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Experiential Learning Final Report: Western Heads East x Mikono Yetu and CRHESI

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CEL Final Report

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Experiential Learning Final Report:

Western Heads East x Mikono Yetu and CRHESI

For my SASAH Experiential Learning credit, I completed two placements during my final year of university. For my first placement, I completed a remote internship with Western Heads East over the summer of 2020. I worked alongside two of my peers to develop a website for the East African, non-governmental organization (NGO) “Mikono Yetu.” My second placement with the Center for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion (CRHESI) took place during the fall term of my final year at university. The main goal of this placement was to create a dispersible infographic that supplied information to healthcare providers about how they can help migrant agricultural workers access safer healthcare. Both placements offered me the opportunity to refine skills I had previously established while working towards my arts-and-humanities degree, as well as to develop new skills. They also provided me with experience in different professional work settings and have impacted my next steps as I look past graduation to the future.

To begin, I will discuss my internship with Western Heads East. The overarching goal of this internship was to design an accessible website for the Mikono Yetu organization which appropriately showcased their programs and the positive work they do to promote female empowerment and economic independence. To do this, we had to meet various secondary goals as well: firstly, my peers and I had to collaborate with our community partners (Maimuna and

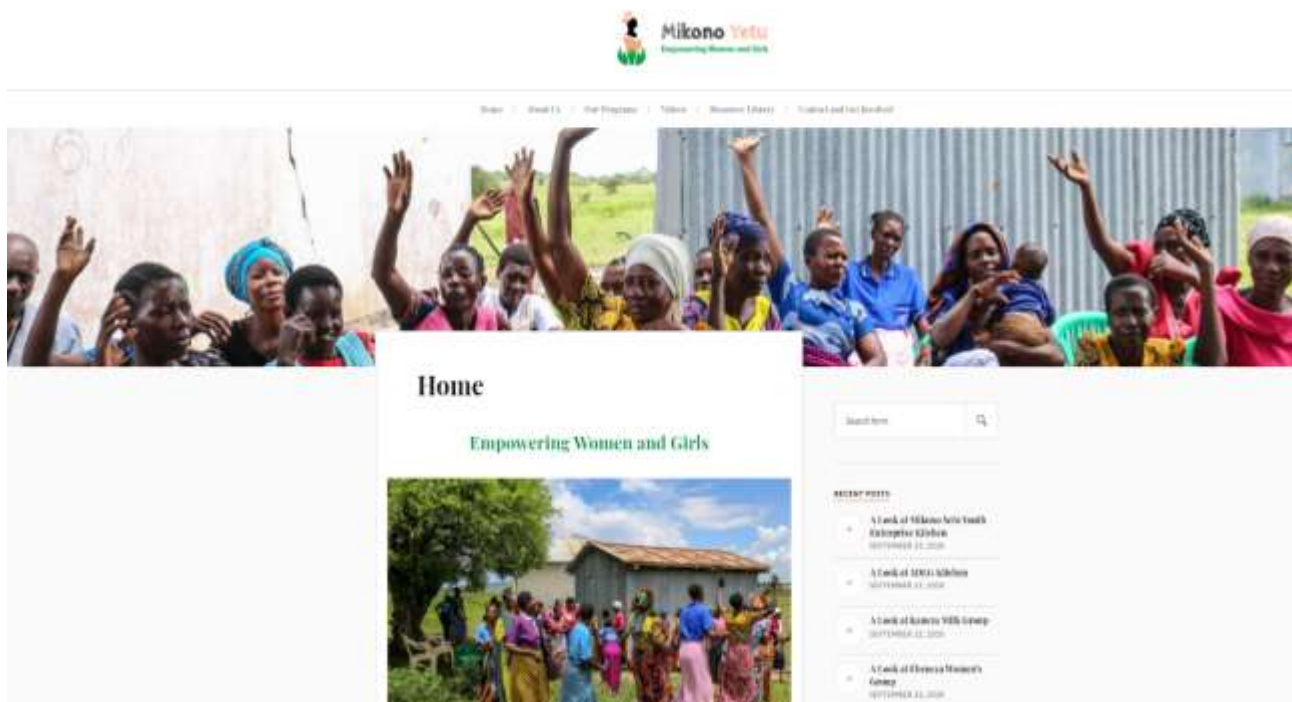
Paul) to learn about the organization and to understand their vision for the website. It was important to establish that relationship early on, so we could have open channels of communication through which we could consistently assess their needs as we presented various drafts of the site.

