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Youth in Policing Initiatives and the Forest City Film Festival

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Youth In Policing Initiatives Summer Program Coordinator

During the months of July-August of this summer, I was a paid, full-time coordinator for a youth program run by the Ottawa police called the Youth in Policing Initiatives (YIPI). In grade 11, I was a youth in YIPI which undoubtedly played a large role in my acceptance for the position. The YIPI program, in brief, is a mixed stream program, meaning the youth are intended to come from one of two backgrounds: those who have been selected based on merit/good character etc. and those who have been deemed by the police to be "at-risk". At-risk youth, to my knowledge, are categorized as such due to either being in a low income neighborhood, having relatives with a criminal background, or having been personally selected out of schools by school resource officers. The intention of the program is two-fold: 1) To create positive relationships between at-risk youth and the police 2) To spark an interest in policing for viable candidates. The idea is that the youth of the former group positively influence the "at-risk" youth, and create mutually advantageous friendships. As a youth in the program it was both the most fun as well as the most personally enriching job I'd had to that point. I made a number of friends, a few of which I still keep in touch with on a regular basis, and the coordinator for my sub-group within the program, Joanna, was a key role model in my life at that time. Unfortunately she passed away last year, but the lessons I learned from her in leadership and life in general remain hugely influential on myself. Given her immense impact on myself and many of the other youth from my year, I felt the desire to give back to the program and play a similar role in a youth's life as a positive influence and role model. So I applied and thankfully got the job. My role in YIPI was much different than Joanna's though in that I was affiliated with the YMCA program rather than her role which was affiliated with community policing centers (CPC). With YIPI I primarily worked at a YMCA summer camp on the Ottawa river in which I was responsible for 3 YIPI students who had roles as counselors there. It was my responsibility to ensure they showed up, did their jobs properly, and helped them fulfill their responsibilities. This is what I did generally from Tuesday-Friday as on Mondays all of the youth from the various subgroups came together for a group day. Group days were filled with a variety of things and every Monday was different. Often it involved demonstrations from police officers from different sections during which the officers would explain what they did on a daily basis, recount interesting stories and challenges they've faced in their careers, and end with opening the floor to the students for questions. As a coordinator I would often have to initiate the questions so that the youth would feel comfortable asking their own questions, and also so as to provoke follow up questions from the youth and get a dialogue going. As someone who doesn't participate much in class, this was beneficial for me to lead and initiate discussions as this was out of my comfort zone and I believe this allowed me to gain a bit of confidence speaking publicly.

YIPI is a valuable program to the community for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, as previously implied, it fosters good relationships between at-risk youth and the police. More than just this though, YIPI students in their placements serve not just the police but many community organizations which are otherwise short staffed and low on resources. These placements would include the YMCA program which I was personally involved with, but also retirement homes, homeless shelters, women's shelters, youth shelters and other charitable organizations of this sort. Through this aid, not only are these valuable organizations better able to deliver the

services they offer, but YIPIs are able to feel a sense of pride in what they are doing. Instead of typical forms of employment for a 15-17 year old, whether it be flipping burgers or cleaning up tables at a restaurant, YIPI students are able to interact with and assist members of the community who need their help at a much more foundational level. On a level which usually only people with special skills and years of training would be able to do. Good relationships are fostered between youth and the police as a result of this as youth are able to see that the police have supportive and helpful ties with the community and don't simply use their authority to arrest people. I think that primarily however, youth gain an appreciation not just for the police, but for 1) how good they have it compared to many people 2) that they have the ability to make a considerable difference in someone's life. Furthermore, on a more practical level, successful graduates of the YIPI program are able to put that they've been an intern for the Ottawa Police on their resume, and not only this but that they have worked at various organizations around the city as an extension of them. This undoubtedly looks great on a resume and helps youth secure future jobs. I can personally attest, as someone who has YIPI on their resume, that this catches the eye of many employers, as in most interviews I've had the interviewer has inquired about YIPI. YIPI also has a legitimate educational value which should not be undermined, while it is not a formally educational program. Especially during the first week of the program, the youth do a variety of tests, brain teasers, group challenges/ activities which I would consider educational. These activities intend to both strengthen ties between the YIPIS, but also to help youth better understand themselves and thus understand how they relate to others. For instance, we conducted 3 different personality tests throughout the week. Following the results of the test, we would proceed into a group discussion about the strengths and weaknesses people with certain results tend to have. I personally really liked this because a lot of the youth who were more quiet or timid and perhaps lacking in self confidence were able to be defined in a non critical way. By being told they are agreeable rather than passive and timid, aspects of their personality were affirmed rather than criticized. In the case of agreeability, which was a foundational personality type in all of the assessments that were conducted, agreeable students could see themselves as cooperate, flexible, and likable rather than be characterized negatively. So in this way YIPI provided a sort of interpersonal education, at a vital time as well given that YIPIs, in highschool, are just beginning to understand themselves and figure out their place in the world. These personality tests also served a large role for the coordinators. The coordinators also did the same tests and we discussed the results as a group. These were done prior to the YIPIs being initiated into the program. I forget the exact results I got from these tests, but I consistently scored high in agreeability and extraversion, and low in dominance and analytical thinking. It was interesting because every coordinator's results varied widely, but we all got along very well nevertheless. With Tom, we discussed the foreseeable strengths and weaknesses that our various personalities could pose in our roles as coordinators. For me personally, foreseeable weaknesses were not adequately upholding authority, and being too forward and sociable in my approach to more timid and introverted youth. I resonated with these results and while I was likely one of the more 'fun' coordinators, I made a concerted effort so as to remain on the same page as the other coordinators in terms of the rules and expectations we upheld, and to not pick favorites in the program; giving every youth relatively equal attention. These tests and our subsequent discussions were also beneficial to our unity as coordinators, as we were able to better understand each other and thus how to effectively interact with one another. For instance,

