within a family. When a person is incarcerated, their family is left behind to carry on without them. Their life continues and they often have to take on different roles. For example, if a woman's husband goes to prison and he used to be the main provider for the family, the roles will have changed when he returns. Learning how to adjust to these roles is essential in order to have a successful reunification.

The final topic of Brielle's presentation was adjustment. Brielle believes that this is the most important aspect, as it is what inmates often say is the most difficult. The incarcerated family member may have been gone for a long period of time and feel disoriented and out of touch with the community. This aspect is something that just takes time and patience. It can be especially difficult to adjust to the faster paced living than an inmate is not used to.

Brielle Schumpe took her internship to a more meaningful level by presenting her research to those at Dismas Charities. Her presentation contributed to the overall success of the workshop, and her insights about family reunification have changed the conversation at Dismas Charities and caused it to be seen in a new light.