Who did you work with and what did you do?

I made a plan for child sponsorship through orphan care centers and outlined some sustainable projects and ideas that could be implemented. One of the biggest lessons that I came away with was that the project is going to be very different than I expected. I didn’t factor the time and communication barriers that were persistent throughout the practicum hours and continue today.

I had planned on focusing on three orphan care centers, but I found one to have a sponsorship program already in place with sufficient funding coming in for all of the children. The other two sites were St. America Orphan Care and Development Center (St. Ameria’s) in Uganda and YWAM Mercy Development (YMD) in Ethiopia. Images and brief biographies were collected from each child at YMD and the majority of the children of St. Ameria’s.

What were challenges you observed or faced?

Both directors, Edith (St. Ameria’s) and Abdissa (YMD) were optimistic about the future, but worried about funding sources. They both wanted their children to succeed as healthy members of society, but were worried that they would grow up to be too old to remain at the centers and have trouble integrating in society. There was an interesting situation at YMD involving a girl who has already graduated from university, but is still living at the center. In fact, more than two of the girls living there are over twenty years old, which is old enough to work and provide for themselves. I found that psychological preparedness is necessary to implement at the centers in addition to economical and physical development.
One of the greatest challenges is the communication barrier between languages and cultures. English was a common language, but when it is not fluent, it is very difficult to communicate more complex ideas. I found myself frustrated at first trying to get points across. Cultural barriers were also difficult to overcome. Edith and Obwin-Wilson (St. America’s headmaster) always wanted to treat everything in formal ways. They wanted to be in every video clip and organize every photo when I was looking for more candid and realistic exposure to the children and their classroom experiences. I had to be strong and direct, but it ended up working out very well. At the end of my two weeks with Edith and Obwin-Wilson, we had discussed ideas on scholarships, vocational training, and local internships. I didn’t know if anything made sense until the last day when Edith told me she was already on the lookout for a sewing machine for the girls. After all of the frustration and initial miscommunication at both orphan care centers, I was able to fully convey and collect ideas with Edith and Abdissa.

**Concluding Thoughts?**

My practicum experience really opened my eyes to the reality of working in the non-profit sector. I want to start a non-profit for my thesis project and am beginning to realize how difficult this task is. Not only are the logistics a nightmare, it is hard to find all the time that I need to start the non-profit while spending time with my family and working full time. I am also realizing that it is going to be better to start small. I am someone who plans a whole vision for something in a matter of months, but I can’t get ahead of myself. I need to remain grounded and take one step at a time. It can be frustrating to do so, but in order to succeed, it will be necessary. It has been easy to get carried away with everything I want to do, so it is a little bit disappointing to slow down, but in the end, I will be better for it, and so will the organization.