if there was a task that needed to be done which involved delegating tasks to one another, we were able to recall each other's strengths and weaknesses and assign responsibilities to one another accordingly. A particular example of this was when the coordinators all conferred following the first week of the program to determine who would be in charge of which sections of the program. Since Jacob was a more dominant but also agreeable personality type, and given that he was a coordinator the summer of 2020, he was well suited to be the CPC coordinator. This was a role which involved driving six YIPIs around in a van going to various charitable organizations around the city. It was absolutely vital that the person in this role be able to both interact well with the other leaders in these organizations (agreeability) while also having the sternness to maintain control of the six YIPIs. In CPC maintaining control I could only assume was also much more difficult as well as high stakes. This is because you're often downtown in densely populated areas so there is much more potential for something to go awry, and everyday the CPC team was doing something different in the community which meant Jacob had to adjust his leadership style and react to things on the fly on a regular basis. For instance, if the CPC was helping out at a special event in the city that mostly involved other volunteers with no longterm affiliations to the event or actual authority-like positions, Jacob had to step into a more intensive leadership role. By contrast, if the CPC team was helping out at the Shepherds of Good Hope, since they already have regular employees and managers, taking such a leadership role would've likely rubbed people the wrong way and been counterproductive. I accompanied the CPC team for a few days at various points in the summer when Jacob needed an extra hand, which is why I can attest to this. In hindsight, although I grew a lot from my position in the YMCA and I enjoyed my time interacting with the kids etc. I would've really liked to have been the CPC coordinator, but maybe I'll apply again this summer.

My experience with YIPI was quite impactful in terms of how it has influenced my thoughts about entering the workforce. Firstly, and most notably, I no longer want to be a police officer. Growing up with 2 police officers as parents, I felt somewhat pressured into pursuing the same profession. After working alongside police officers though I got a taste of what policing is like in actuality which made me second guess my inclination towards policing. One experience in particular did this for me. I was helping out the CPC team one day and one of the police officers helping with the YIPI program, Rachelle, was also along with us. We were at a park for a community event of some kind that was headed by the Boys and Girls Club. Since the park is a public place, there were people there who weren't there for the event, particularly a group of inner city highschool kids. These kids were mostly minding their own business and really were not interfering with the event at all, but they stuck out so to speak given that they were much older than the rest of the kids at the event. Rachelle didn't actually do anything in regards to these kids but she told me to keep an eye on them and she was consistently looking over at them and standing near them to ensure they wouldn't do anything unscrupulous. The kids were well aware as well that she had her eye on them and they were clearly looking back at her and whispering amongst themselves presumably about her. Rachelle as a police officer felt the need to exert her authority in a way so as to prevent something bad from potentially happening, just by subtly signaling to the highschoolers that they were being watched. After reflecting about this, I was a bit disturbed at the kind of negative energy that was between Rachelle and the highschoolers for no reason in particular. I suppose that police officers need to give the

