

# Lighthouse Mecum House

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## Who is Mecum House?

Mecum House is a homeless shelter that serves children ages 10-17 who are in circumstances that leave them without a place to stay. The residents are typically in crisis situations of abuse or neglect and lack anywhere to return to safely. Each youth presents with a unique story, and Lighthouse works to individually serve each of these residents and aims to find each of them more permanent housing within 21 days. The staff advocates for and supports the youth in hope to equip them with life skills and advice during their time at the shelter and beyond.



## An Intern's Role at Mecum House

Each day at Mecum House presents with its unique opportunities and challenges. Many days are spent talking with the residents and helping the resident advisors with their roles. The residents can have flexibility in their days and the ability to make their own schedules, so the role of the intern fluctuates depending on the needs that particular day at the shelter presents with. Whether it be taking the kids on outings off property, making meals and snacks for them, helping them apply for jobs, or lending a listening ear, there are ample opportunities to connect with and get to know the youth at the shelter. With the perpetual flow of residents in and out of the shelter and uncertainty of residents' lengths of stay, the most conducive role of the intern is to guide youth and listen to them while they are at the shelter.

## Adversity Faced by Youth of Mecum House

The prerequisites to become a resident at Mecum House are extreme and stressful situations resulting in these children being displaced from their homes. Many of the residents struggle with mental illness, have experienced emotional and/or physical trauma, and lack a stable support system in their lives. The majority of Mecum House youth residents are there due to circumstances out of their own control, and the result of this is manifestation of stress that affects all aspects of their lives. Because of their lack of support systems, many of the youth have never been taught how to deal with their stress in productive or healthy ways and may be more susceptible to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Therefore, it is important to equip the youth with the skills to properly deal with their stress so when they face adversity, they know how to manage and overcome stress.

## Project: Stress Education and Management Classes

I recognized the demand for stress management education amongst the youth at Mecum House and decided to implement a once-weekly stress education and reduction class. What these classes entailed was a short presentation at the beginning on what symptoms of stress may feel like and how to realize when you are stressed. Then, the residents got to participate in a 30-minute stress reduction exercise that they can easily implement later when they have overwhelming feelings of stress. The classes rotated through different stress-reduction exercises, which were meditation, painting, cooking, and yoga. The rotation allowed for the youth to learn different ways they can cope with their stress and find out which techniques work best for them. Additionally, the classes had resident-autonomy and gave the youth the option to help lead a class so they could teach others from their own experience.



## Impact of Stress Education and Management Classes

Stress management and coping mechanisms are invaluable skills necessary for navigating any walks of life. The goal of this project was to teach the residents at Mecum House healthier ways to manage their stress because they will likely continue to face adversity in their lives. Although the ideal goal would be to alleviate the environments causing the stress, I recognize that many of the youth will continue to face such hardship in their lives. Therefore, this project was designed to equip them with coping mechanisms that are productive rather than harmful and let the residents discover new activities they enjoyed and that made them feel better.



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