

Working with Benevolist.org over the past semester has been one of the most beneficial moments in my undergraduate career. Coming into MEJO 332: Public Relations writing, I had very little knowledge about the day-to-day of the Public Relations world. I had never touched a press release before partnering with Benevolist.org. In the last few weeks, this experience has furthered my passion for creating effective media strategies and has taught me a lot about what it takes to be successful as a communications professional.

This experience has prepared me for the real world because it showed me the ins and outs of what goes into a media campaign firsthand. From meetings with Cari Newton, the founder of Benevolist.org, to discussing potential strategies with my teammates, I learned how to be flexible, adaptable and to think about the bigger picture when solving problems. The most valuable part of my service learning experience has come from. Another incredibly valuable facet of this experience was the firsthand observation of how wonderful it is to work with people who have a passion for the work they do. Newton's dedication to Benevolist.org was inspiring, and getting to know her story did the work that I and my teammates did feel important. This experience was incredibly important to me because it made me realize how I want to approach my work in the future.

There were many struggles that I had faced during our project for this semester was to create a campaign highlighting nonprofits in the Triangle area dedicated to fighting homelessness. In doing so, I and my other teammates had to reach out to nonprofits ourselves to recruit them to be a part of our campaign. The multitude of ignored emails, calls, and voicemails I received during this time taught me an incredibly valuable lesson: the idea is always easier than the execution. Another issue that I ran across was reaching out to journalists, after our campaign had launched I had reached out to journalists from the Triangle business journal, WUNC, ABC 11, WRAL, and WFLF to name a few. I left emails detailing our campaigns with the press releases attached in the body so that our message was easy to access. We experienced minimal success with this effort. However, we did get a response from Angel Oak Creative, who pushed our campaign through their internal marketing team. While it was frustrating at times and it felt like I was not doing enough, I walked away from this experience knowing how to better be prepared in the future for dealing with external clients and potential partners.

The least valuable part of this campaign, for me, was some of the initial scrapped projects that we had begun to work on in the beginning. At the beginning of our time with Benevolist.org, we were initially going to create five different press releases for different scenarios, however, this idea was scrapped. Instead, our April campaign on homelessness awareness replaced this idea, and while I believe that was a more effective use of our time, I started working on a press release that was not used as a result.

Some of the recommendations that I would make to the client moving forward would be to focus heavily on increasing their presence online. Since Benevolist.org is an online platform, the only way that they are going to create brand recognition is going to be through their partnerships with other nonprofits. Benevolist.org should focus on creating content online regularly, with a particular focus on Instagram and Facebook as those are most frequently used by many of their already existing partners. Benevolist.org should expand the content they post to not just be about existing drives, but to promotional content that helps people get an understanding of Benevolist.org's mission.

Regarding the Carolina Center for Public Service, I would highly suggest that they continue to partner with Benevolist.org in the future. Benevolist.org is a growing organization that is still in the development stages. In the past few months, I have already seen so much growth from Benevolist.org, and I think that it would be beneficial for them to receive some help from the students at UNC who are passionate about their cause. Working with APPLES would be beneficial to Benevolist.org, as they grow they are going to face new challenges and opportunities that could provide students with real experience in the communications world.