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Final CLPP Report

During summer of 2010 I interned at Third Wave Foundation, a feminist philanthropist organization in New York City. Third Wave allots money to smaller, community-based organizations focused on reproductive health and justice and community organizing and advocacy. They serve as an intermediary to ensure these community based organizations get the funding they need to sustain their programs and services. They also run a nation-wide abortion emergency fund serving young people.

Third Wave is headed by a variety of strong individuals each doing their best to ensure social justice for women, LGBTQ communities, minorities and other marginalized groups. Working at Third Wave gave me new insight into a world in which I had little experience and knowledge going in and showed me a new side of philanthropy.

My title at Third Wave was Program Intern and I would work closely with Alex Delvalle, Program Director. The Program side of Third Wave works with the community based organizations (CBOs) on the grant docket; keeping in contact with the members and board, providing aid in various capacities like communications and staff trainings and doing site visits. Program, along with the Abortion Fund, is the core of Third Wave. This summer however Third Wave was getting ready to launch a new program component: the education justice initiative. The Ed. Justice work would be to seek out community programs focused on education reform and policy and support them as new docket partners.

My role as program intern was to help launch this new initiative. However, this did not go as planned. When I arrived at Third Wave the organization was going through some major changes; they just moved into a new office, fiscal year changes were being discussed and a brand new staff was about to be on board. The education justice work wasn’t ready and wasn’t a top priority. This left me in a
strange position. Nevertheless I rolled with the punches and became more of a general intern. With my new title I began to help everyone in the office. A lot of my work was administrative tasks like entering information into databases, archiving old material and taking notes at meetings. It wasn’t the best of jobs but had to be done.

One of my major projects was entering past Reproductive Health and Justice Initiatives and Organizing and Advocacy docket information into the database, making sure contact information was up-to-date and having a record for everyone Third Wave worked with in the past. Another major project was updating the donor database - inputting past gifts and contact information. Both tasks took a lot of time, detail and knowledge of Third Wave database systems. Although they weren’t the most interesting or stimulating activities, I did learn how to maneuver different types of databases, read various charts and graphs and organize information in a way that is comprehensive.

In addition to the overwhelming managerial jobs, as an intern I attended conferences and events representing Third Wave. This was my favorite part because I got out the office and had the opportunity to learn about topics affecting young people. Going to Casa Atabex Ache, a multiyear docket member, was a great experience because now I understand why Third Wave funds them. “Casa” does amazing work with young women in the South Bronx community providing mainly spiritual services, helping to heal difficult histories. It was an honor to visit this group and see how their services inspire women.

Another highlight was going to the More than a Wage conference hosted by WoW - Wider Opportunities for Women network - which discussed self sufficiency wages and living standards. At first I didn't want to go because I didn't think it had anything to do with me and wasn’t familiar with the content but I’m really happy I got the opportunity. I learned about self sufficiency wages and what people are supposed to be earning in relation to their line of work. It was shocking, informative and thought provoking to hear the facts about what money someone should make, how someone "should" live and what that means
for low-income youth and adults. I got socialize with other interns in NYC and form an opinion on something which I had no prior knowledge. Events like these gave meaning to my work at Third Wave and made my experience more pleasurable.

Though I didn’t do the most exciting job I feel I learned a lot during Summer 2010. Every week was something new in terms of how I view myself, my work ethic and my future goals. The biggest challenge I had to overcome was learning to adapt to new situations. Since I didn’t have specific tasks to do every day sometimes it was frustrating to do the same tasks repeatedly and at times I felt like I wasn’t learning or being stimulated. There were some weeks when I was unhappy and unmotivated. But from these times I learned that change comes from within and only I could make myself happy. Realizing this was a major milestone and changed the way I approach and deal with many things.

Due to my new found confidence and self motivation I began to make projects for myself. After being able to work on the relaunching of Third Wave website, I wrote a piece on Melissa Gira Grant, External Relations Officer. Melissa played a huge role in Third Wave; casting our network wider and appealing to a broader audience. She went to U.Mass- Amherst for undergraduate studies and over the summer I looked up to her as someone who took her job very seriously but still had a fun, outgoing personality. I enjoyed the tasks she gave me because they included helping to complete the new website. I felt like I was doing something that mattered to the outside world. Melissa also showed me that although Third Wave is essentially a community serving organization, it is still a company and still needs to market itself in a way that appeals to a variety of people. Donors are a huge part of any foundation and the way the leaders communicate with them can either make or break a group. Finding new ways to engage donors and other important stakeholders can be difficult and takes a lot of creativity and patience.
Although I wasn’t directly involved in many projects, I looked at every opportunity as a chance to better my understanding of myself and my work. This internship definitely gave me new insight on my academic and career goals. I know now that while I respect this line of work it is not my passion. I want to be in the education field and any future work I do should be directly related in order for it to be more meaningful to me. I know what it takes to get to these goals and working with Third Wave showed me new ways to get involved. Third Wave taught me how to become a self starter and seek out the opportunities that may not come my way. It is up to me to get things accomplished and going in the right direction. Third Wave also provided me with useful skills like scheduling meetings, taking notes and using office equipment which is essential for any office job.

Something that I wish I could have changed was not getting to know the people I worked with. One reason is that all my coworkers (except the Abortion Fund intern) were at least 5 years older than me. They would go out to bars and happy hours after work and of course I could not join them. I felt a little lonely at times and not a part of the “after-work” team. Also Third Wave hired two new full time employees that did a lot of my early summer work so as they were settling in, I was transitioning out. I helped them become familiar with the office and the databases but it felt they were taking my job. I did however bond with the Abortion Fund intern-Aliza, a senior from Duke. Aliza made days at the office fly by and sometimes we hung out over the weekend. Still, I wish I would have been more resourceful with my coworkers and formed deeper connections that went past Third Wave.

Advice that I have for future interns is to speak with supervisors if things aren’t going the way they should or if something didn’t meet expectations. It is good to have open communication with your coworkers and supervisors and let them know who you are and what you can and will be used for, Being flexible is a good thing but it is also admirable and respected to speak up if feeling neglected, underused or under appreciated. I wish I didn’t wait so long to say something or to make changes in my work. I feel
if I would have talked to Alex more we would have had a better understanding of my role and responsibilities. Being able to speak up for oneself and be clear of expectations and duties make things easier for both intern and supervisor.

Overall this summer taught me a lot about my career aspirations, work ethics and brought me a step closer to what I think I should be doing at this stage in my life. I feel that college is the time when students are supposed to try new things whether it is classes, extra activities or internship. Interning at Third Wave made me feel important. This was one of the first summers I had a full time office job and something to do every day. I had to look and act professional which made me feel like an adult and part of the working class of people. Although I did not do the most exciting job I still gained a lot of valuable skills and talents that I can carry with me to any future job I may hold.