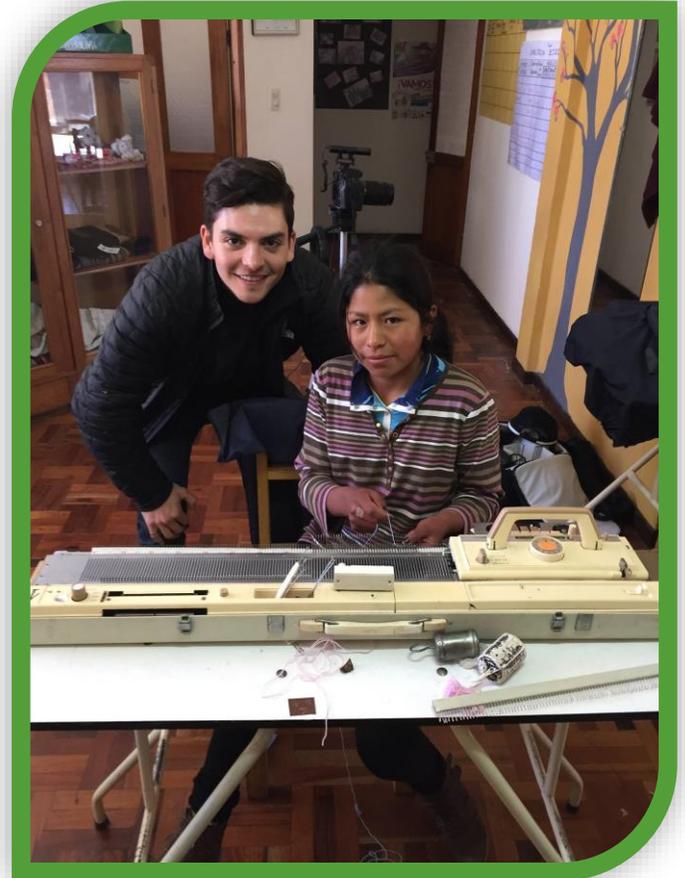


El Poder en Poder and Nanaka, Projects in El Alto and La Paz, Bolivia



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2017 McBurney Fellows
McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy

Project Overview

Student names: Victoria Taittinger, Natalia Trujillo & Armando Ordorica de la Torre
 Departments: Political Science & Environment, History, Electric & Software Engineering
 Organization: Enda el Alto
 Location: El Alto & La Paz, Bolivia
 Mentor: Professor Paola Perez-Aleman
 Fellowship Duration: June 8th to August 11th, 2017



About the McBurney Fellowship Program

Through McGill's Institute for Health and Social Policy, the McBurney Fellowship Program supports students in international service programs related to health and social policy in Latin America. McBurney Fellows serve abroad in organizations working to meet the basic needs of local populations. One key aspect of this fellowship is its mandate to make a significant contribution to improving the health and social conditions of poor and marginalized populations through the delivery of concrete and measurable interventions. Students and their mentors identify issues, make connections with local organizations, and develop a strategy for the fellowship. The views expressed in this document are the opinions of the fellow, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the IHSP.

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Fellowship Rationale

The McBurney fellowship gave all three of us the opportunity to confront the many realities behind actually implementing a social project internationally. The experience impacted us in different ways, be it through the challenge of finding invested partners on the ground (outside our partner organization) or through the logistics of creating new programs.

The McBurney fellowship was a part of larger serviced-based project in that it enabled SLASummit, a student-run Montreal based organization which Armando and Victoria are members of, to develop and strengthen the implementation of selected projects in Bolivia. One such project was created by Natalia and her team during the conference and adjoining project competition which SLASummit hosts for university students dedicated to social entrepreneurship.

The motivation behind our applying to the McBurney Fellowship was threefold. To confront the viability of SLASummit's model and improve on it, to evaluate the impact of the conference's winning project through the executive and winning team's involvement, and most importantly to develop new projects independently or with SLASummit in order to best partner with the community and our local partner NGO.

Our partner NGO, Enda el Alto, was chosen by the SLASummit projects team through a selection based on a set of parameters which took into account such thing as location, breath of projects and management structure. Enda el Alto is an organization dedicated to tackling health and social issues in in its community. Throughout the year we worked to develop a relationship with Enda el Alto proposing projects that they could implement in the future and learning more about the community they work with to see how we could best contribute to their mission.

