The Power of Inclusive Space: Pushing Every Girl Forward
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Introduction
The Social Justice Internship Program (SJI) is an experience in which students are placed with a Chicago non-profit for the duration of an academic year while learning and growing with their cohort in a classroom setting. As part of SJI at Loyola, I was able to work with GirlForward as a Communications Intern. Part of my role there is to help with different internal and external communications. This includes helping with promotion of different events, circulating news relevant to our mission, and assisting with different advocacy work such as International Day of the Girl or the Annual Zine that showcases girls’ art and writing. I also completed a personal project of creating a round-table discussion on gender and sexuality with the staff and a resource to support LGBTQ+ -identifying individuals in our GirlForward community. Working with such a dedicated community of women inspires and empowers me every day I walk through the door to continue my work in learning from and uplifting women and girls from a range of experiences, identities, and backgrounds.

Personal Project
As a personal project for GirlForward I identified an area in which I felt like I could personally lend my skills and knowledge to improve: providing resources for LGBTQ+ individuals within our community. The project was three parts:
1. The resource handbook
2. The project document
3. The discussion/training with staff

The purpose of the handbook is to give staff and mentors background information on the LGBTQ+ community so they feel more equipped to handle any questions or situations with girls or each other and have resources to refer to in which this information may be necessary. Additionally it serves the purpose of helping to foster an inclusive environment for all sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions.

The project document functions as an extension of the LGBTQ+ Resource Handbook that will be available to staff. Within this document, there will be an elaboration of some of the main headings from the handbook as well as a proposition of certain procedures that GirlForward can potentially adopt as a way to become more inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community and help address certain issues that girls, mentors, or staff may face.

The intent for the discussion is to have a space for discussion, reflection, and mutual learning with staff on different topics, vocabulary, and issues pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community for ally training and awareness. It additionally helps empower staff to respond to different situations and develop skills for responding to scenarios involving LGBTQ+ members or issues.

Learning Objectives
1. As a result of interning at GirlForward, I will be able to develop my skills in justice orientation by integrating a resource on the LGBTQ+ community into the organization for continual utilization to broaden my intentionality competency.
2. As a result of interning at GirlForward, I will be able to foster my personal attitude and values by collaborating to a greater ability with girls and my supervisor on narrative advocacy and just storytelling.
3. As a result of interning at GirlForward, I will be able to deepen my skills with online advocacy in a professional way, such as with the different programs (i.e. Canva/Medium) that assist with online advocacy and my own editing skills to help develop a platform for the organization to be address and spread awareness on the complex issues affecting girls around the world.

Reflection
As part of my internship I was empowered to seek solutions and create content that drove our mission forward. With the support of my supervisor I feel not only have I achieved my personal and professional learning objectives, but I have also fallen in love with the community I found at GirlForward. Each day I walked into my internship, I felt like I was always in a safe and inclusive space that wanted to hear everyone’s voice and genuinely took each word into consideration. It was a space I felt comfortable creating my personal project and, in turn, exploring and learning more about my own intersecting identities. This internship allowed me to grow, to share, and to learn from every girl and staff member I was privileged to share space with and provided me with an experience I can take with me into both my career and my personal life.

Special thanks to: Andrew Miller, Center for Experiential Learning, Loyola University Chicago
Emily Ramsdell, Communications Manager, GirlForward
Ashley Marine, Deputy Director, GirlForward

GirlForward’s Mission
GirlForward is a community of support dedicated to enhancing and creating opportunities for girls who identify as immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. GirlForward serves their community through three central programs:
1. Mentoring Program which pairs girls with a woman mentor to explore the “4Ws” (Wallet, World, Wisdom, and Wellness).
2. Education Program where girls are able to strengthen English and academic skills and explore identity through Camp GirlForward and Tutoring.
3. Safe Spaces Program allows girls to safely explore their identities and build community with other girls while accessing the resources they need through after school drop-in hours and other opportunities.

Mural from the Chicago Headquarters created by girls.

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