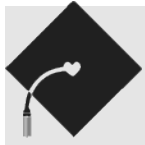


Program Evaluation

Program Evaluator at Le Bonheur Children's
Hospital



Kelsie Cox

Rhodes College, Class of 2013



Describe your current position and the journey that led you here.

I am from Bentonville, Arkansas. I went to Rhodes College for undergraduate studies, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Government. I got my Master's of Education (MEd) from Vanderbilt University in Community Development and Action. I am a program evaluator, which involves evaluating different community programs the hospital has, mostly with kids that are in the hospital. Program evaluation can be closely related to community psychology.

What makes your work meaningful?

I am able to do research, both qualitative and quantitative and really evaluate programs to see what kind of impact they are having. My work really requires looking at the whole picture. Program evaluation can take into account systemic problems, history, social sciences and ultimately how you can affect change. You're providing data to improve programs and make sure they are helping the people they are intended for.

What does an average work day and year look like for you?

It depends on what is going on and projects you are working on. We mainly consider what the clients need, what they are doing, and looking at data. It's a lot of figuring out data and how to develop plans for data collection. There is data analysis, and quality improvement. I am involved in grant writing and report generation. It is also about using a lot of different databases to get what I need from the data.

What are the two best and two worst things about working in your current role or sector?

Work is mostly grant-funded. The whole funding thing can be messy. Grants can change, and there is always uncertainty around funding. This can be an issue for anyone on soft money. A lot of social programs are dependent on that funding.

Depending on the program, you can also feel like you are removed from the work being done. You can also feel removed from the people in the community. You are providing data and improving programs to see if they are effective. Therefore, you see effectiveness in the data, but you are removed from the stories, so that can feel like a disconnect.



(In Kelsie's alumni profile, she describes how not being on the front lines all the time is also a positive to this position.) I also like that we are also connected to St. Jude and the other area hospitals and are all working together to improve services for children and families in Memphis. I like that St. Jude is in Memphis because of the opportunity it gives to the community - the fact that two children's hospitals are here. Their hospital is primarily focused on ending childhood cancer, but it provides a lot of resources and jobs for Memphis.

Do you feel like you have to financially sacrifice to be in your field? Are you happy with the pay?

I think I make a decent salary. I am not making medical doctor level salaries. I would say it is good especially since Memphis has a great cost of living. I definitely do not feel like I am sacrificing anything as far as salary money wise with this. If you are wanting to make more, you would probably go get a Ph.D. Or, there are more evaluation firms which are based out of the East and West coast. I would say I am comfortable with what I am doing right now.

What has been the biggest impact Bonner has had on your life or work?

Bonner helps you find something you are passionate about at a relatively young age. It helps you focus, and get out in the community and explore a variety of service areas. It helped me think about how I want to help people, and helped me focus myself more. I felt that this preparation gave me a head start in looking at Master's programs.

What do you wish you knew as a recent Bonner graduate preparing for this field?

I wish there was more help in understanding how to take your passion and put it into a career. Additionally, how to continue to involve service in your life after graduation. I felt like everyone knew how to make the connection with non-profit work, or how to easily transition into the non-profit world. But, for more fringe careers that are similarly related but not directly related it would have been nice to have some more guidance.

How would you recommend interested students or individuals get involved in this field?

I would say you would probably want to get a Master's degree. It can be really broad. I know people who do what I do with a background in Public Health or different types of Psychology. There are several people who work with me, and I did not know this was a thing, but they have Master's in medical Anthropology. I do not know if there is a Program Evaluation Masters. Getting involved in some type of research either at your school, social sciences research would be the best way to go, to see if it is something you like. In evaluation, research is done pretty regularly. There is the American Evaluation Association. The Society for Prevention Research also involves some evaluation. Another one is The American Public Health Association. There are different places like that where you could go to look at jobs that are related. They always have job boards. There is not one way to get here. Everyone I know that does this, they all came at a different angle. Always look for opportunities to get some experience.

