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**Mount Holyoke College '10**

**RRASC 2008 Summer Internship Report**

**Organization: Project South; Center for Elimination of Poverty and Genocide**

**Project: The Septima Clark Community Power Institute**

**Location: Atlanta, GA**

**Supervisor: Emery Wright**

Euphoric! This is the only term that can come close to describing my experience at Project South. I am truly grateful that the Project South team could afford to accommodate me at this intense transition time in terms of leadership and projects. The environment that they created for me was not only conducive for my summer internship, but it made it possible for me to enjoy Atlanta and its beautiful people. I don't remember a single day that I did not look forward to a 2 bus ride to and from South East Atlanta. The people I worked with were beautiful both in and out and I will be forever indebted to them for their hospitality.

The main summer project that I worked on this summer was the Septima Clark Community Power Institute (SCCPI). This was a three week program that was held in July and it culminated in a Youth Assembly that was held during the last day of the program - Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup> 2008. The SCCPI attracted 13 young people from the Atlanta area aged between 13 and 17 years. During the three week institute; the youth investigated local and regional political history, while learning about the community

organizing happening in Atlanta now. This stemmed from the broad theme of the institute that was dubbed “Our Atlanta; The Past, Present and Future”.

As an intern, I worked closely with my supervisor and the SCCPI coordinator in planning, implementing and facilitating the entire project. This was a new and fulfilling experience for me. I was not only able to apply my leadership skills and experience but also implemented my classroom theory in addition to acquiring new skills.

During my first day at Project South, my supervisor introduced me to the Project South curriculum and gave me the liberty of identifying the projects that I was interested in. This gave me so much freedom and flexibility. I don't think I would be nostalgically writing about my experience had it not been for this independence that was accorded to me on the first day. It gave me a feeling of acceptance and trust. I quickly scanned the list that was given to me and instantly knew that I wanted to be fully engaged with the SCCPI. My first task was to go through the SCCPI curriculum draft and identify the various activities that were planned for the program. This was a really rough draft, and for me it meant that I had to immerse myself in intense research. I was expected to identify any hitches in the outline and planning logistics and report back to my supervisor with informative feedback.

One of the challenges I faced was my lack of knowledge on American history, and in particular, the civil rights movement and Black History. Most of the terms listed in the outline were all new to me. This meant that I had to go back and forth, highlighting all

the new terms, searching for answers and clues from the internet in addition to talking to my colleagues and gathering answers from them. This was when my “summer school” began. My ignorance on Black American history was slowly been transformed into a wealth of information. It was intriguing how fast I got hooked to the history of iconic leaders and historic events in the movement. One of the most important historic events I learned about was the Montgomery bus Boycott (I could not pronounce Montgomery for the longest time). Learning about the process of strategic planning as modeled by this historic event was instrumental to the strategy that I applied as I prepared for SCCPI. Among the pivotal issues that I learned about, include the Jim-Crow laws, the NAACP, Septima Clark, Rosa Parks among many other issues and people.

My daily routine prior to the SCCPI revolved around reviewing the program, consolidating materials and meeting with my supervisor and the SCCPI coordinator. I also had the privilege of interviewing all the applicants over the phone. I was also in charge of compiling an acceptance package and mailing it out to all accepted applicants. In the acceptance package, we had the bios of the SCCPI staff, a letter to the parents, directions to Project South, liability waiver forms and the program’s outline. This task was not without its own shortcomings. All the different pieces of the package were being prepared by different people who were not necessarily in my vicinity. The task required great attention to detail and organization skills. I had to regularly send out emails and make phone calls in order to compile the entire package in a timely fashion. The greatest challenge was making sure that all the material was ready to go given that we were

running out of time. I was glad that all the packages went out on the set deadline and all the applicants but one got their acceptance packages on time.

The next exciting phase of the SCCPI was the Action Team Leaders (ATL) training. This was an intensive two-day training. I was anxious to meet the new people that I would be working with for an extended period of time. Part of my anxiety was based on the fact that ATLs were two young people that I had never worked before. The fact that we also came from very different cultural backgrounds contributed to my skepticism. I did not know what their ideologies were neither did they know mine. The training was exciting, fulfilling and educational as usual. All my previous misconceptions had faded away by the end of the program. We had a chance to try all the activities that we had planned in the program for the participants. This gave us hands on facilitation experience. This was particularly important for me because it gave me a chance to clarify any questions that I had about some of the planned activities. By the end of this training, I was convinced that I was ready to facilitate the three week SCCPI!

