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| . MSU-logo-2001 | REPORT*From the office of the…*Women and Gender Equity Network (WGEN) Coordinator |
| TO: | Members of the Executive Board |
| FROM: | Yimeng Wang |
| SUBJECT: | WGEN Report 6 |
| DATE: | February 25, 2021 |

**Year Plan Update**

In my year plan, I had anticipated holding, starting in December: an online informational campaign on reproductive justice; exam de-stressor supports; an event on environmental justice; Black History Month events; and Bodies Are Dope. As has been par for the course this year, many of my initial plans either did not come to fruition or were heavily modified. Nonetheless, WGEN has managed to offer programming for our 3 primary annual campaigns. Furthermore, with the support of the Events Committee there were some supports available during exam season. Overall, I believe that the core of WGEN’s operations were executed and that there continue to be opportunities for folks to pursue additional passions relevant to WGEN’s mandate.

Broadly, I am cognizant of the fact that WGEN has been less dedicated to events supporting survivors this year. While we have re-launched our support group, Survivors, this semester, I think there definitely needs to be a more deliberate focus on ensuring WGEN is still a service by and for survivors. I intend to try and incorporate that into our final campaign, Making Waves.

Despite it being the start of a new semester, the general sentiment I have found expressed by volunteers, my exec team, and myself is that folks are overwhelmed and exhausted. While some folks have adjusted to online learning, there seems to be a broad sense of being drained by our public health circumstances and the modified semester. Therefore, I think there are significant additional complications to running programming this semester and aim to prioritize the wellbeing of my team.

**Service Usage**

We had 5 individuals signed up for our East Asian Descent community care group, which ran in December 2020. Since the re-launch of our Survivors support group we have had 3 new signups for a total of 14 folks who have reached out.

Our most substantial engagement has been through the Collective Care program, which has received 63 requests for gift cards since its launch only 4 weeks ago.

Over the last semester and since we reopened this semester, the WGEN Safe(r) Space has had 33 users on Zoom (18 which occurred this semester), 19 members on Discord, 12 requests via text-based support (9 this semester), and 6 one-on-one peer support sessions (4 this semester). At least 12 folks were new space users, half which occurred this semester.

I have also conducted 4 individual support sessions since my last report.

Included below are a few social media numbers pulled from our Facebook page:

* **Survivors re-launch post**: 3,255 reached, 79 engagements
* **Collective Care launch post**: 5,306 reached, 349 engagements
* **Bodies Are Dope launch post (Feb 17)**: 454 reached, 32 engagements

As mentioned in previous reports, I am deeply grateful to a personal acquaintance who has supported WGEN’s posts at no cost to the MSU or our service, which I attribute to many of our numbers.

**Past Events, Projects, & Activities**

At the end of Fall Semester, the Events Committee ran 3 events supporting students during December exams. These events took place the week of December 14, 2020. WGEN also ran our East Asian Descent community care group in December 2020. As part of the December 6th Committee, WGEN was also involved with the videos launched on December 4, 2020.

WGEN opened our virtual safe(r) space on January 27, 2021. This was the same day that the Collective Care program co-sponsored by SHEC and WGEN was launched. WGEN’s safe(r) space is open this semester from 12:30–7:30pm Mondays through Fridays. We have also launched our Discord space; the Zoom drop-in space runs from 12:30–4:30pm and the Discord space is open from 4:30–7:30pm.

I want to take the time here to emphasize that both of these projects have been in development since September 2020 and substantial work has gone into finally launching them. I want to specifically thank my Volunteer Coordinator for working on the arduous task of figuring out Discord with me, as well as planning and running Refresher Training for our Safe(r) Space volunteers. I also want to acknowledge the SHEC Coordinator for their significant work setting up necessary documents to organize and maintain the gift card requests we have been receiving.

As a final note, the Events Committee also began running thanks to my Community Events & Planning and Logistics execs.

Survivors, our support group, was re-launched on January 22, 2021. This comes after its temporary absence in Fall 2020 (although it ran during the summer). Disability In Colour, a support group started last year by WGEN and Maccess and continued this year with Diversity Services, was launched the week of February 8, 2021. Meetings for disabled folks who are Black, Indigenous, or racialized will occur every week.

**Upcoming Events, Projects & Activities**

This week is the launch of our Bodies Are Dope campaign. This year, the campaign will take place from February 22–February 27, with ongoing social media events starting on the Monday and drop-in virtual events starting on the Wednesday. In honour of Black History Month and in an effort to strengthen WGEN’s commitment to fostering spaces for Black folks, the programming on Sunday is only open to Black folks.

Bodies Are Dope features 3 interactive social media events, 1 mini informational campaign, and 11 total events (8 distinctive events).

We are also close to completing an informational graphic on WGEN’s online peer support spaces. This graphic is intended to reduce the barriers folks might experience that dissuade them from entering our Zoom safe(r) space. In it, we address what folks can expect after clicking on the Zoom link.

**Currently Working On**

Currently, we are working on acquiring t-shirts and stickers to mail to volunteers for appreciation. We are also working on scheduling volunteer and exec socials with virtual games (i.e. Jackbox).

