

Friends of Canon Gideon (FOCAGIFO) Internship Report

With the funding provided to me by Sewanee, I interned with the Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO) based in Kampala, Uganda, this summer. FOCAGIFO is an organization started by the Reverend Canon Gideon, the first religious leader on the continent of Africa to come out as HIV/AIDS positive. It is a manifestation of Gideon's calling to create progress and hope from his personal experience with his ailment by working to end the stigma and discrimination against those diagnosed with the disease. FOCAGIFO has several groups associated with the organization, including the Hope Institute for Transformational Leadership and Development, the vocational school where I worked as a Community Health educator for six weeks.

At the Hope Institute, I worked alongside Walker Buxton—the other Sewanee intern—as a teacher and developer. While the internship is described as an educator position, teaching only compromised a small fraction of our activities at the school. I worked with Walker to create weekly lessons on community health topics and computer skills and taught each class respectively on Tuesday and Thursday. When I was not teaching, I was working on growing FOCAGIFO's social media presence, developing a user-friendly website, taking pictures of the students in lessons or for individual stories, looking for ways to grow the institute's social enterprise—this consisted mainly of me reaching out to possible vendors for FOCAGIFO's Hope Tea—and shadowing our supervisor, Nabukalu Sandra, on her field visits. Sandra is the organization's Community Health Facilitator and social worker who works with the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) project sponsored by USAID. Our field visits were mostly to

check up on the families of the children at the Hope Institute sponsored by the USAID OVC program to see if they were continuing to comply with the standards created by USAID that allowed them to qualify for the program. Two of our field visits were also education-oriented: I gave a lesson on the importance of environmental health as a part of a community health series directed at two USAID OVC-sponsored primary schools.

My internship with FOCAGIFO helped strengthen weaker skills of mine as well as grow completely new, unexpected ones. I have had an interest in Community Health in relation to development throughout my time at Sewanee, but I rarely related to the topic as more than a big-picture concept. Having to teach lessons in this field to a group of students ages 16 to 24 pushed me to make the concept and significance of “health” much more concrete as I relayed it to a classroom. I also became much more comfortable speaking and sharing my ideas not only in the classroom but with the other interns and employees of the Institute as well. The FOCAGIFO staff is welcoming and enthusiastic about new ideas. This environment made me more comfortable sharing my thoughts on programs and pushed me to create my own projects and expand on those already in place. For example, Mutyaba James Claude, the executive director of Hope Institute and FOCAGIFO, explained the Hope Tea Project to us and said FOCAGIFO was trying to find places to sell its tea nationally (right now, the only client for the tea is Thistle Farms). This pushed me to search for tea and coffee shops in Kampala, and I am currently working on creating a partnership with Endiro Coffee Ltd. and the Hope Tea Project.

Beyond expanding skills I already had, this internship also challenged me to acquire new skills. I have never worked with website development before, but developing the site was a much-needed task we were expected to do. I did not go as far as to teach myself how to code, but

Walker and I did create a well-functioning, organized website with substance and potential to grow. We also greatly enhanced FOCAGIFO's Facebook page and created an Instagram to increase the organization's social media presence, something I have come to realize is significant for an organization (especially a school) that relies on donations and fundraising to function.

My duties as a FOCAGIFO intern were very broad and open to interpretation in a sense, but I believe that this environment taught me to be a much more self-motivated worker. As a relatively small non-profit organization, FOCAGIFO had a perpetual list of things that could be focused on and improved. The more time I spent at the Hope Institute, the more comfortable I became stepping outside of the one or two tasks expected of me for that day and working on other projects. Especially in such a hopeful, openhearted environment like the one I encountered at the Hope Institute, I became content in moving outside of the parameters I had created in my mind for my internship and diving into the organization.

I believe that my experience with FOCAGIFO this summer gave me a good idea of what it was like to work with a grassroots NGO. There were always bumps in the road, and various frustrations along the way, but the people I worked with had a real heart for their mission and the organization itself was working hard to comply with and grow Gideon's vision. This summer taught me that letting go of a personal vision of how things should work is crucial to actively participating in such an organization, and that a lot can be accomplished in this environment if you are self-driven and in line with the values and mission of the organization.

Interning with FOCAGIFO has helped to create a clearer picture in my mind of what career path I would like to pursue after Sewanee. I enjoyed working on the ground with a small organization whose vision and work I truly believe are grounded in the right place. It was a

refreshing change from big-picture development I had studied this past fall with SIT in the same city, and I feel like I have merely scratched the surface of how I can participate in similar organizations in the future.