Objectives

The way in which I envisioned adding on to this project and Enda's unparalleled experience was through finding ways to cut this cycle short. Rather than presenting possible Band-Aid solution, the idea was to open up possibilities by not letting the girls return to the same life and opportunities or lack thereof which in many cases results in relapses and continued violence. – Victoria

Our project had multiple objectives. My part of the project fit into a larger goal to provide alternative sources of therapy for girls dealing with substance abuse, physical and emotional abuse, behavioural problems and more. I first intended to develop self-defence classes with el Poder en Poder. This would give the girls a physical activity but also a new method to work on emotion control, such as learning to manage outbursts of anger. I wanted to give the girls a chance to experience a different outlet - aside from their regular individual or group therapy sessions. - Natalia

My goal was to investigate the power dynamics in the community and identify key local leaders and stakeholders that would be crucial in guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of the project. I wanted to find leaders in the financial, social, art, and legal industries to be able to create a network among them that would be strong enough in a way that once we left, they would be interested enough in the project themselves, thus ensuring proper maintenance and sustainability. - Armando

Background/Context

The el Alto community faces quite a few challenges, most if not all of which are inter-connected. Poverty, with unemployment up again following the initial progress seen after a recent electoral change, and insecurity, with families in precarious situations living in unregulated properties on



the hills of la Paz, are concerning. Adding to this we see alcoholism affecting people as young as 11, as well as glue sniffing and other substance use pervasive across generations, the issue of addictions is seen to vary according to socio-economic background.

One of the most notable issues is that of intra-community violence, present even in the family nucleus. Violence against women isn't novel in many Latin American communities, often labeled as machista. Although the abuse and mistreatment of women and young girls is not foreign to other communities, the legal situation is drastic for plaintiffs and survivors in Bolivia. Not only do its laws pardon rapists who marry the women they've abused, even those as young as 14, but the courts are staffed with often inexperienced lawyers who expedite or mishandle cases.

Young girls, the socially and economically most vulnerable group in el Alto, are hardest hit by a combination of these issues. Not only do the issues they face impact their personal life but also the future of their whole community.

Activities

During our time in Bolivia we planned many bonding activities with the girls in residence at Enda's rehabilitation house Fraternidad such as pancake making, time capsules and story sharing activities.

We also helped the NGO carry out its activities, assisted with consultation and conducted a series of informative interviews of various actors internal to and external to the NGO.

More importantly we worked to develop the 2017 SLASummit winning project El Poder en Poder and new projects that we found the need for such as Nanaka.

Project Work Detailed:

El Poder en Poder – Natalia:

Once on the ground, I saw there were many ways to test out alternative therapies and develop the project. As a team, we had a lot of flexibility from Enda on trying new activities. We experimented with meditation, writing letters, and playing sports (mostly soccer and volleyball).



I realized that because we had complete control over the activities, we had to work with what our individual skill sets were, unless we wanted to hire professionals. The girls were receptive to trying new things and sharing how they felt about each activity or what thoughts/emotions the activities invoked. For example, with meditation, I was a part of two sessions with Armando and one time with an NGO director. In the first meditation, the girls had difficulty concentrating

and would laugh. The second and third time, there was a lot more quiet reflection and deep insights afterwards. They reported feeling calmer and finally taking a moment to focus on their feelings.

In terms of long term sustainability, I met with the NGO directors in both houses, a self-defence instructor, a sport-therapy organizations (APEA), and a yoga studio. As talking with the directors evolved, I realized that it would be interesting to try different approaches to therapy and they were most excited about yoga and meditation. This is because it could be used for both the girls and the families. They could both benefit from learning to control outbursts of emotion through meditation/breathing techniques. The two directors in the Fraternidad house also said they were willing to be trained in these techniques themselves. This was a major advantage because they have both been in Enda for multiple years and would be willing to train future personnel, ensuring sustainability.

Nanaka – Victoria & Armando:

Based on talks with the NGO and other key stakeholders around the Enda community, we realized the lack of employment opportunities that the girls have in both of the houses. On one hand, many of the girls have a criminal record, which prevents them from searching for jobs openly because a simple investigation would result in showcasing their history of illegal activities mainly related to petty theft, addiction-related issues, and prostitution. On the other hand, the girls that Enda deals with usually lack professional/technical training, which also widens the gap between their skills' supply and the labour market's demand.