We are also planning our March week-long campaign, Making Waves. Making Waves is our final annual campaign, dedicated to cross-movement and intersectional understandings of feminism. We have confirmed Alicia Elliott (author of *A Mind Spread Out On The Ground*) and are working on inviting Aisha Fairclough (co-founder of Body Confidence Canada) as speakers. We are also working on the second component of a collaborative project with Diversity Services, which offers a translation of important terms used within community organizing. This will correspond with an event inviting students fluent in other languages to work through concepts such as gender-neutral pronouns.

As part of PACBIC’s Gender and Sexality working group, I am working with the other co-conveners to invite Billy-Ray Belcourt to McMaster as a speaker and applying for McMaster Research and Ethics Board (MREB) clearance for a project that elevates trans and non-binary students’ experiences of exclusion or difficulty in the virtual classroom.

I am also trying to organize all relevant WGEN accounts and projects so that the incoming WGEN Director will be eased into operations in as smooth a way as I can make it, given all the extraneous factors I have no control over. This includes notifying University partners of the upcoming transition, ensuring the OneDrive contains all necessary documents, and wrapping up the majority of currently ongoing projects ahead of April.

**Budget**

I have made substantial use of the budget since my last report. As last reported, I have acquired several new physical and electronic books for WGEN on topics relating to social organizing, challenging oppressive structures, and contemporary activism. I have also worked closely with my Resources Coordinator on how to collaborate with the Womanists to support Black students during Black History Month and in WGEN as a service. Thus, the Womanists line of credit is being dedicated to a giveaway for Black folks that supports Black-owned businesses, and books related to Black liberation and futurism.

As Bodies Are Dope will not be featuring any speakers, we have chosen instead to dedicate part of the budget to supplementing activity costs, something that WGEN would normally have paid for during in-person events. The cost for Bodies Are Dope will therefore depend on our event turnout.

The bulk of our recent spending has been for the Collective Care program. To fulfill all the requests we (SHEC and WGEN) have received, we requested and received $400.00 from the Services Special Projects Fund.

A note on that line of credit: in November 2020 I made a purchase in USD and did not receive the CAD conversion on my receipt. Therefore, I have put what I *estimate* to be the true cost in red, but would appreciate having this confirmed. I have reached out in the past to try and obtain this number.

For our upcoming Making Waves campaign in March, we have reached an agreement with Indigenous writer Alicia Elliott. To meet her speaker’s fee, we requested and received financial support from PACBIC ($500.00) and Diversity Services ($500.00). Depending on what is left of that line of credit, I am interested in also inviting another speaker (initial communications have occurred with Aisha Fairclough) and will reach out to other University partners as needed.

For our volunteers, I am in the process of ordering t-shirts, stickers, and external training opportunities, as noted in those respective lines of credit. I hope to also acquire enough stickers to supply WGEN in upcoming years, as that has long been a personal wish of mine.

Overall, I have found that there has definitely been more freedom with how I can use the budget because of our virtual environment. That said, there are nonetheless limitations to the projects we can fund. All things considered, I think it would be highly beneficial to increase the amount available to Annual Campaigns and Special Projects.

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| ***ACCOUNT CODE*** | ***ITEM*** | ***BUDGET / COST*** |
| 5003-0308 | OFFICE SUPPLIES |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * LibraryCat subscription * **Verso books (6)** | $48.78  **$50.93** |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | **$0.29** |
| 6102-0308 | ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * Trans(forming) Mac speakers * *Bodies Are Dope events* * *Making Waves – Alicia Elliott* | $732.50  *$TBD*  *$1,500.00* |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | $2,067.50 |
| 6104-0308 | WOMANISTS |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * **Black History Month giveaway** * *Books* | **$120.00**  *$TBD* |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | **$130.00** |
| 6103-0308 | SPECIAL PROJECTS |  |
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|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * Financial Advocacy – Black Women in Motion * Gender-affirming products project * **Collective Care program (ongoing)** | $50.00  **~$126.00**  **$394.71** |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | **$179.29** |
| 6494-0308 | VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * *Jackbox (volunteer socials)* * *Volunteer t-shirts* | *$TBD*  *$TBD* |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | $750.00 |
| 6501-0308 | ADVERTISING & PROMOTION |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * Community Care Groups Promo * Trans(forming) Mac Promo * **Bodies Are Dope Promo** * *WGEN Virtual Spaces Infographic* * *Stickers* | $75.00  $150.00  **$125.00**  *$125.00*  *$TBD* |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | **$1,525.00** |
| 6804-0308 | TRAINING EXPENSES |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | TOTAL SPENT IN LINE   * **SACHA Training** | **$500.00** |
|  | REMAINING IN LINE | **$0.00** |
| ***TOTALS*** | | |
| **TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING** | | $7,150.00 |
| **TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING** | | **$2,497.92** |
| **REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING** | | **$4,652.08** |

**Volunteers**

For the end of Fall Semester/beginning of Winter semester, I made and sent our exec appreciation cards through the mail. I also conducted individual exec check-ins discussion folks’ expectations for the semester, their sense of WGEN and personal responsibilities, their thoughts on personal and professional development, and their general feeling of support within the team and by me. Check-ins occurred through December 2020 into late January 2021. An exec appreciation was also held in January; I hope to hold another one in March to thank my team for their work with me in my time as Coordinator.