The third phase of the SCCPI was the launching of the actual program. Having all participants report on the first day was one of my highlights. This confirmed that all my back and forth phone calls were not in vain. The participants were split into three action teams. As an action team leader, my role was to help my team prepare for the youth assembly through the various activities defined in the program. I also shared in the responsibility of facilitating large group activities.

While there were many large group activities that I facilitated, there are two main ones that I would like to talk about in this report. The first activity that I facilitated was a “getting to know you activity”. This was on the first day. I had all the participants gather in a circle. To break the ice, they had to create a band. They did so by creating their own rhythm either by clapping, humming, nodding or even tapping their feet. I was happy to incorporate one of the ice breakers that I always use at my campus orientation training. By the end of the icebreaker, everyone was enthusiastically ready for my next activity. The “get-to- know you” activity was one that I come across during my first week research at Project South. I had one large yarn ball. The idea was to view the yarn ball as a magic ball. Once it was thrown at someone, they had to introduce themselves and give a synopsis of why they chose to participate in the program. The purpose of this activity was to show the participants that although they came from diverse backgrounds, they were bound by similar interests in many ways. The activity also gave the participants an opportunity to establish their own goals and discipline regulations. By the time the last person got the yarn ball, we were all caught in a beautiful purple web, signifying the bond that we would share for three weeks. They then made bracelets from the purple yarn that would serve as a reminder of their expectations.

The second large group activity that I facilitated was a public speaking workshop. This was an impromptu workshop and that makes it really special. As a way of helping the participants identify the different ways of making a presentation, the Action Team Leaders decided to model a presentation. I decided to prepare a power point presentation on “The Africa they never show you.” Part of my decision to do this presentation was

based on the fact that we had not incorporated any international issues in the program. The presentation was also inspired by some of the interactions I had had with all the participants and facilitators. The presentation sparked a lot of debate and curiosity. It was really encouraging to see my audience engage in mind blowing conversations about the African continent. Although none of the teams used power points for their Youth Assembly presentations, I was happy that I could introduce a new topic while remaining in the confines of the program's agenda!

Participants also had the opportunity of engaging in off site field trips and expeditions whereby they interacted with the past and present of their great city, while at the same time constructing their own vision for a better tomorrow. I really enjoyed being a part of these expeditions because they gave me a chance to explore Atlanta and interact with its people as a Project South representative. I had a chance of working at the Hunger Coalition's Umoja Garden and participate in the voter registration. Working in the Garden was particularly fulfilling for me, as it helped me revisit one of my long forgotten hobbies. Gardening was one of the main activities that I enjoyed indulging in while growing up in Kenya. In addition, I had a chance to participate in the voter registration campaign in Gwinnett County. It was a fun experience knocking door to door; asking people to either register to voter or update their voting information. This was a coordinated effort of Project South and the Voter Registration Center.

The Septima Clark Community Power Institute culminated into a 3 hour Youth Assembly. The Youth Assembly attracted about 60 community members. Here, the

participants presented on the issues on which that they had been working for the three weeks. Among the issues addressed were: peer pressure and self-esteem, incarceration, early teenage pregnancy and sex. It was rewarding to see these young people present the community with their consciousness and vision about the city of Atlanta. They also engaged the community in identifying the strategy they would use so as to get to their vision. This marked the end of the three week institute.

I spent my last two weeks at Project South wrapping up my summer experience. To begin with, following the end of the Institute, I conducted exit interviews with the participants. This was a crucial way of collecting feed back from participants about the institute. I also had to fill in my own evaluation for the institute and send it to my Supervisor and the SCCPI coordinator.

My ten weeks at Project South have been indeed intense and engaging. This internship gave me an opportunity to hone my community organizing skills while learning very many new things. I am now more knowledgeable about the social movements that have impacted people of color in so many ways. My understanding of social justice is now broader, and my conviction to make positive change has escalated to higher levels.

My experience would not have been the same without the amazing people that I worked with. Emery, Christi, Steph, Taliba and Fredando were an amazing team. They made it so easy for me to work in the office and my experience would not have been the same without their support. I would also like to acknowledge the support I got from Octavia,

Nikki and Darnell. The SCCPI would not have been a success without your coordinated effort. I also learned so much by interacting with the People's Institute, Georgia Citizens Hunger Coalition and the Voter Connection Center. I would also like to thank the entire CLLP/RRASC team for making it possible for me to get this internship. It was a great learning experience!