PRACTICUM REPORT

Global Expansion of an Anti-Trafficking Prevention Curriculum & Improvement of Business Processes – A Practicum Assignment with Free for Life International

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Introduction:

I was awarded the opportunity to work with Free for Life International (FFLI) during the spring semester of 2019. My assignments at FFLI were based on the experience and knowledge I had gained from my formal education as well as my practical experience in the field of Information Technology. I intend to discuss the following within this report: Free for Life International from an organizational perspective, projects that I worked on during my assignment term, my evaluation of the organization, my reflections on my practicum experience and how the practicum assignment benefited my personal life and future career.

Organization Overview:

Free for Life International was founded in 2006 by Colette Wise and Dan Bercu. The goal of the organization was to address issues of human trafficking both domestically and abroad. As with any new organization, progress was initially plodding. However, FFLI’s growth began to accelerate as the organization grew its network of partnerships and acquired more funding. Over time, partnerships with other anti-human trafficking organizations were developed in Nepal, Nicaragua, and Tennessee.
One of the most unique aspects of FFLI is its focus on victim restoration. FFLI is one of the only anti-human trafficking organizations that provides victims with scholarship opportunities. Providing scholarship opportunities allows survivors of human trafficking to pursue a variety of educational opportunities. Such opportunities can range from attending trade schools or GED programs all the way up to pursuing a Master’s degree. The scholarship program offers survivors the chance to put themselves in a position where they are self-reliant and helps them to create a solid foundation for a future career.

Lastly, in recent years FFLI has identified the potential impact of preventative education. However, for such preventative education to be effective, the curriculum must be able to transform and adapt to different context and audiences. FFLI has worked towards creating a human trafficking awareness curriculum that does just that. The organization has crafted the curriculum in a way that allows it to be strategically manipulated to be contextually appropriate for a variety of industries, at-risk groups and different localities. To date, the curriculum has been successfully modified to provide contextually specific training to general audiences, medical professionals and educators/orphanage workers in the Dominican Republic. FFLI’s long-term goal is to continue modifying the curriculum to provide regionally contextual training in every major region of the world.
In addition to creating the fact book, I worked to make strides in FFLI’s effort to provide the trafficking awareness educational material to individuals that are without a reliable internet connection. Upon my arrival, Gabrielle put me in contact with two organizational partners that were prepared to assist FFLI in the pursuit of this goal. The first of these partners, CTL ALT DEL Poverty, is a non-profit that provides modified Kindle e-readers to school children and villages that have unreliable internet access. These devices are delivered containing a vast amount of educational material and are set up so that they are not dependent on constant internet access. The second partner, The McLarian Group, develops e-learning modules that businesses use to train employees. My assignment was to work with The McLarian Group to transform the existing physical curriculum into an e-learning module that CTL ALT DEL could then add to the modified e-readers. While this project did not get as far along as I hoped, I believe that the work I did helped jumpstart the process.

In addition to working on the long-term projects described above, I was also assigned to work on many secondary projects. During my time at FFLI, I was given the responsibility for the design and content curation of the Free for Life 2018 Annual Report. Additionally, I was brought into several brainstorming meetings to help develop creative answers to questions such as how to incentivize high-value donors to continue their generous donations and how to incentivize businesses to contribute large donations to grow the survivor scholarship fund.
Organization & Practicum Evaluation:

Free for Life International is an incredibly impactful organization considering its limited number of employees and its modest yearly operating budget. The employees that I had the pleasure of working alongside were passionate about addressing the issue of human trafficking and maintained positive attitudes throughout my practicum assignment. In my opinion, Free for Life International’s limiting factor is not the devotion and attitudes of its employees, but its financial constraints.

Free for Life International’s funding is impacted by a variety of different factors. The first of these limiting factors is the fact that Nashville currently has over one thousand non-profits, six of which are also anti-human trafficking organizations. The high concentration of non-profits creates quite a bit of competition for donors in the area. Secondly, FFLI is also limited by the fact that the organization can only apply for government grants that are internationally focused. Unfortunately, international grants are one of the least funded grant categories. Lastly, unlike larger non-profits, FFLI does not have a membership model that generates sustainable income. Many non-profits take advantage of a membership subscription model in order for individuals to access content that the organizations have made. FFLI plans to pursue a similar route by requiring a membership to access the Human Trafficking Awareness Curriculum. However, it may be a while until FFLI can move in that direction as the curriculum is still in the early years of its development process.
Within the first month of my assignment, I could tell that Gabrielle was an excellent team leader and was full of great ideas for the organization’s future. However, I observed that there were communication gaps where Gabrielle would assign tasks and employees were unable to see how the task fit into her higher-level vision for FFLI. I was able to have a discussion with Gabrielle about my observation which led to her revealing that she had some frustrations with the way the team was currently being managed. After doing some research, I was able to suggest Wrike as FFLI’s new project management platform. Since Wrike’s implementation it has had the following positive benefits: dramatically cut down on time-consuming project meetings, facilitated increased productivity for team projects, left employees feeling more equipped to prioritize their day-to-day work efficiently and alleviated many of Gabrielle’s management frustrations.

During the first few weeks of my assignment, I had initially felt a bit overwhelmed with the projects laid before me. I was given a tremendous amount of creative freedom when it came to developing the region fact book and the annual report. However, as I got more involved with the projects my confidence was reestablished. My confidence was reaffirmed by the sense of pride I felt when I received the FFLI email blast containing the 2018 Annual Report that I had created. I enjoyed helping FFLI develop the fact book and am excited to see how it is used to transform the trafficking awareness curriculum in the future.
2) FFLI also taught me to be more confident in myself when given an open-ended task. At times I was worried that the projects I was working on would not turn out as Gabrielle had envisioned. Instead, Gabrielle had nothing but positive feedback for each project. I learned that I should be confident in my work. After all, Gabrielle would not have assigned me the task if she was not confident in my ability to produce satisfactory results.

3) Throughout my assignment, there would be times when something would come up that would have an urgent deadline and needed my immediate attention. I am typically an avid planner and prefer not to have my plan altered once it has been laid out. FFLI taught me that while a plan is important, it is also important to be able to be flexible and adaptable to changes. I believe that I am now more open to unexpected changes in my plans than I was before my practicum.

4) I was also allowed to develop my networking skills when I was asked to attend the Ghost Orchard Coalition event. I spent the evening speaking with representatives from several local non-profits as well as a handful of former federal agents from the CIA, FBI and Homeland Security.

5) Lastly, Free for Life International taught me that an organization does not need a vast amount of money to make a difference in the world. A great deal of positive impact can is achievable by a small team of individuals with a limited budget and a devoted passion for the organization’s mission.