Another goal we had was to edit the textual content of the old website for grammar and consistency. The fact that we were not only creating the website platform but also reading extensively about their goals and programs resulted in us developing an even deeper understanding of the work they do and how the organization has grown over the years. This experience provided me with many opportunities for personal growth and the chance to further my education in a more professional setting. This allowed me to see how my degree has set me up for success, in terms of the numerous doors it may open in the future. Some of the skills I developed included technological, communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and teamwork skills.

I had already begun to develop my technological skills through previous SASAH courses, but this internship gave me a chance to expand upon them significantly. To design the website, I knew I had to be confident using WordPress and other platforms such as Adobe XD, and while I had a basic understanding of these applications, the project quickly revealed a need to supplement that knowledge. Through the various edits, drafts, and group sessions with my partners, these skills were refined as I explored new tools that I had not used before and became aware of the areas in which I needed to improve. This was my first opportunity to use my technological knowledge outside of a classroom setting; it was a steep learning curve as well as an important learning experience. I could not allow my limited technological background to hinder the final product, so I had to fill in any gaps I encountered and learn on the spot. Although

there were obstacles that we had to overcome, through additional website design education, we persevered and were able to develop a cohesive and visually aesthetic website:

Image from the Home Page of the Completed Website



Link to the full website: <https://www.mikonoyetu.co.tz/>

The website design education and my enhanced technological skills have already proven to be extremely useful, as they have helped me gain employment: I designed a website for “Consolidated International Inc.,” a new shipping-insurance company in Piraeus, Greece, over the course of the winter semester. The experience I had with Western Heads East had allowed me to practice my design skills so that I could do everything the company asked for which boosted my confidence even more. They recently asked me to design a second website for a sister company which I will be working on over the summer.

Arguably the most important development opportunity this internship provided me with was the chance to enhance all facets of my communication skills. Working with my group

members, Jade Rozal and QingXiao Cui, the Western Heads East Internship team, and our East African community partners meant that there were numerous “moving parts.” Therefore, clear communication was crucial for the successful dissemination of information across the various channels. Additionally, the group aspect of the project presented challenges of its own: I enjoy working in groups and have had previous experience of group projects in SASAH, but it was difficult to split up the tasks in this case because we were all working towards the development of one final website. We were ultimately successful in dividing the workload between us; however, clearer project planning from the outset would have saved us a lot of time and made our work timeline more effective.

Our project with Western Heads East was just one part of their larger internship program, which was led by Robert Gough, Stephanie Huff, and Maria Rodriguez. One of our responsibilities was to share our progress with our supervisors and the other interns at weekly meetings. This was a great opportunity to further our communications skills, as well as a chance to experience working in a professional environment in which we had to report back to our superiors and were part of a larger organization. Our supervisors were always prepared to answer any of our questions and provide direction if we needed it, but they also allowed us to explore our own ideas and to experiment freely with creative expression in how we presented the website. Their trust in our ability to manage the project helped me gain a lot of confidence and made me feel more certain when it came to decision-making.

My communications skills were most significantly developed through my working relationship with our East African community partners, Maimuna and Paul. My group members and I realized from the outset that it was important for us to establish strong connections with them so that we could amplify their voices and their organization, as opposed to highlighting

what we felt was important. This organization is directly related to their experiences, and as such, I made sure not to allow my own biases to affect my decisions but follow their lead and focus on what they prioritized. This was initially challenging as I had to take the time to actively acknowledge and challenge the westernized perspective that I bring with me as a result of my experiences, and it became clear that concise communication was a crucial step for us to take to make sure the website reflected their values and perspectives.

Although there were no explicit language barriers, since our partners spoke perfect English, I was very mindful of the fact that we were communicating interculturally, and the ways different cultures express themselves can vary. Relatively early on, we suggested that we add a “Donate” button to the pages on the website, and our community partners explained to us that they would prefer we used other wording and labeled the button, “Get Involved.” This label ensured that people knew they could contribute to the project in ways other than through monetary donations, which was important to the organization as it aligns with its inclusive values. This alerted me to the necessity of communicating my ideas as opposed to simply assuming that my community partners would understand vague statements and be on the same page.

Acknowledging cultural differences also reminded me of the fact that, while North American life is fast-paced and technology is immediately available, that is not always the case abroad. Therefore, clarity of communication also resulted in increased time efficiency because we were able to discuss any ideas or issues directly and could avoid sending numerous follow-up emails with extra information. Through clear communication and active listening, we were able to develop a site that reflected their vision. The ability to simultaneously connect with members of my community here at Western, whilst also connecting with our community partners,

Maimuna and Paul, was very powerful because it showed me how I can impact different communities and learn from others.

