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The Impact of Transnational Nonprofit Work on the Development of Becoming a Global Citizen

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Abstract

Global citizens dive into the culture of a country and adopt new ideology, customs, and traditions, while maintaining their own cultural identity. This paper explores how a nonprofit organization has the ability to provide the necessary resources for a volunteer to expand upon their global citizenry. Nonprofits were created for economic, historical, and professional reasons, then are divided into categories depending upon the goal of the organization. Volunteers choose to serve at nonprofits for social, personal, and professional reasons, but will all make an impact on the people they are serving, despite the reason. By volunteering with a transnational nonprofit organization, a volunteer has the ability to gain new knowledge regarding the country he or she is serving, and become a stronger global citizen. Furthermore, my own personal experience with For Kids' Sake was reviewed and how I learned about the culture of Bangladesh over three years. To conclude, transnational nonprofits should make it a priority for volunteers to be familiar with the country and who they are serving, to not only make an impact on those in need, but of the volunteers themselves.

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”—Mother Teresa.

An individual such as Mother Teresa spent most of her life volunteering her time to those in need. Although members of the world may not devote as much time as Mother Teresa did to helping others, there is still a strong desire of many to serve as a volunteer at nonprofit organizations. Many volunteers choose to serve at nonprofit organizations that focus on international issues. When volunteering at these transnational organizations, the individuals' eyes open to new cultures, ideas, and history of a country that they may have never been familiar with before, expanding upon the global citizenry attributes that they main already possess. In this paper, transnational nonprofit work will be examined, and how it can impact the development of becoming a global citizen.

In order to dive deeper into the topic of transnational nonprofit work, one may ask: what is a global citizen? With great research upon this question, Ron Israel, director of the Global Citizens' Initiative (TGCI) defined the mission of a global citizen as “...to help nation state and others engage in a process that solves global problems and builds a more inclusive sustainable world community,” (Israel, 2012). Global citizens immerse themselves into a variety of practices, beliefs, and customs of cultures in order to develop a deeper understanding of a community, yet do not abandon the traditions that one may have been born with (Israel, 2012). Global citizens have the ability to embrace all cultures that the world has to offer, and fight to promote values of equality. One may think that being global citizen is something that must be acquired through in depth study of a country's political, economic, social values—but that is not the case. According to Drew Alexander, we all are global citizens, but we seek whether or not to

contribute to the challenges and diversity that we face (2013). The largest challenge that one needs to overcome in order to follow a path of global citizenry is commitment to being aware of global issues, contributing to the ideas of how to better these concerns that countries may face (Alexander, 2013). For example, the Global Poverty Project developed a movement tilted “Global Citizen” for citizens that use their voices to end poverty by 2030 (McCarthy, 2018). This organization focuses on the improvement of a person’s quality of life, striving to change extreme poverty around the world. This movement is an excellent example of how one may develop into a contributing global citizen. By getting involved with campaigns, institutions, organizations, etc., a typical person has the ability to make a strong impact that may end up saving the life of someone in need.

Now that the definition of a global citizen has been established, there will be a look into a personal experience of global citizenry. For Kids’ Sake (FKS) is an organization that raises money for orphanages and schools in Bangladesh centered in Southern Illinois with international teams from Germany, Switzerland, and Japan (For Kids’ Sake, 2015). The goal of For Kids’ Sake is to support one of the poorest countries in the world by assisting young children in establishing education, healthcare, and shelter as they continue onto successful adults, something that may have been a challenge without the support of FKS (For Kids’ Sake, 2015). As a regular volunteer with the organization for nearly three year, there has been a first hand look at the work of a global citizen: director Shema Ruperto. Shema began working with FKS at age twenty-two as a newly college graduate. For Kids’ Sake is under the faith based organization, the Dayemi Tariqat. Shema was involved with the faith community since the age of fifteen, and was familiar with the work FKS did but had not pursued it (S. Ruperto, personal communication, April 2018).

With a college degree under her belt, she took on the role of coordinator of the For Kids' Sake Art Auction, an annual event that exhibited local and global art from artists of all ages. The challenge of having a successful art auction was difficult, but Shema realized the work that she was doing had a great outcome—to help kids in Bangladesh (S. Ruperto, personal communication, April 2018). When speaking to her, she realizes that the works she does can make such an impact on someones life everyday, whether it is from a child being able to have clean drinking water for the first time to one of her international colleagues hosting their first FKS event (S. Ruperto, personal communication, April 2018). Shema is the prime example of a global citizen—she has become involved with a Bangladeshi culture that is not similar to her own, learned their traditions, customs, and ways of life, then helped expand FKS to even more cultures to save support over 550 orphans and 4,000 students. Shema has taken on the large responsibility of maintaining her own identity and adopting into a culture that she was first unfamiliar with.

