

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)

By Jayme Pinkham

I am currently in my fourth year, working towards completing a bachelor of arts and social sciences degree with a double major in International Development and Gender and Women's Studies, with a minor in Law and Society. This past semester I enrolled in POLI/GWST 4390: Practicum Placement in Public Policy: NGO's and Government Services. For my practicum placement, I worked at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). This organization functions out of Ottawa with outsourced branches in British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia office of CCPA "raise[s] debate and propose[s] policy alternatives that will get [them] closer to achieving a more economically and socially just – as well as environmentally sustainable – province and Atlantic region" (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives). CCPA Nova Scotia consists of one person, Christine Saulnier, and there is no office, or building for the organization, but instead the work is not remotely from either home or from various events throughout Halifax. With my time at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, I did not have one main project, but instead consisted of many events, and small projects. My work at CCPA consisted of attending a BRAG meeting, the stakeholders 2017-2018 budget lock-up, a webinar on parental benefits in Quebec, a draft program for Consultation on Socially Responsible Trade, listening into a CCPA Steering Committee meeting, helped in the organization of a poverty advocacy group meeting, helped with various administrative duties, and finally, provided research on participatory budgeting in Brazil.

As mentioned above, I attended various meetings and events as I shadowed Christine for the first half of my practicum placement. The first meeting that I attended was a BRAG meeting. BRAG stands for Benefits Reform Action Group and “is a coalition of community organizations and individuals. People on income assistance and their allies are gathering to form demands of the government around progressive income assistance reform” (Benefits Reform Action Group). Studying International Development, I found this meeting really interesting as it provided me with a different perspective than what I have previously gained in class. It opened my eyes to the poverty that exists right outside my front door and within the community in which I live, compared to poverty within global south countries. Issues such as the need for bus passes and cell phone to be included into income assistance plans was an aspect that I would have never thought necessary prior to attending this meeting.

The second meeting I attended was the Stakeholders 2017-2018 budget lock-up. Essentially what it was, was the provincial government getting together with numerous different organizations and reading the new provincial budget. After, there were government officials present that were made available to answer any questions that said organizations had. Although I was completely lost in this meeting as I went into it with very little knowledge surrounding budgets, it was cool to see the type of things that these organizations attend, and how and in what areas the government and other actors work together.

A week after the budget lock-up, I virtually attended a webinar about parental benefits. It was held in Quebec and I called into it. This webinar was geared towards parental leave in Quebec, and more specifically the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan, from an economic

standpoint. This plan differs greatly from what is seen in other provinces and territories in Canada. It was very interesting to look into the economic implications of QPIP, especially the trends that people in different percentiles between the genders take between the special and basic plans. Listening into this webinar gave me a different perspective on parental leave in a more practical sense compared to the theoretics behind it that tends to be looked at in class.

I listened into another meeting, virtually, shortly after, as I called into a Steering Committee meeting for CCPA. It was held in Ottawa, and consisted of all of the employees of CCPA from all over Canada. In this meeting, everyone talked about the work that they have been working on this past year and where they would like to take it. It was interesting to see all of the different actors and varying areas of study that go into one organization.

The final event that I attended was a Draft Program for Consultation on Socially Responsible Trade. This event was held at Dalhousie and consisted of a number of professors from varying universities in Nova Scotia and Quebec, as well as a few organizations. It was formatted as a lecture with round table discussion throughout. This was by far my favorite part of my practicum placement. There were only about 10-15 attendees, which allowed me to be able to talk to different people from various academic and professional disciplines on a subject that I was interested in and was able to actually discuss.

While I was at the Stakeholders budget lock-up, I met a lady by the name of Stella Lord, and agreed to help with the organization of a poverty advocacy group meeting that she was planning. This event was held at Bethany's Church in Halifax with first voice advocates,

organizations and social workers that were brainstorming on practical ways to reduce the effects of poverty in Halifax. On the day of the meeting, I was in charge of signing everyone in and scribing the final ideas. This meeting involved a lot of members of the BRAG group which was nice as I was able to create further relationships with community members. It brought together people from different areas, and backgrounds together to brainstorm on solutions.

Nearing the end of my practicum placement, I did a bit of administrative work for Christine. The first thing was for the CCPA gala. Every year, CCPA holds a gala fundraiser where they host a diner and have a guest speaker. This event raises a large amount of funds for the organization every year, which they rely on. I unfortunately was not able to attend the gala as I had to work, but I did help with some of the administrative organizational work. As organizations were confirming that they would be attending, I compiled their tables into an excel spreadsheet in order to see which tables still needed people to fill the spots. Following the gala, I did a bit more administrative work for Christine. CCPA hosted an essay contest for both undergraduates and graduate students to submit their research projects. As the essays were coming in, I manipulated them in order to get rid of any identifying information that may have been in the files, and organized them into folders to be sent to the judges to be unbiasedly judged. Furthermore, I compiled email lists for Christine. During this administrative work, I worked a lot with Microsoft excel, which coincidentally lined up with one of my classes where we were learning how to use excel. Playing around with this program in making the lists for Christine helped when it came around to one of my assignments a few weeks later.

The final project that I worked on while at CCPA was a research project. CCPA – Nova Scotia is partnering up with the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers in order to create a practical framework for alternative budgeting for Halifax. My job was to take an angle of this form of budgeting and look into it. I decided to go straight to the roots and look into participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, where alternative budgeting was first put into place in 1989. In Porto Alegre, the community pushed for a budgeting system where they would get a say in where a portion of the funds would go. In order to do this, the mayor was given a portion of the budget to set aside for the community. Various groups were made of just the average joe's in said community and together with the government, they were able to allocate said funds to the areas that they deemed the most needed. Prior to this placement, I had no knowledge that there was such a thing as alternative budgeting methods. I naively thought that every country loosely held the same framework of budgeting as Canada does. Looking into this project, I had initially looked into other places that have implemented differing forms of alternative budgets and to different degrees. In this, I learned of an element of participatory budgeting that is alive in Ontario (where I am from). It is a subtle version where you can go on the Ontario website and submit your idea/wants/needs for funds being allocated to certain areas and/or projects. This research allowed me to gain information into a subject that I never would come across in my studies, but that is intertwined right here at home.

In conclusion, doing my practicum placement semester with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives opened my eyes to different areas of study. It very much helped me, but not in the typical sense of the word. It helped me figure out that this is not an area that I am interested in and not something that I would want to pursue. One of my majors is in International

Development, and prior to my practicum, I had thought heavily about continuing my studies in IDS in order to someday work for an NGO. Through this placement, I was able to not only see what Christine does, but also different organizations, and personally found that it did not appeal to me. With that said though, I still did come out of practicum with having had an amazing experience and having learned a lot of different things that will help me as I continue with my studies. Doing a practicum at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, you can get a lot out of it. Christine is very flexible to work with and really tries to gear your time with her towards things that interest you in order for you to be able to take something away from it. She introduced me to a lot of amazing people in the Halifax community, and really had my best interest at heart. Overall, I had a great semester with this organization and would highly recommend it to incoming students.

References:

Benefits Reform Action Group. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2017, from <https://www.facebook.com/BRAGNS/>

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (n.d.) Retrieved December 1, 2017, from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/>