In an attempt to bridge this, we brought some key business stakeholders from the community to promote programs that would help the NGO fill the gaps in the services they offered in regards to employability training. With the aim of developing our relationship with the girls, giving them new skills and encouraging self-confidence as part of their healing progress, we began computer lessons in website development after purchasing laptops.

In this context we met Marco Martinez, the CEO of Innovative Apps (<http://www.innovapedidos.com/>) at a conference organized at Google where he was one of the keynote speakers talking about his company's experience:

a software startup that specializes in bringing ecommerce solutions to traditional businesses.

After some negotiation, he agreed to provide Enda with an ecommerce platform for free to be able to put some of their products online, particularly focusing on “artesantias” that the girls make



during Enda workshops. They are able to produce very high-quality handmade garments that they are having difficulty selling in the local market. After introducing Marco (Innovative Apps CEO) to Patty (NGO director) and Marcia (director of the “Artesanias” workshop), the project of putting their products up on the online market is currently in progress. Another key player that was added into the equation was Claudia Patino, who is a Bolivian fashion designer that will participate in this social business as a leader in her area of expertise. Nanaka, meaning “us” in Aymara (the local indigenous language) is the name of this project that is currently beginning to ramp up, historically putting high quality handmade crafts available for markets in richer countries like North America.

Challenges and Successes

We were happy to develop a strong relationship with the girls and to gain a greater understanding of the work that Enda does and how we can be most useful. We achieved our intentions to develop new potential projects and help set up the winning project el Poder en Poder.

It was also great to bring new things to the table which we hadn’t originally thought of, such as the computer science lessons, and to be able to develop projects in other directions.

Victoria:

Time was definitely a challenge I identified, combined with the pace of work at the NGO and the natural speed of things in Bolivia. Thankfully the NGO was open to change and extremely welcoming despite some little misunderstandings.

I personally also found it difficult to be assertive at times and strike the balance between being a facilitator, a leader, a friend and a volunteer.

Moreover getting some girls to participate, although most were enthusiastic and I felt were happy to have us there, there was a case of one student who was very reluctant at first to learn and participate. However, we happily managed to win her over through an activity she loved (football, which they all love!) and then by encouraging her to excel throughout in the computer course.

Natalia:

I accomplished getting to know the girls and gaining their trust in such a way that they felt they could share their feelings. I also finalized the idea for my SLASummit project. Initially I had set out to run trial sessions for personal defense classes but because the project changed focus to yoga/meditation, I was not able to run a trial run. However, extra funding gathered through a crowdfunding initiative will be used to train instructors in martial arts in the fall so that they may be dispense the designed classes.

Armando:

There are many processes that take time, especially when they involve bureaucracy. I believe that our strategy -- working on creating a network of people who would be interested in running the

projects driven by monetary incentives -- was a very good idea when it comes to ensuring long-term sustainability rather than trying to fully implement the project on our own, especially knowing that we would only be there for a very short amount of time.

It takes time and effort for stakeholders to begin trusting you and this is crucial if their genuine investment and interest is necessary for the project to succeed.

Questions Raised

Victoria & Armando:

Building a strong basis with different actors founded on respect by working and communicating as equals was a great approach. Without a doubt, working hand in hand and in constant consultation with Enda (i.e. partner NGO) was key to our getting along and initiating successful projects.

Taking initiative, diverging from the initial plan and adapting to needs and circumstances worked well and made for more developed ideas and plans.

It was at times difficult to lead projects due to a lack of clarity from NGO management and an attitude of complete acceptance of most of our ideas, which made it hard to adapt them in the best way possible for the benefit of the NGO and its community.

Natalia:

The thing that worked most for the fellowship was open communication with the NGO directors. We had an idea of what we wanted to do while there but those ideas took different turns when we asked the directors for their opinion. This allowed me to shape my idea according to the real needs and expectations of Enda.



Training and Mentoring

Training/mentoring on site

Describe the training you received while at the organization. Describe the role your faculty mentor played during your fellowship. Did you have sufficient training/mentoring to complete your work? Did you have the resources you need to succeed?

Through working in SLASummit Armando and Victoria have been able to learn a lot about event and project management. Natalia was also able to develop a great project and plan through participation in the SLASummit 2017 conference.

In terms of the organization, most of the training we received from was through our own inquisitiveness and throughout our interviews.

