

Report on placement for AP/SOSC 4046 6.0 Social economy practicum (2014-15)

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In 2014-2015, I carried out a community-based learning experience in the social economy at Warden Woods Community Centre, (Warden Woods, Scarborough). I take this opportunity to reflect on my hands-on experience in a grass-root community organization that I was able to participate in through the course SOSC 4046 The Social Economy Practicum in the Business & Society Program, Department of Social Science.

In this course, it became clear to me that for racially marginalized communities to address economic and social issues they must also use economic alternatives. My experience was unique because, as an African Canadian and a resident in a marginalized community, I was able to bring my lived experience into the work. So much of my own life's struggle seemed distinct from studying business and society; however in this practicum I was able to connect my personal experience to the social economy. .

I was placed in a community-led organization, Warden Woods, a multi-purpose non-profit organization, which was exploring the transformation of one of their units, the Scarborough Conflict Resolution Services (SCRS), into a social enterprise to ensure it recovered its costs. During my placement I came to see that social economy organizations work to better the lives of marginalized people through capturing economic resources to assist neglected communities. In my view, social economy organizations that have the greatest impact on the community are those who use alternative economics. This leads to untapped human capital and

knowledge being unearthed from within the community and one begins to see that economic development can occur from the grassroots level. Warden Woods' affiliation with York University enabled us as students to experience how decisions are made in social economy organizations and, while they are not perfect, this learning enhanced our experiential education. Warden Woods debunks the misconception that not-for-profit organizations are satisfied with government subsidies or unreliable hand-outs and that they were interested in introducing fee-based services to the community. Furthermore, I believe that not-for-profit organizations reflect the members of their community. The people I met in these organizations and community individuals are not looking for hand-outs but rather for opportunities to address their own social and economic issues.

As a student being involved in the attempt to address economic and social problems through this placement was very exciting. In working on my assigned tasks and as part of a group, I became an instrumental part of the creative process which also allowed me to put what I had learned in seminars into practice in the real world. I have studied many theoretical aspects of business and society but this practicum helped us to engage with community and alternatives in a real way. Our work at Warden Woods was interesting: we mapped out the social enterprise universe, compared models of social enterprises in the GTA, developed the marketing materials and assisted in defining the SCRS business opportunity.

At the completion of my placement, I had increased my self-confidence and I have a better understanding of the social and economic exclusion affecting low-income communities in the GTA, on which I am able to take a critical perspective. This new learning stems from being a student in the social economy practicum where my academic and real-world knowledge are now connected. My only regret is that I may have taken away more in experience than I was able to

give back to the social economy organization. Thank you to all in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies and Department of Social Science at York University who made this practicum course possible for us students.