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Abstracts

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## Developing Intercultural Relationships During Remote Internships

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AWC 2020 Abstract Submission

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WHE and Mikono Yetu

QingXiao Cui, Rebecca Jackson, and Jade Rozal

### Developing Intercultural Relationships during Remote Internships

During the summer of 2020, we completed a remote internship with Western Heads East. The main goal of this internship was to develop a website for the Tanzanian non-governmental organization Mikono Yetu. Although this internship did not explicitly require individual research, processes of reflective learning and analysis enabled us to gather an abundance of preliminary insight that could be useful for research regarding the development of relationships with community partners during remote opportunities.

We undertook this remote internship during the COVID-19 pandemic and the documentation of our experiences allowed us to collect preliminary information about remote work and the potential challenges it brings. Working remotely on an international project initially made it difficult to fully grasp the importance of our tasks. At times, it was challenging to immerse ourselves into the project since we felt distanced from whom, and what, we were creating the website for. We realized it was crucial to find a way to connect to the community we were working alongside despite not being able to do so in person. We learned to connect in different ways, primarily through educating ourselves about the Mikono Yetu organization and understanding their goals in detail, as well as through establishing relationships with our community partners.

Establishing relationships was another significant area of the internship for the purpose of connecting with others virtually while simultaneously improving our intercultural communication skills. Across cultures, the ways in which people express themselves or the lens through which they view the world often vary and acknowledging this was crucial to our ability

to succeed in creating connections. If the internship had been in person, we likely would have acknowledged cultural shifts subconsciously, or less actively, as we would have been directly confronted by them; however, the remote aspect made it necessary for us to actively challenge our own worldviews and ensured that we acknowledged how our privilege can result in biases. Self-reflexivity is crucial, and in this case played a significant role in allowing us to embrace and value diverse perspectives and experiences.

Additionally, we learned that while research itself is crucial, the translation of knowledge to accessible formats is also important as it allows for research findings to be disseminated and studied on a larger scale. We hope that the website we designed will contribute to East African communities by providing advances in research in various fields, specifically for health, wellbeing, and social equality, on a publicly accessible scale.