We find it would be a good idea to integrate training into the McBurney Fellowship (e.g. pitching ideas training, communication and assessment skills...) and that perhaps we could've received more training from the NGO, despite the fact that we did work alongside them for the year.

Training/mentoring from McGill supervisor

Describe the role your faculty mentor played during your fellowship.

Our mentor was always available for consultations, and challenged ideas and projects throughout our conference and after, giving us an insight into the many phases a project must go through.

We perhaps could have benefited from more training and pre-departure work in looking for partners prior to arrival and in initiation project development sooner.

What did you learn?

Victoria:

I really find that you have to set aims high and really care about the people you will be working for and with. If you don't feel you are invested before flying out then you might as well not go. That kind of enthusiasm will push you forward, and although it may be blinding, if you equilibrate it with an open mind and some caution I think things can turn out pretty well. You can always be more careful but you don't want to stifle creativity because when you are working with a great team and people with different perspectives, if you all share a little bit of passion then you can have a positive impact through innovation. Given that NGOs in Bolivia are not allowed to receive funding from private Bolivian organizations and donors, I find that Enda's approach of welcoming new actors is fantastic. I think it's best to work with people on projects where you share a similar mindset or philosophy, however you don't want to fall into a constant narrative either. More than learning, this experience confirmed to me that social entrepreneurship and innovation is what I want to dedicate myself to.

Natalia:

I learned about the importance of having an open mind. Bolivia as a country is different from anything I'd experienced traveling before. However, there is a lot to learn from living the experience with an open mind without being scared of the unknown. In regard to the NGO, the girls living there were very smart and could gauge the way you treated them. They had strict rules to follow in regards to looking outside (not allowed for fear they were planning an escape), using

technology, and more. They knew if you were someone they could manipulate into doing what they want. They never did it with ill intent but it was important to understand your position as an outsider and make sure that everything they are used to in a normal basis continued even under my total supervision. Especially because it was about respect, they were well behaved and more open if they respected you but didn't necessarily fear you.

Next time, I would say that planning activities to do beforehand is really important. I was in charge of coming up with things to do and the more I planned, the better it was for me.

Armando:

Networking is extremely important. Understanding the communication channels and methods that society has are among the most crucial aspects to consider. Accomplishing true involvement of key leaders in a society is the only way that social movements and big projects can take place and remain after disruptions that may occur during the process.

Community Implications and Further Work

We contributed by helping the NGO develop its program in new ways and by assisting them with our human and financial capital. Our association with Enda throughout this year and hopefully through continuing years has brought greater attention to their work and mission as well as support through our crowdfunding campaigns and thanks to the SLASummit and winning teams.



We hope that in the long term the web development courses we kick started and will try to maintain and fund will allow the girls to develop their skills and improve their chances of breaking the cycle of violence and poverty they found themselves in.

In the short term we can account for achievement and greater self-confidence through the activities we organized as well as excitement for the health and fitness project el Poder en Poder and Nanaka (our computer and marketing based project).

How might your fellowship make a difference for the people you worked with?

We believe that community members would care in that the work we did was solely based with their interest in mind and with as much community acceptance as we could get.

Considering our plan was to improve on the existing work that Enda has been carrying out mostly successfully for 20 years, given that Enda is an NGO native to el Alto and staffed by its community, and that we sought to bring new opportunities not via charity but through education, I find that ours is a non-intrusive and beneficial initiative.

We hope that our project has the impact we wish for the girls concerned, their families, their whole community and the NGO. However it is too soon to say that it has, as besides initiating the project and building a relationship, there still remains a lot of work to be done. This is why we plan to continue working with Enda and the community and plan to return to Bolivia, as well as strengthen the relationship between SLASummit and Enda.

What would the next steps be to translate your findings into policy action (if not already happening)?

More freedom for NGOs in Bolivia is needed in order for them to be able to carry out their mission. The government ought to allow foreign and private assistance in Bolivia, as well as allow for tax deduction when giving a charitable donation. Bolivia's tight control on social and health assistance is stifling progress and change.

One of the main issues faced by girls who find themselves in life and health threatening situations due to violence and abuse, such as the girls welcomed by Enda, is that of legal protection. The laws as they stand work in the favor of perpetrators and offer little legal recourse to plaintiffs.

