**Summer Bash 2020**

Concluding Reflection

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After working with the Summer Bash in 2018 as part of the Canada Summer Jobs Grant, I was delighted to have the opportunity to return to the team this summer. While our goal remained the same – to bring folks together and celebrate the community – the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented an incredible challenge for event planning. This unique situation has created an incredibly unique opportunity for personal and professional growth.

Despite one’s best efforts, event planning is never without some uncertainties. This summer, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic created a situation awash with uncertainty that was constantly evolving. Particularly during the earlier stages of the pandemic, it seemed that restrictions and guidelines from governments and public health authorities were changing weekly. In consequence, planning for future events required initial development of a rough framework in advance that was then filled in based on the current situation closer to the event date.

Working as part of the organizing team for the Summer Bash this summer has certainly required me to become more nimble and more adaptable in event planning. I was constantly having to re-evaluate our current circumstances and make adaptations were necessary. Between adapting our movie nights to drive-in events and making changes to everything from the distance between cars to the onboarding of volunteers, I learned a great deal about remaining flexible and keeping an open mind.

Another significant consequence of event planning during the COVID-19 pandemic was the need to critically evaluate every aspect of an event from a health and safety perspective. Health and safety at events this year was no longer just a matter of emergency first aid, but was integrated into everything we did. While I tend to big a ‘big picture’ thinker, it forced me to consider our events on the smallest scale.

To this end, I learned a great deal working with the Regina Folk Festival on our drive-in concerts. Everything was considered, from disinfecting the microphones between speakers to distancing performers on stage. It was all of these precautions that allowed us to successfully host more events this summer than any other community organization in Canada.

The Regina Folk Festival concerts also presented a very unique opportunity to shadow the audio technician, lighting technician, and stage manager to learn about their roles in event production. I gained a much greater appreciation of their respective roles, from balancing microphone levels for incredible output sound to using lighting effects to reflect the energy of the performance on stage. I was even given the chance to control the lighting board during one of the matinee shows!

Throughout the summer, one of my primary tasks with the Summer Bash was attracting, negotiating, and maintaining relationships with sponsors. Given the extreme, negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on many local businesses, this required a strategic approach with a focus on attracting funding from businesses that had not been adversely affected. A primary goal was also to create a platform for struggling businesses to continue engaging with the community, especially when many of their doors remained closed.

Given the inability to meet with potential sponsors in-person, I gained experience making pitches to companies over the phone, with follow-up in writing over email. I developed a sponsorship package to distribute to companies and worked to tailor the sponsorship pitches to each company to show alignment between their mission and our event, and between their market and our audience.

This summer I was also able to continue developing my graphic design skills. Working on the ‘Logoist’ design platform, I helped to design artwork for social media posts, graphics for our event tickets, advertisements for newspapers, flyers for distribution to thousands of households, and posters for around town. In the process, I learned more about how to create my own vector graphics, how to better apply colour theory for visually appealing artwork, and how to draw focus to certain aspects of an image.

All of the skills that I gained working with the Summer Bash are pertinent to my ongoing volunteer work with other non-profit groups and are undoubtedly transferrable to future employment opportunities. The Summer Bash has allowed exposure to so many different tasks – from graphic design and production lighting to emergency management and media relations – that have allowed for professional development in a multitude of areas.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to work as part of the 2020 Summer Bash team and am thankful for the professional and personal development that it has offered me.