impression that they are 'there' so to speak, as a preventative measure, but something about this tactic made me uncomfortable. I think I am someone who is optimistic of others, I tend towards giving people the benefit of the doubt when it comes to their acting lawfully and unless directly provoked by something, I tend to mind my own business. It seems like effective police officers don't do this though, and rather they are skeptical and even presumptuous about the guiltiness of others activities. I think my own parents are like this as well, even off duty; perhaps because they're so used to being around the deviants of society that they think deviancy is more common than it is in actuality. I think there is also something about wearing a uniform that inclines people towards challenging their authority. There are countless videos online of police officers performing their duties, not doing anything particularly controversial, and people approaching them and inquiring into what they're doing, why they're doing it etc. I suppose people don't like being told what to do so at the sight of a police officer they naturally get their backs up. Because of this tendency people have I can understand the use of Rachelle's tactic as a sort of countermeasure to the usual opposition people would have toward her. To me however, it just seems toxic and unwarranted even though it likely makes for more effective policing. So because I feel like this, and because this sort of behavior appears to be characteristic of police officers, I reconsidered my aspirations towards policing.

Forest City Film Festival (FCFF)

The other 0.5 credit for my EL experience was spent as an intern for The Forest City Film Festival. As an intern for FCFF, I had multiple responsibilities, my two central responsibilities being as a blog writer and interviewer. These two responsibilities were often intertwined as interviews were often conducted with a view towards a blog post I had to write, and they served a role in gathering information both about the film and the filmmaker. As someone with an interest in film, this internship was enriching because I learned a lot about film jargon which has yielded advantages for me in terms of my ability to critically watch and discuss films. Preceding my internship, I had taken a SASAH course on film festivals with professor Constanza which gave me a bit of insight into both how to critically watch films and the particular function of film festivals for filmmakers. Film festivals for filmmakers are in large part a space for networking as filmmakers meet other people in the film-world and they can watch each other's work, and discuss the possibility of collaborating etc. Film festivals are also a way that filmmakers can gain status and credibility, especially if films are nominated or selected for awards. Knowing that film festivals served this role, I did my best in my role to give an air of professionalism in my conduct. Personally, I would consider myself pretty laid back and perhaps even unprofessional at times. In one of my past jobs, I actually received a complaint about this. I briefly worked at the Heart institute at the Ottawa hospital as a COVID-19 screener. Apparently when I was screening customers I was too "monotonous and unprofessional" in my approach. I think that to a certain extent this is just how my voice tends to sound as it is rather deep, but I am willing to admit that giving an air of professionalism, when necessary, is not something that comes naturally to me and is perhaps an area of weakness. This deficiency of mine I tried to be very conscious of when interacting with filmmakers. This was of critical importance because if I didn't seem professional then several things were at stake. Firstly, it reflected poorly on the

festival, and since FCFF is already a very small film festival that doesn't have much of a reputation in the film festival circuit, my actions had the potential to be very detrimental to FCFF's image. Secondly, if I didn't maintain a certain professionalism, the filmmakers themselves might take this personally as if their film isn't worthy of being taken seriously. This would have possibly led to filmmakers not feeling inclined or welcomed to speak freely about their films, which would've likely led to poorer quality blog posts on my part. There were multiple ways in which I tried to maintain an air of professionalism as an intern. During interviews I would prepare a sheet of paper with questions on it. This gave the impression that I was not only prepared for the interview, but that I had duly reflected on the film prior to the interview. I would also wear a button up shirt, comb my hair, and look professional in this way.

During my interviews, another challenge that I found was focusing on the filmmaker and the film rather than myself. In school, if you want to do well, it's important that you pay careful attention to diction in order to speak and write formally and effectively. This necessarily involves a certain level of self-consciousness. In interviews however there is a two-sided nature to them, so you need to be less self-conscious in order to get a sense of the interviewee and adapt your approach to them. It's very hard, especially in a formal setting like an interview, to not be focused on sounding smart. This was especially the case when speaking with filmmakers who undoubtedly had a more comprehensive and technical knowledge of film than myself, making me the less qualified member of the dialogue. I found in early interviews it was almost as if I was trying to prove my worthiness and establish my own credibility to the interviewee, using film related words and essentially trying to sound smart and qualified. It was only after several interviews that I, first of all, realized I was doing this, and secondly, made efforts to change this. I learned that if you're too focused on yourself in the interview and how you present yourself, then you're not going to be listening and communicating as effectively with the interviewee because your primary goal is sounding smart rather than extracting valuable information. To effectuate this change in my conduct, I didn't have to change my approach to interviews in a methodological sense, but it was rather a change in my underlying mentality and aim. After I made this change I believe not only did I yield better information from the interviews, but since my interviews became higher quality I became a better representative of FCFF.