Furthermore the government's approach to social homes and care for children who have been abused or suffer from addictions is wrong. They are often wholly separated from their family and cut from their community which leaves them abandoned and more vulnerable in overcrowded and understaffed centers or orphanages. Encouraging new and diversified approaches which place reintegration post care at the center is key.

It is hard as individuals in democracies to push for legal and political reforms, and it is even harder for foreigners to push for them in semi-democracies like Bolivia. However, raising awareness is a potential recourse for us to push for policy change.

Program Evaluation

Armando:

How did this fellowship further your academic or career goals?

I will eternally be thankful to the McBurney Fellowship for this eye-opening experience. It is mind-blowing to see how the motivations that drive people in different cultures may be similar in the big picture but also completely different in a more granular level. I learned a lot about how antagonistic different cultures can be and how much your social environment affects your biases and overall perspective of life, including traditions, fears, and aspirations.

What did you value most about the fellowship?

The flexibility that McBurney offers encourages the implementation of projects using the grass-roots approach, creating a project development environment with the community and not for them, making their voices the ones that really determine where the boat steers.

Natalia:

How did this fellowship further your academic or career goals?

This fellowship furthered my career goals because I worked first-hand on project implementation with an evolving project. I learned what it was to change an initial idea based on the necessities on the ground. It fits in perfectly with an international development career because observing, learning and reflecting on the everyday necessities of the people you want to impact is imperative to a project's success.

What did you value most about the fellowship?

I valued most the flexibility given by McBurney, as it is understood that not everything will go as previously planned and I had the freedom to experiment once there.

Any advice for future fellows?

I would advise that future fellows research not only their NGOs but also the community, the country and its history. This would allow the fellow to know what to expect not only within their work but also within their social lives. The best thing to do is to immerse yourself completely in your surroundings.

Any suggestions for how to improve the program?

My project part is part of a larger program alongside SLASummit. The next steps include getting two Enda members started on Yoga classes (the studio and the staff members are already picked). Starting in September, they will begin classes twice a week until they are comfortable with yoga and meditation therein. Then, they will be able to replicate what they are learning for the girls. We will also use the self-defence instructor I talked to for a trial period on self-defence. The instructor will come once a month for 6 months until my team goes back to Enda in February. Then, we will evaluate the impact of both the yoga and self-defence and re-evaluate what the best combination for alternative therapy is.

I would recommend this organization to other fellows if they were interested in teaching a specific activity/had a specialty they wanted to share with the girls. They would need to know how to teach that activity and how to command the respect necessary to teach it.

Victoria:

How did this fellowship further your academic or career goals?

- It gave me an opportunity to assess my yearlong work in projects with SLASummit and to evaluate our community selection with my project partner, as well as our approach and philosophy.
- It allowed me to further my social entrepreneurship aspirations and gain more experience.

What did you value most about the fellowship?

- The opportunity to work abroad and with different people in a great organization.
- I loved the flexibility of the fellowship and how it is based on trust.
- It was great to see the team effort and dedication that went into this project.

Any advice for future fellows?

- Analyze the different components of each of the goals you set yourself out to achieve and see which ones you can meet before you set off abroad.
- Communicate as clearly as possible with your teammates if any and whoever else might be involved in your project (especially if they are abroad).
- Set skype meetings or others (if pertinent) prior to departure.

How useful was it to interact with other fellows?

- Within our team it was useful to work together, as we have complimentary skills.
- It's always interesting to confront different viewpoints.
- It would be great to interact with fellows outside of our project as well.

Any suggestions for how to improve the program?

- Have an option to personally present project pre-departure to McGill community or other actors for suggestions.
- Have a McBurney associated mentor with skills that match your project aims and goals assigned on top of selected mentor.
- Have an option to write a research paper for McBurney.

Was your project part of a larger/ongoing program?

This project was for us part of a larger SLASummit initiative. We hope to have returning projects to Bolivia in our future editions and our winning team is scheduled to go back to Bolivia in winter of 2018 as well as continue to implement their project in the meantime.

We also plan to develop the computing classes, find external funding and potentially developed other interlinked projects with Enda.

I would recommend working with McBurney, it's a great and really encouraging opportunity to implement a project and work towards something you believe in. It's a very flexible and open fellowship, as long as you have a project that aims to further health and social development in Latin America and are determined to try and do so then McBurney can support you. I also think that participating in the SLASummit conference is a great way to prepare for this fellowship.