

Megan Missey

Professor Marshele Carter

MEJO 332

APPLES Reflection Essay

My APPLES service-learning course has been a memorable experience for me as both a person and a public relations student this semester. The hands-on experience of working with an actual nonprofit client simulated a professional working relationship that seriously informed my desire to work in the public relations industry. When my commitment wavered, I reminded myself that my reputation as a student, team member, and public relations volunteer was on the line.

Working with CFK Africa has transformed my perspective. When I first learned that my team would be working with a nonprofit that worked in informal settlements like Kibera, I had no idea what to expect. I, quite honestly, had never heard of Kibera. Yet, during our first meeting with our point of contact for this project, Katrina Kulik, we were taught all about the work that CFK does. I now recognize the value in that work and have grown invested in seeing the nonprofit succeed even after my time with it is over. For example, my additional piece for my portfolio, similar to a direct mail list, contains the contact information for club presidents and UNC professors teaching courses that overlap with CFK's work. I have promised to update it for Katrina in the fall of next year because I genuinely want to see CFK engage with more students like myself.

The most challenging part of this project was communicating with many parties about responsibilities. Those parties include CFK but also members of my own team. CFK Africa underwent a rebranding in January to commemorate its expansion into seven more counties in Kenya. While that was incredibly exciting news for us as public relations volunteers, it also meant CFK staff were extremely busy behind the scenes. When it came time to schedule meetings and discuss deliverables, finding a time to talk created quite the email chain. Additionally, resources we created as a team to stay in contact about our progress with the project went unused by some team members. This meant I often did not know the stories or deliverables that my team members were creating. This also meant Katrina was forced to converse with us individually instead of in a single group, which I imagine would have been much easier on her side of things.

The least valuable part of this project was creating the website section of the communication audit for CFK. After meeting with Katrina to discuss the audit, we learned CFK was redesigning its entire website. This made all of our observations and recommendations regarding the website unhelpful. After the significant amount of time I put into that section, I was somewhat disappointed. However, I was happy to know that Katrina recognized some of the weaknesses we had pointed out already.

Perhaps our most significant recommendation to CFK Africa's team regarding their communication to its publics was to streamline the entire process, a suggestion which, to Katrina's credit, CFK had been thinking about already. During our time working with CFK, we

noticed that a lot of the organization's messaging was lost in its sheer volume. The website contained multiple redundant pages which only occasionally introduced new information to their audiences. These numerous web pages filled with broken links undermined the mission and presentation of a legitimate 20-year-old nonprofit and actually made their website run slower. Thankfully, these are all issues that Katrina promised us CFK was aware of and working with an external website creation company to fix.

In closing, my recommendation to the Carolina Center for Public Service is to keep partnering with CFK in APPLES courses. Every staff member we interacted with was extremely kind and generous with our time, even as responsibility piled high on the plates around them. Elnard Rigan, a CFK psychological counselor, took precious time out of his evening to speak with Ashton and me from Nairobi. Katrina was consistently available and transparent with us and welcomed us into the organization's inner workings. Their kindness to us is a testament to true partnership, something I imagine APPLES programming is always striving for.