

The Aninga Project

By Matthew Paisley

Introduction

From what I heard from other members of this class when we held our wrap up class and subsequent symposium, my practicum experience was different.

I volunteered with a local not for profit organization called *The Aninga Project*, which fundraisers in Halifax so that it can send underprivileged girls in Uganda to school. Studies have shown that when women are educated, countries profit culturally, and economically. In fact, the United Nations has said that one of the most effective ways that developing countries can achieve the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) is to educate women and bring them into the workforce in larger numbers. The organization was started in 2009 out of a friendship between a Ugandan man and Dal grad, and founder Jenny Benson.

I first got in contact with Jenny at the beginning of the summer--- some time in May. I introduced myself and told her how excited I was to get the opportunity to work with her organization. I didn't know anything about the organization other than what I saw on the website, which wasn't a lot and seemed outdated. I got the jist of what the organization's mandate was and learned about a couple of the fundraising campaigns they run each year. When I heard back from Jenny she said that this placement would be a largely independent placement as the organization is her side project and didn't have an office space. I said this was fine and that I would be happy to work on whatever she needed from me. The next time we met was during the first week of classes. We met in the Starbucks on Spring Garden to iron out more details of what I would actually be doing and get to know each other a little bit. I was a little disheartened when I left however as it did not seem that she had any real work for me to do. Since we hadn't met as a class yet I figured I would wait until I had a more concrete idea of what would be expected of me during my time at my placement to make suggestions to Jenny on what sort of project I might be able to do for her.

During the course of my placement I was given three large projects: Creating a social media calendar complete with suggested posts, running the Aninga Project's "Giving Tuesday Campaign", and a report on Kenya that could help support their desired expansion. Since there was no office and I spent between 0-5 days a week working on the projects I will focus this report around the 3 projects and what my experience was with them as opposed to a week-to- week journal.

Overall, I had a mixed experience with the Aninga Project. I received little to no guidance from my supervisor, and had very little contact with her over the course of my placement. I was taking six other courses during my placement and do not feel like I

learned much about the not for profit sector or gained transferable skills which can be applied to the real world once I finish school. Where I do feel that I benefitted was that I learned more about how and when I'm most effective at working, as well as an important lesson about overloading my schedule and the diminishing returns doing so provides.

Social Media Calendar

The first project I was asked to do for Jenny was to create a social media calendar for the Aninga Project. As fundraising provides the bulk of the the Aninga Project's income social media is an important tool they use to increase their visibility and connect with the community. As such, it is important to post regularly and on special days which relate to their cause-- such as international women's day on March 8th. The instructions I was given were to search the UN calendar for relevant days and suggest posts for both instagram and twitter. Although I'm a young individual, social media is not one of my strong suits-- I suppose in this way I'm an anomaly. However, I went about searching the UN's calendar and collected 23 key dates that related to the Aninga Project's mandate explicitly or more broadly and crafted posts including pictures for each day. Since 23 posts in a year is nowhere near enough to make a meaningful impact on social media I also included general posts with a suggested rate of one post a week. During this project I encountered three large challenges.

The first problem I encountered was that I hadn't worked for the Aninga Project. I had met Jenny once and had only limited contact with her at this point in my placement and really did not have a sense of the sentiment and message that the Aninga Project was trying to project. To overcome this, I added my own personal flair to the posts and came up with a general formula: Thank you to "X people supporting Y issue", "Y issue is important because...", "#NameofDayBeingCelebrated", "#GeneralHashtagAboutWomensRightsandEducation". I also sometimes included quotes by famous advocates of whatever day was being celebrated. So for example, my suggested post for World Teachers Day on October 5th was: "Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world." – Malala Yousafzai. Happy #WorldTeachersDay! An example of my general formula was for the World Day against Child Labour: "Today is the World Day Against Child Labour. We believe that every child deserves an education and later, opportunities for decent work. Child Labour is harmful and demeaning. Supporting our cause is helping to educate women and give them dignified work opportunities. Let's work together to #EndChildLabour in Uganda. goo.gl/i2Lz1M". The formula varied slightly by post to post and depended on whether it was catered towards instagram or twitter. The second problem I encountered was that I needed pictures for instagram posts and I didn't want

to use pictures I took from google or other companies' websites because I wasn't sure what the copyright laws were surrounding the use of pictures found online. I tried to look up the laws but couldn't get a definitive answer so I decided to remain cautious and didn't include pictures that weren't explicitly for the purpose of being shared. Furthermore, there was a small selection of pictures on the Aninga Project's website and so I used those when appropriate. The third was coming up with additional, general posts. I figured that the Aninga Project would be making posts throughout the year as new campaigns arise and in response to events in the news but Jenny also wanted a weekly post that could be used in addition to these posts that would happen naturally. I found that it became difficult to imagine and create a diversity of posts. To overcome this I included days which most companies and organizations post on anyways such as Mother's day or Christmas as well as days which cater to the specific goals of the Aninga Project such as the first day of school. After these days had been exhausted I moved on to quotes by prominent women on the benefit of women's education, such as Michelle Obama, or Emma Watson who is a UN goodwill ambassador for Women. Additionally, I crafted posts that reinforced what the Aninga Project does and *why* it does it.

Overall, I spent roughly 35 hours on this project over the course of a month. Most of the time was spent searching for relevant days and learning a little bit about each day I was posting about and researching social media strategies online. I did find the research I did on social media strategies was helpful as it gave me a foundation to build from. Furthermore, it is something I can use going forward. The rest of the time was spent crafting the actual posts. This was not a short process either as posts were first created, then refined, and pictures for each instagram posts found. I submitted this assignment on November 3rd.

