

Internship at "Dance for All"

Li Joanne Yun

One of my goals in summer 2016, was to make good use of time to work on something that could bridge my studies and future career goal. As cruel as the fact is and for how much I resist, 2016-2017 is my final year in CUHK. Like many others, I wish to attain working experience in potential workplaces of interest. Since my career goal is to become a dance therapist, naturally, I searched for internship opportunities in dance therapy. I opened up my possibilities to expose myself to different special groups, including seniors, mental illness patients, people with developmental disorders etc, with the hope of letting myself to feel my clients' unique features and needs. The searching process led me to Dance For All in Santa Monica where I ended up having a fun and self-fulfilling summer internship.



First and foremost, what is Dance For All? It is an organization delivering therapeutic movement program for teens and adults with developmental disabilities. The program offers yoga and dance classes, as well as performance opportunities in Santa Monica and its surrounding communities. The aim of the classes is to build a community that cultivates self-esteem and empowers individuals to find their visions, voices and leadership abilities. Even though it sounds idealistic, I am not surprised to see the teachers and committee members with admirable personality and attitude in Dance For All are successfully executing all of the above.

Dance For All generally takes in 1-2 interns based on seasonal needs, all of them, including existing members and interns, underwent a level of education in counselling, family therapy, art therapy, yoga therapy, dance therapy or other related disciplines. Surrounded by professionals in this particular field made me the odd one out; Not only had I have limited knowledge on their skilled service, I had gone through very little comparable sessions as a participant myself. You might then wonder, how did I get an internship in Dance For All with no related experience? I must say I got very lucky, during the time I communicated with Hilary, the director of Dance For All, it happened that they were preparing for an annual concert holding at the end of July. They were, at that time, short of manpower in administrative work and event planning. Both occurred to be the skills I developed in the past year of running my own campaign -"World of Smile" in Hong Kong. Hilary, as the nicest person one could be, hence opened up a special position for

me to help run their concert, manage online promotion and assist in editing their teaching manual for professionals who wish to equip dance/ movement techniques in their own therapy session. From mutual understanding, we came up with the best arrangement for both of us.

Even so, I was not able to get hands-on experience in conducting an actual session. I was privileged to get into the background operation of Dance For All, a kind of institution that I am very likely to take part in the near future. With the trust and guidance from Hilary and other members, I managed several major tasks alone. Noticeably, the entire online ticket selling process, from writing releases to designing the look of our page; from managing the system to tracking sales. I was also invited to give ideas on ticket pricing and donation types. One idea I proposed was to give away T-shirts for those who donated USD15 or above, comparing to the original strategy of selling tickets on the venue for USD12, we got a higher revenue. At the same time we could collect the money before the event, hence minimizing transaction on site, which a lot of times can get messy. This turned out to be a well- appreciated idea according to the results. Besides, according to a friend of Hilary who came to the event, commented on the online ticket selling process to be smooth and very user-friendly. I was over the top happy hearing such feedbacks from a professional. It was undeniably a big affirmation of my hard work. At the end, over a hundred audiences showed up, instead of 50 which we had originally aimed for.

Another major component of my job was to manage Dance For All social platforms. Right after I understood the expectation of the function in social media groups for the organization as well as its major audience type, I did an extensive research on groups that had similar features. I found that a lot of them, especially those who could successfully communicated organization values and messages through the social platform, they shared a common practice of posting articles, findings, interviews and videos of their related work. They also created anticipation for their upcoming events by having regular updates and countdowns. Adapting these elements, I put together a social platform schedule for Dance For All from the start of July to the end of August. Hilary, as always the nicest person one could ever be, accepted every proposal I had made.



As you might have noticed, Hilary is the person I made the most contact with, at the same time she was the person I had most respect to and had learnt a lot from. One of the major learnings I had from her was the ability to give enormous freedom, trust and appreciation to her

colleagues. She always creates spaces available for us to speak up and explore. Whatever we are good at, we have the passion in, as long as we can justify our actions and make no harm to Dance For All, she encouraged us to carry on. This environment gave me a huge courage to try and motivate me to chase for the betterment of the organization, like when I was casually reading articles online for personal interest, a lot of times I found myself thinking, "Would it be beneficial to Dance For All? Should I schedule a post about this for next week?"

Moreover, Dance For All has an excellent sharing culture. Two weeks after the concert, all the organizing members gathered together to talk about the most memorable, emotionally moving moments from the event. Although I did not know the dancers as profound as the others were, their transformations and achievements popped up vividly from the descriptions. The sharing provided me with certainty that my work had provided a good net in making things happen, what I did have a great value to all dancers and their family.

I would like to highlight that we use the term "dancers" to address clients in our program. "Dancer" is an empowering title, it shows respect to the clients and implies that they are powerful agents to move according to their free will. Their movements are not limited to simple, basic self-care tasks, but also creative and artistic expressions. The people with disabilities can also have extraordinary potential, which we often neglect. By giving them a proper title, we make an effort on de- stigmatization and enable the society to see them as a human again.



All in all, my summer would not be complete without my experience in Dance For All. I could see myself reutilizing what I have learnt there in life. Someday in the future, I hope I can return with skills in therapy to recontribute in Dance For All, where everyone is a star.