At COLAGE, the only national youth-driven movement of people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents, I had a fair amount of responsibility and independence this summer. About the same time I arrived at COLAGE the Alternative Reproductive Technologies Fellow was leaving. During the year he worked on researching and writing a Donor Insemination Guide for youth conceived with the help of a sperm donor. The publication also was a guide for parents, teachers, doctors, and a legal aid for families. I had been in contact with the fellow throughout the year, filling out surveys, participating in conference calls, and helping with editing. I had one week with the fellow when I was in the office and then I took over the distribution and media requests for the Donor Insemination (DI) Guide. I was conceived with the help of a sperm donor myself, so I have a vested interest in distributing the DI Guide and in COLAGE’s greater efforts.

As the person responsible for the distribution of the DI Guide, I wrote letters to organizations, sperm banks, associations, and groups that could benefit from the Guide. I maintained contact with the representatives of the various organizations. Contact mainly was in the form of emails but also in several phone calls. I sent out well over one hundred emails over the course of the 10 weeks and there were responses, but there could have been more. Now a link to the ordering site for the DI Guide can be found on the websites of the Sperm Bank of California, California Cryobank, American Psychological Association, amongst others. The DI Guide was also reviewed on several websites and blogs including HRC’s Family Newsletter. It was also my responsibility to fulfill and record the orders that came in. Copies were sent around
the country and abroad. I also was part of the team deciding on how to develop a distribution plan for the Guide, an ongoing conversation.

During June and July I was also responsible for organizing a team and donations for the San Francisco AIDS Walk on July 18, 2010. I spent most of my time sending emails encouraging people in the office to join the team and to fundraise. I also sent emails and wrote blurbs for the larger COLAGE community and volunteers to encourage them to join and fundraise. I also came up with ideas for fundraising and had posters put around our building. On the day of the walk I helped our team members sign in and get acclimated to the huge event.

COLAGE offers programming for youth at Family Weeks in Saugatuck, MI and Provincetown, MA. Throughout the summer I spent time on various projects surrounding those events, from making reservations to organizing workshops. During Family Week in Provincetown I found out I was responsible for organizing the Do Something workshops for all three groups, High School, Crew (Middle School), and Camp (3rd-5th graders). I had to get workshop outlines and materials list from fifteen people who would be leading the workshops.

I mostly used my writing and communication skills this summer. I wrote several rounds of appeal letters for the DI Guide, I wrote a great deal for the AIDS Walk Team, and I helped to write workshops for Family Week. I was also able to participate in several media events because of COLAGE and the organization’s partnership with Focus Features’ film “The Kids Are All Right”. I spoke on a panel after the screening of the film, I wrote an article for www.lezgetreal.com about my experience, and I was interviewed by People magazine for an article about lesbian-headed families that meet the youth’s sperm donor. I had to be able to write, speak articulately, and communicate talking points. I also had to become more familiar with Microsoft excel and the database.
During the internship there were times when I was unable to continue or move on with a project because I had to wait for the approval or opinion of someone else in the office. For example, after I drafted the appeal letter I had to wait about one week before the letter was approved and I was able to send them. Similar wait periods happened, which slowed down my work and caused some back up. I tried to space out the projects but this could become difficult as I had to wait.

The most fulfilling moments of the summer came when I was able to work directly with youth and families. COLAGE organized a group to march in the 40th San Francisco Pride Parade and had a booth in the Family Garden. COLAGE partnered with Our Family Coalition for the parade and it was amazing to see our beautiful families take up a whole block as we marched. In August COLAGE offers programming for youth in 3rd-12th grade during Family Week in Provincetown, Massachusetts. I have gone to Family Week since I was thirteen and this was my third year on staff. This was the first time that I saw and was part of the preparation and lead up to Family Week. This year I had more responsibility and was able to appreciate COLAGE’s work even more than I usually do. These two experiences being with the incredible and inspiring youth and families that COLAGE supports were by far the most rewarding moments of my internship. It served as a reminder of how strong our families and our movement are, but also it reminded me of why we must strive for equality.

