

Internship Report:

Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO), Kampala, Uganda

Funded through the Lilly Summer Discernment Institute, I had the opportunity to intern at the Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO) in Kampala, Uganda this summer with four other Sewanee students. FOCAGIFO is an organization that works to address poverty, youth unemployment, socially sanctioned violence, and HIV/AIDS-related disease, stigma, discrimination, and death in the community of Katooke on the outskirts of Kampala. The Reverend Canon Professor Gideon Byamugisha, an HIV and AIDS advocate and a visiting Sewanee professor during the Advent Semester of 2013, is the Executive Director of FOCAGIFO and works to combat HIV and AIDS through holistic community development, education, and individual empowerment. Gideon also started the “Hope Institute for Transformational and Leadership Development” through FOCAGIFO as a vocational and holistic program for young adults. FOCAGIFO’s strategies for positively influencing the surrounding community and its people stem from the idea that love “blames less and supports more”: a mantra that I was particularly drawn toward and driven by during my time working in Uganda.

My experience working in Kampala was challenging and exciting as the five Sewanee interns were able to come up with our own curriculum, projects, and fundraising ideas to implement at FOCAGIFO and its “Hope Institute.” During my time working for this organization, my responsibilities included giving weekly “Guidance, Reflection, and Goal Setting” counseling sessions to students on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, teaching a

“Communication and Self-Empowerment” course on Wednesday mornings with Rachel Schuman (C’15), and collaborating with the other interns to update our “Sewanee Interns” blog and the FOCAGIFO newsletter. As the “Social and Spiritual Services Intern” for the organization, I started these counseling sessions as a resource for the students to access any emotional or spiritual healing they needed, talk about any issues they were currently facing in their lives, and reflect on their education at FOCAGIFO and their hopes for the future. This was a great way for me to get to know the students on a deeper level and to help them to assess where they are now and where they hope to be. As for the Wednesday “Communication and Self-Empowerment” courses, Rachel and I loved getting to know the students in this group setting as we taught lessons on speaking and writing well, debating, self-esteem, human rights, and gender issues in Uganda. We hope that the students learned how to better articulate their ideas, how to be empowered individuals, and how to positively impact their community in loving, supportive, and transformative ways.

As a group, the interns completed several successful projects and activities over the course of our 7 weeks at FOCAGIFO, such as the Hope Institute Mural, the “Health Cup,” “Love Week,” visitations to local primary schools, a journaling project, a handbook for the Hope Institute’s “Guild Members” (student council), debates, visitations to community members and local NGOs, and fundraising projects for the organization. These projects allowed us to engage with students, staff, and community members outside of our usual classroom and office settings. Visiting primary schools, community members, and various local NGOs was a great way for the interns to share our messages on community health, environmental stewardship, leadership, HIV/AIDS awareness, and spiritual wellness. It was also a wonderful opportunity to learn from

different organizations and community members in and around Kampala. In the last couple weeks of our internship program, we also compiled a “Guild Position Handbook” for the new guild members at Hope Institute (comparable to student government or council) and an “Intern Handbook” for the group from Sewanee that will work for FOCAGIFO next summer.

Events that the interns held at FOCAGIFO this summer held included two debates, the 2nd annual “Health Cup,” and “Love Week.” As a project for our Communication and Self-Empowerment class, we held one debate for first years and one for second years on topics involving the environment, the economy, and technology. This was a great way for the students to put their communication skills into practice. During the “Health Cup” that took place at the end of our 3rd week here, students engaged in various sports matches and a local organization (KIFAD) came to do HIV/AIDS testing. “Love Week” took place during our 6th week at FOCAGIFO and involved the interns implementing curriculum and events through the lenses of love and respect as the most powerful forces of change.

Overall, my internship at FOCAGIFO was an amazing and transformative opportunity. Working for a small organization with limited resources in a rural, impoverished community was definitely both a challenging and rewarding experience that has shaped my perception of myself and the work that I hope to do after I graduate Sewanee. During my time working at FOCAGIFO, I gained a better understanding of the nature and processes of non-profit work, as well as the initiative and drive it takes to work for an organization in a developing country. My service work within this community also allowed me to develop a greater sense of my abilities in a non-profit vocation, and I was able to realize how I am drawn to people, their personal stories, and their connections to the communities in which they live.

My summer at the Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation definitely confirmed my desire to work under the umbrella of non-profit and relational work in the professional field. I look forward to exploring that desire more and discovering the possibilities for the experiences I will have once I graduate from Sewanee.