



Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps Intern Report

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I interned at the National Network of Abortion Funds for the summer of 2006, and the experience has met and certainly exceeded all of my expectations. I was totally thrilled with my placement, and I feel that I am gained the experience and connections that I was hoping for. The staff at NNAF warmly embraced me, and I must say that coming from the RRASC program, the reputation preceded me!

Work ...

The first month of my internship was completely dominated by preparations for the NNAF annual conference and organizing summit, which was great. I spent the first couple of weeks collating the packets for the conference attendees, packing boxes of supplies for the conference, and various other administrative tasks. Though these duties were mind numbing at times, I appreciated the chance to familiarize myself with the materials for the conference so that I was prepared to be as helpful as possible at the actual event. I was given many opportunities to read NNAF materials and to become acquainted with the work of similar organizations to bolster my understanding of the many invaluable players in the reproductive rights movement. I was also encouraged to learn about the many member funds that are the heart and soul of NNAF, as each are quite different and impressive. I was even asked to read a book of poetry and choose my favorites to be read by the author at the abortion speak out at the conference, a task that I was delighted to complete.

The period of conference preparation also gave me a chance to get to know the awesome staff and the other intern. I have found the women at the NNAF office to be

incredibly friendly, flexible, kind, bright and passionate. I was certainly intimidated by these ladies, but I was treated with such respect that it seems that our inequalities were noticed by me only. There was a very relaxed and upbeat atmosphere in the office, which made every day of work completely enjoyable. The tasks that I was assigned were mostly underscored with the aim of helping to familiarize me with NNAF and similar reproductive rights non-profits, which I am so grateful for. Melissa Mills-Dick, my incredible supervisor (and Hampshire alum!) has been an amazing support for making sure that I get the most out of this summer at NNAF. I cannot say enough about how awesome Melissa is, but unfortunately (and fortunately for her!) she is moving on. It has been quite interesting for me to be behind the scenes as NNAF went through the interview process and to then meet and spend time with Melissa's replacement, Bipasana, who is also quite wonderful. As far as the big picture of my life, I am pleased that I have been able to witness this transition in a small office, and how people handle such delicate matters. I am also quite glad that I have been able to observe some of Bipasana's training and her shift into her new position, and all of the thought and planning that occurs when an integral member of a small office needs to be replaced for whatever reason.

The conference: I had a superb time at NNAF's annual conference and organizing summit. I was able to draw on my experiences from CLPP's annual conference, which certainly allowed me to be a knowledgeable assistant. This was Melissa's first time as the conference coordinator, and I was one of two interns that were her right-hand women. We ran around like crazy and I think we did a fantastic job. It was such fun for me to finally put all the names of the board and fund members to their faces, and see how all these passionate women from all walks of life came together with one united passion. I came to have renewed respect for the absolutely vital nature of a well-run administrative team, and I appreciated how my role as a conference assistant gave me access to situations and conversations that might have otherwise been out of my grasp. I learned so much during

the conference, from deepening my relationships with my coworkers, to how to be a useful and helpful conference organizer, to the many, many voices and opinions and hearts it takes to make a successful and powerful movement.

The highlights of the conference for me were meeting two of my heroes of the reproductive rights movement; Dr. George Tiller and Daniel C. McGuire. Dr. Tiller is the only late-term abortion provider in the country, so his reputation of being an amazingly brave pioneer certainly preceded him, but he was also the doctor that helped one of my dearest friends, so I had a personal sense of connection and gratitude as well. His speech was so powerful and moving that for many of us, we were close to tears as we listened to him. He was just so sweetly articulate about his experiences and beliefs about the critical need for safe abortion services, and his words were so inspiring and rejuvenating for many women in the audience. He was also so humble and openly appreciative about the work that all the NNAF members do everyday, so our gender difference was easily ignored. It wasn't just another man talking at us, he was a kind and brilliant person who shares in our fight everyday. Dr. Tiller was open to talking with me, and even invited me to go and sit in the lobby together and share a long conversation. He offered advice and support about my career and my passions, and it certainly felt like a hugely pivotal experience in my life.

I also was able to meet Daniel C. Maguire, who is by far one of my greatest scholarly and intellectual heroes. He was also open to sharing a conversation with me, and was wildly supportive of my plans for the future. I plan on writing an honor's thesis next year examining contraceptives and abortion in Christianity, and Mr. McGuire's books have been an outstanding inspiration and guide for me. It was outrageously exciting for me to meet him, and he has even encouraged me to correspond with him in the future. Aside from everything else in my NNAF experience, the conference alone has made me positive that I made the perfect choice about this summer for myself. Given that NNAF was able to secure such impressive speakers for their 2006 annual conference, I would imagine that 2007 will be just as great. Similarly, it will be Bipasana's first year as conference coordinator, so the

future RRASC intern will probably have a similar experience of getting into the fast-paced nitty-gritty of the conference. I would imagine that any member of CLPP will be well suited for an internship with NNAF from having previous conference experience to draw upon when helping to organize with Bipasana.

Another fantastic part of the conference was that I was able to attend a few sessions and attempt to cram even more information into my overcrowded head! I listened to Susan Yanow speak, and though I have met her on many occasions at CLPP conferences, I was unaware of the breadth of her career, and she led a very informative session. All in all, my experience in Oregon was somewhat akin to a homecoming of sorts, because I finally felt a deep comfort and thrill at being part of a bigger national picture of a tribe of women who care and struggle in the same way the I do. It was just so positive for me to see so many future peers in my chosen field, and know that I am in such excellent company. Due to my internship this summer, my reservoir of hope was refilled, and my activist toolbox has been upgraded. I would imagine that any future NNAF intern will have an equally positive experience.