A challenge that I faced when writing blog posts arose due to the nature of the blog posts being about a collection of films with a similar theme rather than about individual films, although some of the more key films I wrote individual posts for. For instance I had to write a post about the Environmental Activism films held at the festival: Bright Green Lies, Blood and Water, and 467 Land Back Lane. In this blog post, like all of my blog posts, I had to attempt to generate interest in the films and give a bit of a synopsis in terms of what each film was about. The issue with these three films in particular was that while they were all about environmental activism each film was very different. Bright Green Lies was about the corrupt nature of the Green Energy movement, while 467 LBL and Blood and Water were about pollution in indigenous communities and indigenous history. Aside from being topically different, stylistically each film was very different as Bright Green Lies has an investigative journalism style and was a full length documentary, while the other two were more artistic in their style

discussing aboriginal history as a narrative and making ongoing contrasts between history and the present day. Because of the greater similarities between the latter two films, it was difficult to avoid speaking of them as one and writing about Bright Green Lies in isolation. This was important to avoid however because if I had done so I wouldn't have given either of those films their due attention as individual works of art, placing the spotlight on Bright Green Lies. To avoid this I had to do two things: 1) Determine common themes between all three films 2) Differentiate Blood and Water from 467 LBL. To satisfy this first goal, I wrote about how each film was about fighting a dominant force. In the case of Bright Green Lies this was in terms of the corporations funding Green Energy and the pervasiveness of consumer culture. In the case of the other 2 films this was in terms of the long lasting impacts of colonialism. While the "dominant force" in the latter two films were the same, I don't believe this hindered my ability to portray them as unique and independent films because I ensured in my blog to speak to each one individually following my unification of all three under this umbrella of 'fighting dominance'. Through this practice of having to write blog posts, which both unified and independently presented each film, I think I became better academically. Specifically, I had to distill common themes and messages which overtly (like with colonialism and big corporations) look different. This is a common practice in academia where you often have to draw connections between different pieces of media/ information.

I think that my internship with FCFF helped prepare me for a potential career in firefighting through having to find the positive aspects of films which I didn't necessarily care for. As I said earlier, my blog posts functioned as a sort of advertisement for the films with the aim of inciting a desire in people to watch them. To do this, I had to often overlook my personal criticisms and opinions in order to paint a favorable picture of the films. I think this is a valuable skill as a firefighter as there is an obvious need for collaboration and mutual respect. Just like there are films I didn't care for, there will likely be other firefighters who I don't care for either as people or as firefighters. It is undoubtedly important, however, to put the cohesiveness of the group first rather than to bluntly express my feelings. For instance if one of the other firefighters is difficult to live with in the firehouse, perhaps they leave dirty dishes around or they're loud and obnoxious, instead of criticizing them it seems like its more beneficial in the long run to tolerate certain things that I would usually take issue with, and instead focus on the positive aspects of their behavior. While it is a truism that speaking your mind is good and healthy, and not voicing your true opinions and feelings is clearly a slippery slope into complacency, my internship taught me that this is true only to a certain extent. This extent being to the point that it hinders the larger scope of your aims; in FCFF this aim being the positive portrayal of the film and in firefighting this being the proper collaboration of the team.

Another way that my internship prepared me for being a firefighter was in regards to the idea of "pulling your weight". In FCFF, the way writing responsibilities were assigned wasn't typically by Evan or Dorothy (my supervisors), delegating certain people to do certain posts, but rather it was mostly people proactively claiming certain films or topics. This made it easy for someone to lighten the load on themselves by only claiming the easier topics or, even worse, to not claim their fair share of topics. This was something I was guilty of and while at the time I thought I got away with it, it was certainly noted by the other interns. As a result I was not really part of the

team in terms of kinship while all the other interns developed friendships outside of work. I developed a bad reputation and this made meetings kind of uncomfortable for me, deservedly so, as people did not trust me to deliver quality work or to pick up the slack somewhere when necessary. I also felt somewhat guilty which added to this discomfort. This feeling of not belonging and the ensuing uncomfortableness this caused was surely worse than the little bit of extra work and effort I would've had to put in and I think through this experience I learned a valuable lesson in doing your fair share. I used to think that if I could do the bare minimum and still get the result I was looking for, that this was somehow a 'win' for me. This remains true of some things, especially in terms of independent work, but when working in a group setting this does not hold true. As a firefighter and working in a collaborative setting, doing the bare minimum, much like in FCFF would not only be obvious but also frowned upon. As such, I'm glad I experienced the negative social implications of what it's like to be the weak and undependable member of a group so that I can do my best to avoid slipping into this role in my future career.