Giving Tuesday Campaign

A project that I was working on beginning in September and ending at the end of november was the Aninga Project's Giving Tuesday campaign and activation. This consisted of calling into planning conference calls with other charitable organizations participating in Giving Tuesday through NS Gives and then participating in the actual activation on Giving Tuesday. There isn't much to say about this project as the Aninga Project hasn't run its own activations in the past since it's a small organization. I listened in to the 4 conference calls and took notes so that I could report to Jenny. The actual activation took place on November 28th and lasted three hours during which I was in downtown Halifax handing out giftcards from CanadaHelps.org which gave people \$3 to give to any charity participating in Giving Tuesday. The thought behind the activation was that if people went to the website with a 'free donation' that they would be

encouraged to give more. This activation was great to be a part of as I felt like I was actually contributing to the organization by helping to raise funds, even if it was indirectly.

Report on Women's Education in Kenya

This was the report that I completed and sent in on December 22nd. I recommended that I do a report on the state of women's education in Uganda as well as the political situation since I had not been given any assignment since Giving Tuesday and felt I had not been given enough to contribute to. Jenny said that it would be helpful if I wrote a report on the political situation in Kenya since the Aninga project was hoping to expand there in the near future, though no real specifics were given and I was left to determine the outline of the report and its scope on my own. I ended up writing a report that included a profile of the country, a section on the barriers women face to getting an education in Kenya, and a section which addressed some key legislation regarding NGOs operating in the country and some suggestions for best practices. The report ended up being 20 pages--- 31 pages including appendices, title page, and works cited-- and 7,000 words excluding footnotes, appendices, and titles. I started researching the report as soon as I confirmed with Jenny that she did think the report would be helpful which was on November 21st and I suggested that the report could be finished December 10th. This gave me two weeks and 5 days to complete the report. Over that period I spent every other day working on the report for approximately 3 hours a session over the first nine days and longer 5 or 6 hour sessions during the last 8 days. On the 18th day, December the 9th I discovered my computer had crashed after I left an exam. I was unable to bring my computer into the Dalhousie IT services as the repair desk was closed for the weekend and the Apple Store did not have any appointments available until the following Tuesday. My report, which was just missing a conclusion and a bibliography at this point, could not be retrieved since it was not saved to the cloud or written online using google docs. As such, I had to re-write the entire report. Thankfully, I did have some of my notes handwritten so I didn't have to take entirely new notes and find all of my sources again. I started writing the report again on the 9th and sent Jenny what I had been able to re-write at approximately noon on the 10th though it was only the beginnings of the report. I spent the rest of the 10th in the library and flew out the following day. Once I returned to Toronto I took my laptop to the app store for my appointment. Upon assessment I was told that there was a problem with my harddrive had failed and I'd wouldn't be able to use my laptop and couldn't recover the data saved on it. As such I continued to work on the report consistently until it was finally submitted in full to Jenny and you on December 22nd. The report was extensively

researched and I hope it will be of use to the Aninga Project in some capacity as they look forward to expanding their operations to Kenya.

Issues and Final Thoughts

I understand that Jenny expressed to you that she was concerned about my placement. I did miss my initial deadline for the social media edits, and was supposed to meet up with her to pick up some Aninga branded wristbands before the Giving Tuesday activation. I was unable to meet up with her at the allotted time and did not get in contact with her before our scheduled meeting time to let her know that I would not be able to make our meeting due to a conflict which arose. I got in contact with her later that day in response to an email she sent me asking what had happened. Jenny was very patient with me when I missed the deadline for the social media calendar, however her patience understandably wore thin when I missed our meeting. She is a very busy woman who works a day job aside from the Aninga Project and was willing to meet me during her lunch break to give me the branded wristbands for the activation I was participating in. I understand that it was completely disrespectful and unprofessional to not have gotten in contact with her before the meeting to let her know I was unable to make it.

This past semester has been difficult for me both academically as I was taking six additional courses to the practicum and I struggled to keep up with all my commitments and obligations. As a consequence, I was forced to pull a lot of all nighters and experienced burnout early in the semester and which lasted the majority of it. I learned that there is a limit to what I can put on my plate and that at a certain point I not only will not be able to perform well at all of the tasks but also that I risk not living up to my obligations and even detracting from my personal well being because of it. I have always taken pride in working hard and not only following through on all of my responsibilities but also going above and beyond. This semester has really been a wake up call for me and I have learned that at a certain point there is a limit to what I can take on, and that I have a responsibility to only take on what I can handle so that I avoid not living up to my responsibilities. I have also learned that that I work better when in a physical work environment and if I had to go back and choose a placement again, I would have picked somewhere that had a physical office that I could go to every week. In the future, if Dalhousie is to partner with the Aninga Project again I think it would be beneficial to mention that it was a correspondence placement and not on site. Furthermore, if the Aninga Project does not have an actual idea of what they want to get out of a student placement then they should not be partnered with again. The social media calendar was the only project I was assigned by the Aninga Project. The

conference calls were a simple administrative task and I suggested the report to the Aninga Project.

However, I would like to thank you Professor Denike for organizing the practicum course and putting in the effort to find partner organizations. I think that the program as a whole is beneficial to political science students and helps students gain practical experience that they can apply to the real world, under the right circumstances.