

Reflection

My name is Ann Garcia, and I am writing this reflection as separate from the summary I wrote on our service-learning project in which we created promotional material for Place4Us. While the campaign was a result of a joint effort between myself and two classmates, this reflection is from my own thoughts, and thus, I do not wish to represent my classmates without their input.

Admittedly, at the beginning, my group and I felt we had gotten off on the wrong foot with the folks at the Earth Viability Center (EVC). Though our StratComm professor allowed us to select the clients we worked with, we were not given details on what specifically the client wanted, and so we tried to come to our first couple of meetings with our own ideas of how we could provide value to the organization and their platform, Place4Us. Our ideas entailed the use of social media such as Twitter or a Discord server to convert current Internet users into Place4Us users. However, in discussion with our client, we quickly learned this would not be conducive to our client's goals of growing Place4Us and its userbase, and might instead distract potential new users from using the platform itself. This makes complete sense now, but at the time, we thought perhaps we had slighted our client by suggesting we waste each other's time with a campaign that wouldn't accomplish our client's goals.

In an attempt to course correct, we changed our approach, coming to our weekly meetings with the intent to listen more than speak so that we might demonstrate our dedication to meeting the client's needs. When the EVC said they wanted something, we volunteered to help out. When we learned one of our outreach materials would not be as beneficial as we'd imagined, we adjusted the format to better fit Place4Us's needs. As a whole, we sought to be as useful and unobtrusive as possible.

Along the way, we began building rapport with Dr. Plag and Dr. Clemson of the EVC, and by the end, with a better understanding of Place4Us and its needs, sharing our own input became natural. One example of this is when I suggested the change of "The Story" from "The Book." In a meeting, Dr. Plag expressed worry that the title "The Book" might come across as too antiquated to modern audiences, given many people no longer read books or hold them in as high regard as they once did. While I personally have always been a lover of books - this is why I became an English major - I absolutely understand this sentiment in this age of technology. To preserve the meaning of The Book as a force to drive change and create a new narrative for people to live by, I proposed we change the name to "The Story," which would be an easy adjustment given the name of the VCC was already "The New Story." Dr. Plag agreed with this change, and so that night it became The Story.

We all came to this project with the desire to advocate for the protection of the planet. We did not quite understand *how* we could make an impact, but as we grew closer to Dr. Plag and Dr. Clemson, we came to see that our voices and our perspectives were highly valued. We realized this was how we could make a difference - simply by showing up and being ourselves, fighting for what we believed in.

We were encouraged to produce personal statement videos regarding our thoughts on Place4Us, which can be seen in the Place4Us homepage's rotation. In mine, I explained how disinformation had caused a rift in my own family, and that I believed the Internet had the potential to be a much more unifying tool for humanity than it currently is. As someone trying to start a career in digital marketing, I use the Internet

almost daily, and I'm constantly inundated with circular discourse and community infighting. Knowing the online world reflects the offline, I always wonder how different everything could be, how much progress we could achieve if more people online could simply agree on a course of action and then work towards it, rather than repeating the same talking points ad nauseam. Finding Place4Us, a virtual platform full of people dedicated to doing the work and using the platform to organize activism in the real world, was what finally gave me hope that we could truly use the Internet to accomplish something.

I know I'm not the only one who wants to make a change. Young people are tired of false promises and empty words. We want action, and we want to play our part, yet we are constantly silenced and treated as though we don't know better or that we are not deserving of a better life. Place4Us made me feel validated and agreed that my concerns with our world and our American society are very real. They made me feel confident enough to use my voice to speak up for what I believe in, and they offered to amplify my voice, to provide the platform on which I fight. I want others to feel that same strength. I am just one voice, but I believe with a community like Place4Us, one voice can become many. It can grow so loud that it will no longer be ignored.

We have to keep fighting. If we do not, whatever history we have when all is said and done will paint an ugly portrait of pain, oppression, and injustice. I cannot sit idly by when I know we have the means to write another story. For now, I will continue to tell others about Place4Us. I know there is hope for a better future for humanity and for Earth, our home. I see it everyday in the people I love. I hope others will see it too.