With a set definition of global citizenry decided, a glimpse into the world of nonprofit work will be analyzed. A question that arises is, why are there nonprofits? On an economic level, research has shown that nonprofits are more likely to use donors' money for a reliable service directly compared to a for-profit organization (Dimaggio and Anheir, 1990). With nonprofits directly showing where contributions will go (such as providing meals for children or reducing the cost of spaying a dog), this makes consumers more likely to place their money in a nonprofit organization versus a company that is not open with their spending (Dimaggio and Anheir, 1990). A historical context also takes place when examining the development of nonprofits in the world. Nonprofits improved functions in social welfare and aesthetic

environment in a market as a way for upper class status groups to control urban environments that may have been disruptive (Dimaggio and Anheir, 1990). In simpler terms, nonprofits were created by upper class citizens in order to raise money for poorer groups, in order to develop a safer environment for the community. In a professional environment, the work of nonprofits became popular due to the justifying the ideology of a nonprofit and of professionals. A nonprofit environment was deemed to fit a professional environment, such as a hospital or university, that allowed for a exercise of expertise for the common good (Dimaggio and Anheir, 1990). The creation of nonprofits allowed for the development of a community that employed economic, social, and professional standards that people were drawn towards.

There are currently eleven categories given to differentiate the various types of nonprofit organizations: animals, arts, culture, and humanities, community development, education, environment, health, human and civil rights, human services, international, research and public policy, and religion (Charity Navigator, 2016). Each of these categories are further subdivided into different causes, such as medical research or wildlife conservation (Charity Navigator, 2016). The process of evaluating a nonprofit for which category and cause they are placed in is not decided easily. The organization must be evaluated in three separate categories in order to have final placement. The activity code that an organization that is filed with the IRS is how the nonprofit classifies itself is first viewed, followed by an examination of the nonprofit's programs to determine the goals of the organization, and finally the nonprofit's financial information is evaluated (Charity Navigator, 2016). Once this is completed, the nonprofit will be placed into the proper criteria. Although this paper may focus on the impact that transnational nonprofit work

has, when looking at all the types of categories of nonprofits, they all share one common goal: to serve a certain community and better that community by the help of others.

Nonprofits need the work of volunteers in order to be successful and help those in need. But how do these nonprofits get volunteers? The answer to this question is very broad and ultimately depends upon the one who answers it, but there are three general reasons why one may choose to volunteer: for their career, for a boost in social life, and for personal reasons. First looking into the career aspect of volunteering, many people (especially students) decide to give time to an organization due to the impact it may make in their future employment opportunities. A study conducted by Clare Holdsworth examined why students choose to volunteer. After a survey was completed by a variety of students, it was found that there was a 1.40 odds ratio for students stating that they volunteer due to employability (Holdsworth, 2010). The high odds ratio of 1.40 means that an event is more likely to occur. Jon, a participant in the study stated, “I got into volunteering...and the reason why I did was because I kind of felt the impending you know me having to get a job, and I didn’t really have that much experience,” (Holdsworth, 2010). In a study completed by The Corporation for National and Community Service, it was found that there is some correlation between higher chances of employment and time spent volunteering (Spera, Ghertner, Nerino, & DiTomasso, 2013). In addition, it was found that the relationship between volunteering and employment may help “level the playing fields” between individuals who may have low education levels but volunteer versus individuals who do not volunteer but have higher levels of education (Spera et. al, 2013).

Secondly, an increase in social life may be a reason why one chooses to devote time as a volunteer. When volunteering, you can connect with the community and those who are apart of

it (Robinson & Segal, 2018). When volunteering, the opportunity to make friends, expand networks, and boost social skills are increased (Robinson & Segal, 2013). To strengthen existing friendships and make new relationships people should commit to a shared activity together, such as volunteering weekly at an organization (Holdsworth, 2010). In addition, not all people are naturally outgoing, and by consistently meeting with the same group of volunteers, the social ability of one who may be lacking an outgoing personality will increase due to the constant support while working on a common goal (Robinson & Segal, 2013).

Lastly, volunteering has a personal component that boosts mental and physical health. In fast paced lifestyles that make up most of today's world, high rates of stress, anxiety and depression occur (Robinson & Segal, 2013). Volunteer work has been found to combat these life problems due to constant interaction with others to develop a support system and release stress (Robinson & Segal, 2013). Self-confidence can also be boosted when volunteer, as it gives a sense of pride and accomplishment when working towards a goal for an organization, creating a positive outlook on ones life (Sturges, Sweeney, & Pickar, 1979). Many older adults choose to volunteer in order to provide a sense of purpose in life due to helping others, in addition to providing mental stimulation (Robinson & Segal, 2013). Older adult volunteers tend to walk more, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills compared to the elderly that choose not to volunteer (Robinson & Segal, 2013). From these three main categories listed to why one may volunteer, thousands of more reasons may develop. A volunteer's reason may be a combination of all three categories, only two, or may be something very personalized that specifically pertains to the volunteer. No matter the reason for

volunteering, the help that is given makes an impact on the organization and the one who chooses to help.

