What it Means to Walk

I have spent the last eight weeks of the summer interning at a nonprofit called miraclefeet. Seen as the little nonprofit that can do, this organization works to increase access to proper treatment for children born with clubfoot in developing countries. Miraclefeet does this by creating partnerships with local healthcare providers in each country they operate in, and this creates a sustainable and affordable system for treatment of the disability. Clubfoot is the most common congenital birth defect in the world, and these children face stigma and discrimination in their own societies. Miraclefeet offers monetary, structural and organizational support to clinics operating in 13 countries around the world, and has provided treatment via the Ponseti method to over 10,000 children.

My internship title was Community Development so I worked closely with the philanthropy and development team while I was there. The large overarching project that encompassed most of my summer’s responsibilities was developing a specialized toolkit for miraclefeet volunteers to use during fundraisers. The goal was to make the volunteer (this term is used to describe people who do birthday parties or run races on behalf of miraclefeet) experience better and easier for both our organization and the volunteer. I conducted research on previous volunteer’s experiences working with miraclefeet so we could improve the process and interviewed other nonprofits to see how their volunteers used their fundraising kits. Toolkits were to include initial engagement with the donor, follow up, and actual engagement materials. Some smaller projects that were concurrent with the toolkit were to investigate a crowd-funding
site to see how miraclefeet could use its resources more successfully and to develop a community engagement strategy by looking for opportunities around the area for miraclefeet to get involved in.

Over the course of the eight weeks I developed skills that will carry me into my career in the nonprofit field. I completed all the tasks I laid out above and felt great about the skills I gained along the way. When I finished the volunteer toolkit it was awesome to see how all the grunt work I had done contributed to the final product- something I had been questioning. One thing I realized about myself was that it was harder to motivate myself with longer-term goals than I was expecting. I enjoyed having interspersed short-term goals, such as engagement opportunities, to continue to inspire my end result of the toolkit. Over the course of the internship I was also able to use donor database software, which will be good to put on future applications and resumes. I became more confident in initiating meetings and holding people accountable to tasks over the 8 weeks as well - an area I needed to grow in.

Although in the first couple weeks I struggled with the fact that I may not be making a difference, a few instances stand out to me where I felt that my work was certainly appreciated. One of the community engagement opportunities I created for miraclefeet revolved around a screening of a women’s world cup game and I was able to get miraclefeet a booth spot at the event. Although we only made $250 that night, we raised awareness and it has led to more opportunities down the road. Just by being there our Director of Philanthropy was able to connect with a local professional soccer club leading to an eventual partnership between miraclefeet and said club. It was this type of short-term goal achieving that helped motivate me throughout the summer. Since it was an 8-week project it was hard to feel confident that I was
making a difference the whole time, but successes such as the community engagement event were helpful. Secondly, in my penultimate week of the internship I was in the process of creating the physical engagement toolkit that will go on miraclefeet’s website and a member of the development team happened to catch glimpse of the first draft. Her tone and comments showed how appreciative she was of all the work I had put into the toolkit. This project was one that miraclefeet had wanted to do, and needed to do, for a while but due to lack of bandwidth was not high on the priority list. She thanked me for making their workload easier, she could envision how the toolkit I was making would make operations at miraclefeet run smoother – and that was the original goal of the project. Lastly, I learned something valuable after a low point of the internship. Someone became irritated after an email I sent and responded in an aggressive manner. From that I began to understand how to send a direct and strong email as well as how to handle and respond to people who are displeased with something. Especially at such a small organization, the power of an intern certainly goes farther than expected.

This internship provided me with some very good information about how I want nonprofit work to play out in my life. Working for an organization that is doing as much good as miraclefeet is doing is certainly what I want to do in life and this has pretty much solidified that thought in my head. I also discerned a couple more specifics about the nonprofit field that will impact my career goals later on. Miraclefeet is a very small organization still, and although it is growing rapidly both internally and externally, the office of 11 can still lack specific boundaries in terms of job description and bandwidth. I think I want to work for an organization that has gotten over the startup growing pains that miraclefeet is still going through after 4 years. One thing that I really came to admire about miraclefeet is their sustainable method of treatment
though and I want to work for an organization with a similar model later on. I have a lot of respect for miraclefeet because in many nonprofits that operate internationally it is easier for the organization to just come in and try and fix the problem rather than working with the local healthcare providers. The latter is the more sustainable method of treatment and this practice makes me really proud to have worked for miraclefeet this past summer.

I had a highly rewarding and enjoyable summer working as an intern at miraclefeet. I developed skills that will not only apply to my future work in the nonprofit field but will play out in my daily life and continuing schoolwork as well. Last but not least, I feel that I have become extremely well versed in the method of treating clubfoot and how life-changing said treatment can be.