Other Projects:

The greatest part about being an NNAF intern is certainly the flexibility. After I was familiarized with NNAF's materials and multiple projects, I was able to choose how I wanted to spend my time and energy. This certainly set a very positive tone for the whole my summer, and I would imagine that this self-directed approach will be just as appreciated by future interns. I felt that the staff at NNAF was genuinely excited about whatever talents I had to offer, and they were always willing to let me take the initiative and let me shine. This was especially great for me given that I am a non-traditional age student, and there were significant age differences between us, where I was older than some of the women who supervised me. I would certainly encourage other older students to apply for the NNAF internship for this reason.

Stephanie Poggi, the Executive Director, developed a project for me to help in developing a manual of sorts of assist member funds in documenting illegal Medicaid refusals to pay for abortions in the 33 restricted access states. Two of NNAF's member funds have already had some success in this area of fighting the Hyde amendment, so I worked on compiling what they have learned and their suggestions for other activists. I had lots of support and materials to draw from, and yet I also had considerable room to be self-directed. This project felt very huge and exciting, but also overwhelming. This project was eventually trumped by a more realistic and pressing task; developing components for the Hyde website. Their goal was to have the website buttoned up by the 30 year anniversary, which was in September as a part of their "30 Years is Enough" campaign. At the time I felt a little jarred by switching gears from one major project which I had to leave unfinished to another huge project, but in retrospect, I see now that that was in fact a valuable learning experience in and of itself. With activist work it is a reality that there will be multiple projects looming that are all incredibly important. Part of being an effective organizer is being able to find flexibility and stamina for every facet of the movement that one is involved in. So while I felt awful about having to move on from the Medicaid project, it was ultimately appropriate and quite rewarding to contribute to the Hyde website. I would say that this ability to be adaptable is a very important component to any social justice activist work, not just with NNAF.

The Hyde work that I did was very satisfying, and it is such fun to see this website now that it is up and running, knowing that I helped to get it there. The intern that was there before me had compiled a huge amount of data relating to abortion rates by state, age, race, income, etc. She had also amassed data about all sorts of other aspects of women's lives, reproduction and parenting. From this huge body of information I was able to chose the sets of the data that I wished to pair together in order to form a cohesive picture of exactly how the Hyde amendment was harming women and posing an undue burden on American families. I spent most of time on Excel where I organized this data to

flesh out the points that we wanted to make. I checked in the Sarah Horsely, (the communications director) on a daily basis about this project, and we brain-stormed together. I really loved this part of my internship. It felt very tangible and current, which is so inspiring. Also, if I thought of another set of facts and figures that seemed appropriate, I was encouraged to find it and add it to the document. My only woe was that I was unable to see this project through to the very end, but that too, is part of working together as a team of activists. What was most exciting about this internship was having the knowledge that the work that I was doing was directly assisting the many incredible and influential activists that comprise the member funds. I loved being involved in working to arm my fellow activists with information and tools to fight the powers that are effectively squashing our rights.

Another part of my internship that will definitely be a part of a future intern's experience is the administrative element. Though this was not an enormous part of my experience, it was certainly part of my everyday work. I filed, addressed lots and lots of envelopes and packages, looked up zip codes online, organized and counted supplies, metered mail, and made trips to the post office. I also had to count up many groups of fliers to send off to member funds, which was a very tedious task. I did, however, come to appreciate the fundamental need for an office to be extremely well organized. It was very helpful for me as a mother and an apartment renter to become intimately acquainted with all of the tricks of a well-run office. I actually came home and re-organized my family's whole filing system and then my office. I learned skills that seemed so silly, but are really so essential to being an adult! I highly recommend that any future intern come to NNAF willing to learn about how to keep an office under control to run smoothly, because these are skills that will serve anyone well through life.

I also spent a fair amount of time working in a computer program called Ebase. This is used solely for keeping track of donations to NNAF, both monetary and otherwise. I entered in donor information and then wrote out the formal thank-you letter on NNAF letter-

head to be used for tax purposes. This was also an excellent learning opportunity for me as I got to see the guts of how a non-profit runs. It was also quite entertaining because I had been present at the silent auction where many of these donations were sold, so I was able to see how much things were worth, and how much people paid for them, and of course, who bought and donated what! I can certainly see that my knowledge of that program will serve me in the future, and I am sure that it will be an asset to any job or volunteering that I will do given that donations are the lifeblood of any non-profit. I felt very grateful to NNAF for giving me such a well-rounded summer.

Lastly, I worked on the E-news letter. This was tremendous fun! I worked in Outlook for this project, and I found this to be very satisfying. Sarah would compile job opportunities, links to possible news-sources, and emails of member fund news and announcements. I would cull through, paraphrase the pertinent information, and organize it by color and typeface within the newsletter template. I loved to search for news items with the goal of sharing it with the whole of NNAF's member base- it felt so important! I also was intrigued to see how many exciting jobs there are in the field of reproductive justice.

An added benefit of working at NNAF is its location in Jamaica Plain, which is quite a fun suburb of Boston. NNAF is one block away from a very sweet little strip of shops and restaurants, so lunch hour was always crammed with fun explorations, but it didn't feel too overwhelmingly 'city', yet the actual city was so close. In fact, getting to NNAF's office from the city was incredibly easy, and the office is just two blocks from the T stop. Overall, I had very rewarding summer, and I will be happy to talk to prospective RRASC interns privately about my experience.