Finally, I strengthened my adaptability and critical-thinking skills as we had to navigate numerous technological issues when it came to the domain and hosting platform. Originally, we were going to redesign the old website. Therefore, our notes focused on making changes as opposed to creating something from scratch; however, a few weeks in, the old domain became inaccessible. While the new hosting platform was being set up, we had to entirely re-evaluate our approach and see how our notes on the old website could be used to create the new site. Learning how to change our plan quickly, rather than let the setback negatively affect us, was an important part of this internship, and the ability I gained to adapt and critically evaluate the situation are undeniably important skills I will use in the future.

Participating in this placement as a student allowed me to focus on the skills I have developed over the years in SASAH. Having already done projects, courses, and assignments, I felt prepared for the internship even when obstacles did arise because I had been equipped with the necessary skills to overcome them. Despite having been set up to succeed through my experiences with the SASAH program, I still learnt a lot of new things, especially how to translate skills developed in the classroom into a professional capacity. I was pleasantly surprised by how prepared I felt to take on this internship, and it helped me gain a lot of confidence in myself and my abilities. As someone who went to an international school from fifth grade until graduation, after which I became an international student at Western, I have always been interested in connecting with other communities and cultures. Until this internship, I had not realised that I had been subconsciously building my intercultural-communication skills. This

understanding was a critical moment in my desire to work in the communications and culture industry in the future.

My second experiential-learning placement was with the Centre for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion (CRHESI). The goal of my project was to create an infographic based on Susana Caxaj and Katrina Plamondon's article "Nurses' Role in Improving Health Care Access for Migrant Agricultural Workers." The infographic outlines the various barriers Migrant Agricultural workers currently encounter to accessing healthcare, specifically those pertaining to healthcare coverage, translation options, disclosure of workplace injuries, and breaches of confidentiality. The infographic raises awareness about all these problems and suggests non-disruptive and plausible solutions.

Once again, this placement was an excellent way to further my academic development, and it naturally followed my SASAH education, providing me with the opportunity to explore future options. I was able to refine skills I had already established, as well as develop entirely new ones. The skills I got the chance to refine were my research, critical-analysis, and communication skills. I found these skills to be very important during the initial stages of the project because it was centred in the health-sciences sector and I was unfamiliar with the content matter. Using my research and critical-analysis skills, I was able to familiarize myself with CRHESI, their research, and their partner groups, such as the "Migrant Worker Health Project Expert Working Group." Past projects I have done in SASAH have required me to research topics across disciplines, which facilitated this research as I had learnt how to sort through large bodies of text, extracting the relevant information to effectively understand and educate myself on new concepts.

This placement also allowed me to challenge and develop my communication skills in ways that were different from the previous internship. One opportunity to enhance my communication skills arose through the fact that the infographic was a communication piece itself, and I had to learn how to most effectively communicate the information to elicit the desired response of viewer engagement. I had to focus much more on language than I usually would have, as we wanted the infographic to provide succinct information without losing too much detail. Phrasing most of the issues as questions with the solutions as the responses was a very active choice: we wanted to encourage viewers to read on because they were curious about the answers, as opposed to pushing the information onto them in a manner that could be perceived as accusatory.

Visual communication through the graphic design was also an entirely new experience for me. I had never created a stand-alone visual piece before, as I usually have a presentation or an abstract to supplement and explain my work. It was a trial-and-error process, and I initially struggled: my first approach was to emphasize the wording through a minimalistic design; however, the overly simple layout lacked the eye-catching features necessary for this type of poster. I concluded that more intricate colours and designs would not take away from the content but would supplement it by allowing for the images to stick in viewers' minds. I do not claim to be a visual artist, but this project allowed me to re-envision graphic design as an element of communication, and that shift in understanding allowed me to make a final product that achieved its goal of being visually inviting and has the potential to impact a wide audience.

First Draft vs. Final Draft

How can I Provide Culturally Safe Access and Care For Migrant Agricultural Workers (MAW)?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY MAW?

- MAW may have unique health care coverage issues
- There may be hidden costs (eg lab work) even if direct billing to MAW's private insurance is provided
- They may not have a direct way to come back to the clinic for a follow up

WHY IS TRANSLATION CRUCIAL?

- English may not be the MAW first language
- The worker may be uncomfortable with their supervisor being their translator because
- Medical repatriation is a real possibility for MAW
- If they report health issues they may lose work hours, be bullied, or face other punitive actions

WHY CAN MAW BE AFRAID TO TALK?

- Their boss may be present
- They may fear of reprimand or punishment
- They may be wary of disclosing workplace injuries
- They may not know the importance of reporting workplace injuries

WHY IS PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY TRICKY?