Refresher Training was held for Safe(r) Space Volunteers mid-January, prior to the reopening of the WGEN Safe(r) Space in late January. Refresher Training lasted 4 hours for volunteers, and required 6.5 hours total from execs. It focused primarily on peer support-related situationals and logistical updates (e.g. the use of Discord as a new platform). This was in response to the immense amount of time that myself and my Volunteer Coordinator dedicated to September training, which we felt unable to repeat, and the recognition that previous training content was still available to volunteers. As mentioned, I have been corresponding with SACHA to offer training on questions of responding to disclosures online, especially when not in physical proximity to the person disclosing.

I think it is difficult for volunteers to feel fully engaged and connected to the service due to the online nature of their responsibilities, which I deeply regret. I also find that folks generally have reduced capacity to engage with WGEN and extra training, which I can understand and empathize with. Nonetheless, the enduring challenge has been finding ways of encouraging volunteer bonding while not overwhelming volunteers or my Volunteer Coordinator. I am pleased with the use of Discord, and there was a social environment during Refresher Training. I hope that a social with Jackbox will continue to build bonds between volunteers.

**Current Challenges**

This semester, and the year in general, has been a uniquely frustrating and exhausting period that has been exacerbated and often caused by my role within the MSU. While there are many aspects that I recognize the MSU does not have control over, I wanted to highlight specifically the lack of support I have felt and a general sense that my work is not recognized or appreciated. As Coordinator, I have sought to create an environment for my exec team and volunteers where they feel like their work is meaningful and celebrated and where they feel allowed to take a step back from WGEN if they do not have the capacity. I absolutely do not begrudge them for taking me at my word and am always extremely happy when they feel they can do so. However, this often means that I am asked to take on additional work if I want a project to be completed by my timelines. Sometimes it feels as though my execs are not recognizing me for my work despite a) that not being true – they are always extremely supportive when I ask and b) that *not being their job*. It is frustrating that many of the expectations placed on PTMs (e.g. holding volunteer socials, fostering a positive team dynamic) do not seem to be something afforded *to* them. While the relationship between PTMs is not one of an exec team, I think it would nonetheless be helpful for individual work to be recognized in a substantial manner, so that I do not feel as though my efforts to keep my service running and support my community are acts thrown into the void.

This is compounded by the multitude of changes that have occurred in the past few weeks with limited preemptive knowledge afforded to PTMs. Without going into the already strongly articulated challenges offered by others, I want to emphasize that the sheer number of changes that have affected the hiring and onboarding timelines and service structure have been extremely difficult to navigate. They have been almost impossible to process among the other extensive responsibilities that come with being Coordinator (e.g. planning all aspects of 2 week-long campaigns, acting as a member of University committees, managing various exec projects, etc.). I, and my Volunteer Coordinator, are concerned that there is not a clear enough delineation between the incoming Assistant Director role and the Volunteer Coordinator role. Many of the University committees I sit on run on the typical academic schedule, meaning that there are concluding meetings in April that I now am unclear whether I can participate in. The sheer task of preparing transition materials despite still actively pulling together our final campaign has been extremely overwhelming. All of these are tasks that I need to do that I simply have not had the time and energy to get around to.

The only period of time that PTMs are given a chance to process significant changes are during their often stressful midterm and exam periods – which are also unpaid. I ask the MSU to recognize the amount of service-specific adjustments that have to be made when they declare broad-scale changes and the additional labour that creates on PTMs. While it is admirable to seek to implement changes, my own experience has been that there is often not a significant acknowledgement of the service-level complications that arise when they are executed.

Finally, my newly changed term limit also brings up the question again of compensation for both hours accrued prior to the “lieu hours” system set up in October 2020 and the lieu hours themselves. As most, if not all, PTMs are also in their final year, I am curious to hear whether financial matters will be settled by the conclusion of our term on April 1, 2021.

**Successes**

Both the WGEN Discord and the Collective Care program have been a long time in the making, as has already been acknowledged. I am so grateful to the folks who worked with me on both of these, and I think they have been invaluable to our communities. WGEN is funding through undergraduate fees, and I am sincerely glad that we are able to directly return that support to folks despite not sharing space with each other.

I am also so glad for our Safe(r) Space and Events Committee volunteer teams, who have been enthusiastic and engaged despite this difficult year. I think their work everyday on facilitating the space and contributing to events is a credit to their perseverance and passion. I am especially glad that there has been renewed engagement in the Safe(r) Space this semester.

Finally, I am extremely glad to have been able to use the budget to add to WGEN’s value and resources in the long run. Especially considering many in-person costs are not applicable this year, I hope that I can put future WGEN PTMs in a better position with my investments.