

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh  
370 S. Walker St., Suite 122  
Cary, NC 27511  
919-307-3952

REFLECTION ESSAY

CONTACT: Julia Colen, Public Relations Intern  
919-600-4558, juliamcolen@gmail.com

Dec. 6, 2024

Partnering with GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh through UNC-Chapel Hill's "Assisting People in Planning Learning Experiences in Service" or APPLS program, was a meaningful experience that served me as a student, public relations specialist, and individual. The partnership with GiGi's Playhouse was even more important to me as my older brother, Ben, has Down syndrome and has utilized the resources at GiGi's Playhouse. Getting to partner with GiGi's and serve them as a public relations specialist allowed me to learn about the importance of community, community relationship building, foundations of public relations, and the strategies of a nonprofit organization. I gained a lot of hands-on experience and will take the knowledge gained from this experience and apply it to future opportunities.

This experience contributed to my education as I was able to learn the foundations of servicing a client through public relations. In partnership with GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh, I created a portfolio including a resume, timelog and communication audit. Additionally, a media kit which included news release, client profile, fact sheet and social media posts for GiGi's partnership with Dairy Queen for Down Syndrome Awareness Month in October. Time management and timely communication was extremely important to utilize for this experience as public relations is very fast paced. I had to balance my communication with the president, social media chair, and other collaborators, send my writing samples and ideas in a timely manner, and follow along with current trends to stay on brand.

The most-valuable part of my service-learning experience was being able to contribute to a real nonprofit organization and offer my ideas, while also being able to receive feedback and challenges. Receiving outside feedback from a client is an important experience that not many people in the public relations world get to experience before a job or internship. Communicating, creating, and providing deliverables to a nonprofit organization while still in school is a valuable opportunity that has helped me improve my writing, communication and public relation skills.

The most challenging part of the service-learning experience was time management. It was important to find a balance between my regular school work, deliverables for the client, communicating and setting up times to discuss with the president, as well as going in person to volunteer. While I was able to manage and balance it all, it was difficult to organize at the beginning. Another challenging aspect was the fast paced environment of public relations. While

this goes hand-in-hand with time management, the quick moving pace was challenging but also exciting.

The least valuable part of the service-learning experience was the scheduling difficulties. Between the group aspect of a communication audit, and figuring out a good time to discuss and meet over five different schedules, it was more difficult to establish a set schedule.

Regarding GiGi's PR efforts, I would recommend amplifying its social media presence through apps such as Instagram and TikTok. Many brands have been able to gain a following on social media and expand the nonprofit online and in real life by following trends, interacting with followers, and consistent posting. Creating a consistent theme, posting schedule, and using a variety of media such as posts, videos, and posters, GiGi's can expand its audience. Additionally, since there are so many locations nationwide, growing the brand online can help bring in more volunteers, general awareness, help fundraise and spread the mission and vision.

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh and its President Michelle Pfeiffer were both amazing clients to work with. They were very accommodating, communicative, and helpful. Providing feedback, resources, and help with ideas for its public relations campaign. I would recommend that the Carolina Center for Public Service should remain in contact and partnership with GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh so that UNC students can still serve them through the APPLES program and help them continue to grow.