- Violations of privacy can occur
- Clinicians may disclose medical information to their supervisors
- Others may unwittingly disclose medical information to a worker's boss

© 2019 Access and Equity Network. "Access and Equity Network: How to Provide Culturally Safe Access to Migrant Agricultural Workers" (Canadian Health Services Council) <https://www.accessandequity.ca/2019/04/01/how-to-provide-culturally-safe-access-to-migrant-agricultural-workers/>

SAFE HEALTHCARE FOR MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL WORKERS (MAW)

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY MAW?

- They may have unique health care coverage issues:
 - Even if direct billing to their private insurance is provided there may be hidden costs (eg lab work)
 - They may not have a direct way to come back for a follow up

WHY IS PROVIDING TRANSLATION CRUCIAL?

- English may not be their first language
- The worker may be uncomfortable with their supervisor being their translator because:
 - Medical repatriation is a real possibility
 - Reporting health issues may result in lost work and/or punitive actions

A MAW MAY BE AFRAID TO TALK BECAUSE:

- Their boss may be present
- They may fear of reprimand or punishment
- They may not know the importance of reporting workplace injuries

WHAT MAKES CONFIDENTIALITY TRICKY?

- Clinicians may inadvertently disclose information to a workers supervisor
- previous relationships may make the assume worker's employer has best interest in mind

© 2019 Access and Equity Network. "Access and Equity Network: How to Provide Culturally Safe Access to Migrant Agricultural Workers" (Canadian Health Services Council) <https://www.accessandequity.ca/2019/04/01/how-to-provide-culturally-safe-access-to-migrant-agricultural-workers/>

Communication was also very important in terms of explaining my ideas and discussing my queries with my supervisor, Professor James Shelley. As I have mentioned, my Western Heads East internship had already taught me the importance of concisely articulating myself, and this was equally important during this project. When I was developing the various drafts and deciding how I wanted to express the information on the infographic, there was a lot of back and forth between Professor Shelley and I, so it was important that I was communicating clearly to avoid making the process any more confusing. This regular communication allowed for us to establish a very good working relationship. Professor Shelley gave me a lot of creative freedom and let me work very much at my own pace which I really appreciated because it taught me to set deadlines and hold myself accountable. Learning to work under different styles of supervision was a great experience through these placements as it made me feel more prepared for real-world

working situations and confident that I can work under any type of leadership, whether that means meeting set goals or establishing my own timeline. It has also helped me to understand what kind of environment I would prefer to work in.

Moreover, the fact that this project was based in the health-sciences faculty meant that I got to work with individuals I may not have been involved with in my regular academic career. Other than Professor Shelley, I also got to meet Katrina Plamondon, who co-wrote the article the project was based on, and she shared her opinions and thoughts on how I could improve the visual presentation and textual content of the infographic. This provided me with a lot of direction, and it was great to make those cross-disciplinary connections and see how various fields of study may intersect. Additionally, although these were not direct connections, I hope to have positively impacted migrant agricultural workers and the wider healthcare community through the infographic's potential to spread information and encourage large-scale change. I think that being involved in a community-engaged-learning placement is an excellent opportunity to give back and to explore how our actions can positively impact the wider community in ways we may not have expected.

As I have already touched upon, SASAH was crucial to my ability to successfully complete this placement. The various research, analysis, communication, and literary skills I have developed in SASAH allowed me to understand the project and effectively express the information included in the infographic. SASAH also offered me a great advantage when it came to approaching elements of the infographic that I was less sure about, such as the graphic-design portion. Since the program is interdisciplinary, over the past four years I have done various courses that required me to challenge myself and step outside my comfort zone: For example, in second year, we created our Museum for Future Fossils exhibition, where I created my first

visual-arts piece. Therefore, although I was unfamiliar with graphic design, my experiences in SASAH have shown me that I am capable of achieving daunting tasks when I set my mind to them, so I had the confidence to take on this placement, knowing I could overcome these difficulties.

This placement pushed me to work on a project that I would not have necessarily applied for prior to SASAH. I have never considered myself a visual artist nor do I have much experience in graphic design, and the fact this placement was in health sciences made it even more distant. However, through this project, I was pushed to develop my communication and analysis skills. It opened my eyes to various career paths and showed me that communication does not have to be limited to journalism, as I experienced its potential through website design and infographics. I have always wanted to make a difference and positively impact other communities, and I now understand that there are so many avenues that can be taken to achieve that.