My internship helped me to gain confidence in a new environment. I was quickly responsible for the DI Guide so I had to become the resident expert on the Guide and its distribution very quickly. I was far more confident in this new role than I usually am in new places. After working at COLAGE I feel that I am a more knowledgeable advocate for families. I was able to learn more about issues affecting the LGBTQ community and how COLAGE is
working to advocate proactively for families. Having the knowledge to combat homophobia and transphobia is a skill that will help me in my work and something I can pass on to others. In a more practical sense, I am now able to use salesforce database systems with ease and familiarity. I believe I can transfer that skill to other database systems in the future.

To make the internship even more meaningful I could have sat down with my supervisor, the National Program Director of COLAGE, to talk about and really outline a strong DI Guide distribution plan. It was difficult to find the time to do this though because the staff was busy with their own stuff and with the overwhelming planning of Family Week in Provincetown. I would have liked to leave a stronger and more tangible evidence of my work on the DI Guide. We had decided that we would begin by contacting people and organizations that we believed would be interested in the Guide, but we never moved much past that. That is where I left, and although I did mention suggestions for the future with my supervisor and with the next person responsible for the Guide, I feel that I could have done more.

COLAGE is really about social justice and children of LGBTQ parents. I felt best prepared for the topics and discussions at COLAGE because of classes like Gender Studies, War and Gender, and International Human Rights. Being familiar with issues, both global and domestic, helped me follow the work of COLAGE with greater ease. It also helped me track the progress the LGBTQ equality movement has made recently. What best prepared me for the internship was my familiarity and close relationship with COLAGE that I had established long before getting the internship. My work with COLAGE over the past eight years gave me a longer and greater appreciation of COLAGE’s work and growth. I was able to take my knowledge and use it in projects, most specifically when planning Family Week in Provincetown.
After spending my summer working at a medium-sized non-profit in San Francisco, I have realized that I want to work somewhere with a greater focus. COLAGE does amazing work that I will also support and strive to be a part of, but it is limited in its focus. I learned about many wonderful social justice organizations in the Bay Area this summer, but I feel that I ultimately want to work with a bigger organization. This internship solidified my commitment to social justice and human rights. It also helped me understand that I would like to work with an organization that offers me room to grow and rise. I admit to being an ambitious person with big, international human rights oriented goals, and a place like COLAGE cannot offer that yet.

My internship lived up to most of the expectations. When I first spoke with the ART Fellow, I had notions that I would speaking more publically about the DI Guide. Conferences were mentioned, but there were none that happened while I was an intern. I appreciated the responsibility and independence I had in this internship. I felt like I was accomplishing important tasks and contributing to the organization. This internship also has presented advocacy opportunities that I hope will continue. I expected there may have been opportunities to work with Focus Features and “The Kids Are All Right,” but I have done more than I anticipated. The interest in youth born through donor insemination is growing along with the media seeking voices of real families. COLAGE is at the front of responding and giving families the opportunity to speak out.

I continue to have great respect for COLAGE, the national staff, the youth and families, and all the hard work of all those connected with COLAGE. The staff was welcoming, professional, friendly, brilliant, and accomplished. I felt like a part of the team and was very happy working there. As an intern I had responsibility and was not delegated menial tasks too
often. In reality I felt like, and was welcomed as a staff member. I know I will keep working and volunteering with COLAGE.

My whole internship was focused on reproductive and social justice. The first week I met with Alice Ruby of the Sperm Bank of California to talk about the distribution of the DI Guide. The DI Guide is for families that have chosen alternative reproductive technologies. To have these families, there has to be reproductive justice. To thrive in our society youth need more than loving families. No matter how dedicated and wonderful the parents are, children and adults are exposed to a society that treats our families differently. This experience can be challenging and isolating for most people. Social justice for individuals and families is critical for LGBTQ families. COLAGE helps youth become better advocates for themselves and their families, a full intersection of social justice and reproductive rights.

Future interns should make sure they are able to find adequate and safe housing for the summer. COLAGE does not offer housing or help much in the search for a bed. Another intern had a very bad experience from a place they found on Craigslist. Where you live makes a difference in the internship. Go to COLAGE with a sense of humor. The office is very friendly and there is frequent banter and well meaning sarcasm. Future interns should also jump right in. I wasted time feeling the outsider or low level intern, but you will be welcomed as a member of the team, so participate like one. Also, do not be afraid to ask for assistance or guidance. I often felt like I would be bothering someone if I asked them for something, but everyone is patient and willing to take the time to help. Finally, have fun and suggest Thai for your welcome lunch, it will be delicious!