

**Final Report:**  
Placement with The Aninga Project  
Winter 2023

GWST/POLI 4390  
NGOs, Government & Community and Services

I am pursuing a major in Psychology and a double minor in Gender & Women's Studies and Sustainability. When I first encountered this Practicum Placement course, I honestly was a bit hesitant to register because I feared there wouldn't be any placements offered that cater to my degree let alone skill set. However, with the right encouragement from my academic advisor and my realisation that this placement also caters to students in the Program of Gender & Women's studies I got in contact with Dr. Denike. I am grateful I did because this placement opportunity was a great learning experience that was quite different from the standard lecture or seminar style I'm used to. Unlike my peers, my major doesn't offer a co-op experience either, so this placement was the closest experience to that. It was very worthwhile.

### **The Aninga Project**

My placement was with The Aninga Project and my supervisor was Jenny Benson, one of the founders of the project. The Aninga project is a non-profit educational initiative that has a mission of providing funding in order to empower and make education accessible to girls and women in Uganda (now East Africa). The Project has two objectives:

1. To be able to fund the education of girls in African nations by paying for their school fees and other related expenses that promote their well being such as transportation, boarding fees, uniforms, books, water, maize and school supplies.
2. To contribute to the empowerment of African women by providing them with the means to acquire an education that would otherwise be out of reach to them (to societal and cultural norms and/or financial struggles)

### **Aninga's Background and Impact**

Before getting into the details of my involvement and experience with The Aninga Project, I quickly want to highlight some of the amazing efforts and impact Aninga has had in East Africa over the years. I believe this will allow you to gauge how impactful the project has been thus far. Additionally, if you do find yourself interested in being placed with The Aninga Project, having a clear idea of the nature and impact of their efforts so far may inspire you to come up with more innovative ideas to support the project with their initiative locally and on a global scale.

The Aninga Project was founded in Uganda in 2006 and then the partnership of Jenny Benson (my supervisor) grew to become a Canadian based Charity in 2009. Since their work in 2007, Aninga has managed to successfully support 7 women in graduating from school, university and obtaining full-time jobs within their communities. Today the project is officially registered as a Canadian Charity and an East African NGO. Aninga has volunteers and mentors supporting girls, women and their communities in Uganda, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While their mission and objective remain the same,

Aninga is currently working to expand their reach across the African continent, first starting off with other East African nations.

In the next few sections, I will summarise the tasks I was involved in with the Aninga Project during my placement. I would like to state that my involvement and overall engagement with the project significantly declined towards the end of the end of the semesters due to circumstances out of my control. It was very challenging navigating this placement during this time but I am grateful I was able to push through. While I delayed in reaching out for help, Dr. Denike and Jenny did a great job in supporting me as I worked to complete the placement and course successfully.

### **Social Media Posts:**

The first task given to me by my supervisor was to create a social media post calendar for all of Aninga's social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) from January 2023 - January 2024. The task involved me doing research on recognized UN calendar days relevant to Aninga Projects work. The calendar had to include all the identified days for the year, a draft post for each corresponding day as well as a caption to accompany the post. My supervisor gave me the freedom to use any platform to create the posts so I went with Canva. This task in particular allowed me to develop my creativity and editing skills but otherwise it was a fairly doable task.

### **Grant Connect:**

Another task my supervisor gave me early in the placement was to support The Aninga Project in obtaining funds through organisations. Given that Aninga is still recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, my supervisor highlighted that their main priority for the year is to fundraise in order to promote the development of operations in East Africa.

Prior to getting connected with a chosen database, my supervisor gave me a brief rundown on the kinds of funding opportunities already available to Canadian charities. Through her briefing, I learned about the prevalence of databases already existing to fund initiatives. This task introduced me to a method of fundraising I was unaware of. After the briefing (via email), my supervisor shared that the project board approved funding to subscribe to one of the many databases they explored. The project board collectively opted to go with Imagine Canada - Grant Connect database. Now with a chosen database, my supervisor tasked me with 1.) exploring grant connect, and then 2.) identifying and sorting through the organisations that may have been interested in funding The Aninga Project's Initiative. This task in particular was a bit of a tedious one.

The most challenging part of this task was determining whether or not the organisation highlighted would be a good fit for the project. Some organisations had a lot of

information available through grant connect or through their webpage. It was easier to gauge whether or not they suited Aninga because of the information readily available. On the other hand, too many organisations had little to no information about potential fund recipients. In those cases, I sometimes made the decision to include or exclude and continue the search for new funders. Another challenge I faced during this task was finding funders that catered to international initiatives let alone meet Aninga's profile. To narrow my search in order to find organisations interested in funding 'girls education and empowerment in east Africa'. I also searched the database using keywords (i.e., "girls education", "women and girls", "Africa", "community", etc). I also took advantage of Grant Connect's search engine filters. This was a new and at times challenging experience for me, but I gained valuable skills from it; skills I'm sure will come in handy to me in the future.

