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Reflection Essay: GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh

My time with GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh this semester was very meaningful. I feel that I came out of this service-learning class with a stronger toolbox, not only for writing, but for effectively communicating with individuals, teams and organizations. I gained many skills that I know will prepare and support me throughout my time at UNC and well into my future career.

When I first signed up for the class, I didn't realize it was a service learning class, clearly I overlooked that part of the description in ConnectCarolina. Once I found out, I was honestly terrified. I even considered switching out of the class because I wasn't sure what it would be like to work with a real organization, or whether the time commitment would fit with my schedule, but I'm so glad I stayed in it. This class proved to be valuable in ways I didn't expect and offered skills that are applicable to anyone.

Throughout the semester, I learned how to write a variety of pieces, building on the foundation I built in MEJO 153. I felt more connected to the media world and current events, which was new for me and something I really appreciated. I also found the guest speakers in class to be incredibly impactful. Being able to hear directly from people in the field made the skills we were practicing feel more relevant and useful. Their experiences showed me how different paths could be applied in the real world and how much of a difference your skills could really make which was inspiring.

Before this course, I had never heard of GiGi's Playhouse. Now, I can say I hope to stay connected with them in the future. GiGi's is a wonderful organization that is not only inclusive, but deeply sincere in its mission to make the world a better place. Our first (and only) meeting with Dana Ramsey, the executive director of GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh, eased my initial nerves. I was anxious going in because I wasn't familiar with the organization yet or any of its employees, so I was unsure whether it would be a good fit for me, but Dana was very welcoming. She was fairly new to this position and understandably very busy, so we weren't able to meet again which made communication more challenging throughout the semester. Even so, we were able to create business kits and social media deliverables for them which I was proud of. This experience taught me how to communicate professionally with organizations, adapt when information is limited, and still produce meaningful results which I see as a valuable lesson.

Towards the end of the semester, I had the opportunity to interview the social media coordinator, MacKailey Braga, and that experience was especially impactful. I appreciated speaking with someone who had recently graduated and shared a similar academic path, as it made her insight feel especially relevant. College and post-grad life can feel overwhelming, so hearing her reassure me that things fall into place and that there is a role for everyone was refreshing. Interviewing someone I had never met, and who held a more senior role than I ever have, pushed me outside my comfort zone in the best possible way.

In the future, if GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh were to be used again for this service-learning class, I would recommend establishing a different primary point of contact, simply because communication gaps made some parts of this work more difficult. Even so, the organization was wonderful to partner with, and the work felt meaningful. I am grateful for this experience and excited to watch GiGi's continue to grow and to see where the skills I gained in this class take me next.