I feel it is important to discuss the fact that both of my placements were completed during the COVID19 pandemic. I would first like to acknowledge how grateful I am to have been able to carry out these projects remotely and to have had access to all the necessary amenities to be supported throughout. That said, the pandemic still presented various obstacles, and having to work from home was a big shift for everyone. Through these unprecedented circumstances, I learnt about the importance of setting a schedule to stay on top of my work, especially since the monotony of quarantine can lead to a lack of motivation. It was also important for me to set weekly goals so that, although not much was changing around me, I could still feel as though I had achieved something.

The placements also provided a great escape from the everyday world because they gave me a project to focus on, and they kept me in contact with my group members and my supervisors. It may not seem like much, but that daily interaction made a big difference to my mood. Moreover, the projects helped me to connect with the wider community, both nationally and internationally, and it was interesting to see how the pandemic was affecting people all over the world, giving us a shared experience, no matter where we were from. While it was a significant change and challenge, the fact that these placements were still possible in the midst of a global pandemic gave me hope that the world will pull together and global connection will still be possible, even if it looks a little bit different than before.

In terms of the next steps, I am leaning towards the communications industry, which could include, but is not limited to, journalism, reporting, advertising campaigns, and radio. I am focused on amplifying voices, through making human connections and communicating people's stories to the rest of the world. That can take on so many different forms, and because of that, I am open to all different types of projects, providing connection and amplification are some of their core goals. These placements have impacted my future career steps because they have helped me understand what I am passionate about, as well as significantly boosted my confidence around my ability to successfully achieve tasks. They will also show employers that I can work on a vast range of topics and that I will not be limited to projects in a specific sector. I am always willing to take on a new challenge, which will undoubtedly benefit me in the future, and this is a mindset SASAH undeniably helped to foster and develop over the past four years.

The placements themselves were both very impactful in terms of challenging me, developing my skills, and helping me to decide what my next steps are going to be; however, it was through the reflections, reports, and the final presentation, that I was able to fully grasp the

importance of the experiences. Creating my final presentation really pushed me to reflect upon what was most important to me and to pick out what I learnt from it. I had a lot to say, but the constraints of the seven-minute presentation meant that I really had to hone in on my most significant takeaways from the experiences. This highlighted to me how important it is to actively reflect on and engage in your work, taking the most you can from it as opposed to mindlessly completing tasks. There were certain skills I had been using subconsciously, such as adaptability and critical thinking, that I was able to explicitly outline and recognize through reflective learning. I am a big believer that you should put your passion into whatever you do, and through my presentation, I was able to see how I managed to put my passion for connection into both projects, which I will continue to do in the future.

Watching my classmates' presentations showed me how they also approached their placements by engaging their unique passions and skills, which taught me that every experience is what you make it. QingXiao Cui and Jade Rozal, whom I worked alongside for the WHE internship, both had different presenting styles than I did, and they focused on parts of the project that I had skimmed over more briefly. One example of this was the fact that Jade included a short video of the website we designed in her presentation. This allowed her to showcase our accomplishments in a far more cohesive manner and informed the audience of the scope of the project. Through noticing these differences, I saw how I could improve my presentations in the future and realized how important it is to consider what I include in my presentations so that I can provide a better summary of the work completed to my audiences.

The other presentations also highlighted the diversity of internships my classmates have completed, which once again reminded me of how many directions I can go in after graduation. I saw how each of my classmates had excelled in their positions and had brought their values and

experiences into their roles. Julia Campbell provided an excellent example of taking initiative and working with your values in mind: she explained that during her time as an intern at the Stratford Festival she had pushed for the costume cutters to be included in the archival documents where they had previously not been. She expressed that she wanted to make sure that credit was being given where credit was due, and she took on extra work to make it possible. I hope to be able to lead with my values in the same way. Above all else, my peers' presentations encouraged me to try to learn from those around me, as everyone has such a valuable and important perspective to share.

I would strongly encourage all future students to make the most of their experiential-learning opportunities: taking risks and applying for an internship that interests you, even if it is slightly outside of your comfort zone, can really pay off. While I had very little experience creating websites or doing graphic design, I dived headfirst into two experiences that relied heavily on those skills. I was very interested in the projects' goals and so was not held back. This was possible because I knew that SASAH had set me up for success in terms of providing me with basic technological expertise that I could build upon and teaching me how to use critical thinking and problem solving to overcome obstacles that arose. Pushing into new sectors allowed me to connect with and learn from so many people, which exposed me to new perspectives and potential future options.

These placements helped me to discover how my passions can be translated into various fields and provided me with an opportunity for significant personal and professional growth. The experiences and the skills I gained through them will always be important to me and the placements were a great way to wrap up my SASAH education by providing me with a fantastic introduction into the post-graduation working world.

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