### **Mental Health Panel Presentation:**

During mental health awareness week at Dalhousie, I took it upon myself to attend and present at Imhotep Learning Academy's Mental Health Panel. When I heard about the event, I thought it would be a great place to start raising awareness about the project at Dalhousie. Prior to this course, I had never heard of Aninga, so my goal was, and continues to be, to share Aninga's efforts and impact with the local community. Given that the attendants of the event were all Dalhousie Students I figured it would be a great way to introduce The Aninga Project to students from various faculties. As someone who greatly struggles with presenting in front of crowds, this was by far the most nerve wracking task I did during my placement. In order to ease my anxiety, I created a very detailed visual presentation and outline and shared my plan with my supervisor beforehand. I received great feedback from my supervisor. I was even provided with a bit more information and a real life example from the Aninga project about how their efforts to empower girls also included a focus on mental health. That additional information provided to me gave me a deeper insight into the holistic impact Aninga has made with their students over the years.

### **Blue Nose Marathon:**

Another project I had the ability to be a part of during the last couple of months of the placement was Aninga's participation in Halifax's BlueNose Marathon. My supervisor included me in some of the planning stages of their involvement and invited me to continue to support them even after the end of the practicum placement. Unfortunately, I did have to take a little step back from my involvement in the project, especially my participation in the running aspect of the marathon. My efforts to fundraise and raise awareness about the initiative will still continue even after the marathon. I now have just under a month to support Aninga and their efforts to raise enough money to meet their goal of \$5000 before the race. All the fundraising ideas I had throughout the placement will be put to good use.

## **Review of my experience :**

Overall, my experience at my placement with The Aninga Project had quite a few ups and downs. Initially, from what was communicated to me, the COVID-19 pandemic slowed their operations in both Canada and Uganda quite a bit so when I was placed with the Project, I was only given two assignments by the supervisor. Impacts of the pandemic aside, it is crucial to note that most of Aninga Project's action happens within East Africa, by the Project mentors, students and communities they work in. As previously mentioned, their Halifax operations are primarily charity based. So on a local scale (local being Halifax, CA), the "action" comes from fundraising and awareness raising. That said, other than the social media posts assignment, the supervisor didn't do a great job at involving me in the Projects activities during the course of the placement. I often had to ask for something to do (wasn't usually given something) or create something of my own to do in relation to the project of course.

Additionally, because of my prior background experience supporting charities and leading fundraising initiatives, my supervisor thought it would be more fitting that I take the initiative and develop as well as follow through with my own project(s) to meet the course requirements and experience the project. This sounded like a great idea at first, but I soon started to feel as though it absolved my supervisor from the responsibility of having to be an active supervisor. I completely understand that they were busy working and caring for their family however the lack of direction and communication was not the greatest experience, especially when I learned that a lot of my peers were able to have such hands-on, in person experience with their placement. Other than my 4 virtual meeting calls and sporadic email correspondence, I didn't get to experience that in person component with my supervisor. The two mandatory meetings with our peers were beneficial to me. We had one virtual and one in-person meeting. Being able to share my experience and hear my peers' experiences in a group setting was an essential element to my experience.

Lastly, the 11 hours of work per week requirement for this placement course was quite hard to achieve with this placement. Due to the lack of tasks given and challenges in regularly communicating with my supervisors. I found myself having to find various ways to meet that requirement because it didn't seem achievable given my circumstances. When it came to the social media posts, I slowed down my pace while working on them. I also found myself doing a lot of research on the project's future impacts and fundraising opportunities to ensure I was spending a good amount of time working with the Project.

## **Conclusion:**

To any prospective students interested in choosing The Aninga Project as their placement, I would highly recommend checking out The Aninga Project's official website (see link below). There is a lot of great information about the project's journey, current

goals as well as the previous impact they've had on women and girl's lives in East Africa. While I wasn't really involved in Aninga's efforts to support general communities within East Africa , you will soon find through an exploration of their website that the project does a whole lot more than support women and girl's. If you're someone who is great at taking their own initiative and works well independently then this placement may be a choice for you.

To finish, I would like to express my genuine gratitude to my practicum placement coordinator, Dr. Denike. I believe my overall experience at this placement wouldn't have been as positive if it weren't for your support during the course and afterwards. Thank you for your endless efforts to make this practicum experience great for myself and my peers alike, and thank you for supporting us in communicating and advocating for ourselves to our supervisors whenever necessary.

**Aninga Project Website:** <https://www.aningaproject.ca/>