To pull it all together, nonprofit volunteering can be an excellent way to strengthen global citizenry. The United States, considered a first world country, has many volunteers that look into helping countries that are considered a third world status, such as the organization mentioned before, For Kids' Sake. As a volunteer for a transnational organization, the volunteer is opening up their mind to a country's culture, political policies, traditions, and values. By doing this, a volunteer has further developed their global citizen status. Transnational volunteer work allows for global citizens to "see themselves as part of an emerging world community, and whose actions help shape the community's values and practices," (Israel, 2012). A global citizen values the country for what it is, and does not attempt to change the people they are helping, but to improve the circumstances that were put onto them, much of which nonprofits have the financial ability to assist with (Drucker, 1990). Nonprofit organizations provide the framework for a volunteer to find a way to help in the world, then further guide the volunteer to a path of open-mindedness and cultural appreciation for a community in need.

As someone who has devoted many hours into volunteer work, we will now take a look into my personal experience with transnational nonprofit work. When I first arrived at Southern Illinois University, I knew I needed to fulfill requirements for a scholarship I received by completing volunteer hours. After a year of participating in sporadic volunteer events to achieve my necessary hour requirements, I knew I wanted to find an organization where I could constantly volunteer. After a search through a list of volunteer organizations, I came across For

Kids' Sake. At first, I thought it may be just a one time volunteer opportunity, but it turned into an activity that turned into a three year commitment.

When I first began volunteering for the organization, I knew very little about it. Shema gave me the general overview of the organization, stating that the main goal of FKS is to help orphans and students in Bangladesh. My volunteer tasks at first were very simple, such as addressing envelopes, folding brochures, and other typical office tasks. As I realized that I wanted to continue on with volunteer work at FKS, my tasks grew. My main roles now are volunteer coordinator for the annual 5K race and raffle/basket coordinator for the annual art auction event that the organization holds. In addition, I became president for the registered student organization (RSO) on campus, Students' For Kids' Sake, which provided a way for students to become more familiar with the work that FKS does. Being committed to the organization has allowed me to develop leadership qualities that are necessary for future employment opportunities.

Becoming president of the Students' For Kids' Sake RSO also has allowed me to expand the knowledge I have learned at FKS those at Southern Illinois University. Before the creation of the RSO, very few students were familiar with the organization. After three years, the RSO has expanded greatly, developing servant leaders that desire to learn more about the organization they are apart of, instead of just having a filler on a resume. Being a leader for this organization has allowed me to demonstrate what a global citizen is, and how others can work to further expand their global servant skills by volunteering with FKS. Additionally, being apart of the RSO has allowed for relationships to strengthen among other RSOs that have similar goals with global citizenry. For example, Students' For Kids' Sake participated in an event titled "Water for

the World”, hosted by the United Nations Association. This event emphasized the importance of everyone being able to obtain clean drinking water. Using the ideas of different organizations allowed for a cohesive network of different ideas that perfectly coincided towards the ultimate goal of informing the community of the current water crisis. Working with other organizations in the community has shown me that there are like-minded individuals who desire to see a change in the world—one where individuals accept those for who they are, while still maintaining their own cultural identity.

Although gaining volunteer experience fulfilled scholarship requirements and provided information to put on my resume, the most important quality that I received during my time with FKS is the new knowledge I gathered about Bangladesh, and how my work with the organization can make a large impact. I knew very little regarding Bangladesh before I began my time with FKS, but after spending three years with the organization I have learned an abundance of information regarding the culture of the country. I learned about what type of food the orphans eat to what traditional games they play during break periods to how Bangladesh is has accepted over six hundred thousand Myanmar refugees, despite being one of the poorest countries in the world. I became immersed in the culture that is on the other side of the world, discovering new information regarding people that I may never meet. I remember learning one story about a man named Rahim. He was a orphan at one of the facilities due to his father dying and his mother not having enough money to take care of the whole family. Despite this, he grew up to be a doctor, becoming the physician for the very orphanage that raised him. Stories like Rahim’s inspire me to keep volunteering for transnational organizations, because I have the ability to see how my work can make an impact on someone who desperately needs help. Although at first I used FKS

as a way to fulfill volunteer requirements and strengthen my resume, it has done so much more in allowing me to learn about a country that I never have before researched. I believe that my work with For Kids' Sake has allowed me to expand my cultural awareness, developing me into a strong global citizen.

In conclusion, I believe that transnational nonprofit organizations should make it a priority that volunteers are aware of who they are contributing their time for and what impact their contributions make to those that are need. Learning how a volunteer's work can change someones life not only makes the volunteer feel accomplished, but he or she learns about the culture and traditions of those in need, expanding their global citizenry. Nonprofit organizations provide an excellent opportunity to allow one to make a difference in the world by working towards change in human rights, gender inequalities, healthcare resources, etc. and developing a volunteer into a well knowledgeable global citizen.

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