Over the summer, I had the privilege of interning in Washington D.C. with an organization called Young People For (YP4), a program out of People For the American Way. To understand my role, you must first understand the structure of YP4 and what the organization strives to do. YP4 is a progressive leadership development organization that trains young people on how to be radical social justice warriors in their communities. Each year, around 150 young people are chosen to be part of the YP4 Fellowship. They are mentored all year, create a social justice “blueprint” project and attend two leadership conferences. These fellows are chosen from every different area of social justice. We have fellows working in areas like environmentalism, reproductive rights, queer liberation, racial justice, immigration rights and much more. Anything is embraced as long as it has a social justice lens and promotes dismantling systems of oppression.

At Young People For, my title was the Curriculum and Leadership intern. I worked directly under the Curriculum and Leadership Associate, Maryssa. She became a close mentor and friend over the summer. We were a small staff – consisting of a director (Catalina), a policy associate (Erik), a logistics associate (Mike) and a communications associate (Saryn). My responsibilities included helping Maryssa plan the regional leadership conferences that would be happening over the summer, as well as create an interactive reproductive justice workshop to present at each conference.
The very cool, yet stressful thing about being part of such a small nonprofit was that we had to be able to step into different roles when necessary. One of my strengths that helped with this internship was being adaptable and doing whatever was needed in order to keep things running. Most of our time revolved around planning the regional leadership conferences that would be taking place across the country. In order to be in the YP4 Fellowship, you must attend one regional conference during the summer with other fellows from your region, and all fellows then attend the National Summit in January. Our first regional conference was in Phoenix, AZ during my second week at work. I wasn’t expecting to be able to attend, considering I had only been working at YP4 for a week. But for some reason they thought I could be of value that week. The regional conferences consist of a crash course in social justice. In order for the regional conferences to run smoothly, a set of curriculum for each workshop must be created. I worked a lot of the summer on writing curriculum for YP4 Alumni to facilitate at the conferences. There are workshops taught from morning until night about all things social justice. Workshops focused on white privilege, feminist theory, telling your story, finding tangible ways to help your community and many more topics. It’s an exhausting weekend, both mentally and physically. You spend time truly exploring the oppression our communities face every day. It is also very reaffirming and helps many fellows realize why they do the work they do.

On my first day, I was tasked with creating my own gender and sexuality workshop to present at each regional conference. This was daunting, to say the least, because this had to be done in a week while other curriculum had taken
months to prepare. I was expecting to do a 15 or 30 minute presentation, but I was told that my presentation would be 2.5 hours long and would need to cover a wide range of topics. I spent that whole first week working tirelessly on an authentic Gender and Sexuality workshop that defined gender, sexuality, the gender binary, etc. We also covered comprehensive and pleasure based sex education, STI and HIV prevention, barrier methods, stigmas, PREP use, consent and reproductive justice basics. Going to the CLPP Conference was incredibly helpful for this part, because I had attended workshops on these topics already. It was incredible presenting in front of my peers about something I am so passionate about. A lot of the information I was giving was something that these fellows never received in their early adolescence. I really wanted to make it fun and interactive, but also recognize the seriousness of intimacy. I’m happy to say the presentation became my “baby” over the summer and that it got better and better at each regional conference.

I also helped with logistics at the regional trainings, making sure each fellow had everything they needed to be successful and feel safe. I traveled to Phoenix, St. Louis, and Raleigh. We also did a specific training in D.C. about voting rights. My days usually consisted of running around D.C. getting ready for each conference, proof reading curriculum and communicating with fellows to confirm their plans for travel.

A more abstract goal I had for myself this summer was to get some guidance on what I want to do after I graduate in May. This internship definitely solidified some things for me. I know now that I want to work in the social justice realm. I feel even more dedicated to reproductive justice and advocacy work. Before I completed
this internship, it was hard for me to see myself living in a big city and advocating for reproductive justice. I’m confident now that I could work at any major nonprofit and succeed because of this experience. More than anything, it takes hard work and dedication to justice. I now know I have that. After I graduate, I’d like to start working for a nonprofit, potentially YP4. Eventually I want to move back to Washington D.C. and work.

This internship wasn’t anything like I expected. I think I expected to be doing more traditional “intern-duties,” and that was not the case at all. I was a valued member of the team. I always felt my input was taken into consideration, and I felt like I helped make the organization better. I was given very real responsibilities and was expected to get things done. I also didn’t expect to connect so much with my coworkers. I was really worried about forming friendships within YP4 at first. I wanted to maintain a professional relationship, but I was desperately missing my family and I was craving those relationships. The five other people at YP4 became my family. We learned about each other’s personal lives, our families, our goals for life, and we cared for each other in an incredibly stressful line of work. When I finished my internship they had a going away dinner for me and we all cried. I found people that understood how important social justice is and wanted to dedicate their lives to it, just like me.

It was a very exciting summer to be in D.C. I saw Hillary Clinton speak at a Planned Parenthood event. It made me appreciate her dedication to reproductive justice. It was also a summer of heartache. There were many avoidable deaths of people of color by law enforcement. I went to multiple rallies protesting police
brutality. The Pulse nightclub shooting hit me particularly hard, as I and many of my friends are part of the Queer community. I was really excited to attend my first Pride festival. Capitol Pride is a weekend long festival celebrating the LGBT community and it’s one of the best in the nation. I woke up on Saturday morning to the news of the shooting. It was a really hard to decide whether I was going to still attend pride, especially with the safety concerns. I ended up meeting a RRASC friend and attending. It was so healing to be in a safe and loving space all day while we grieved. Some of the events from the summer are painful to think about, even now, but I couldn’t have been in a better place.

The biggest thing I learned this summer was that it is possible to have a fulfilling job doing something you love. I was exhausted all summer, but I woke up every morning excited to go to work and be a social justice warrior. I learned so much about being a better, more inclusive activist. I am so incredibly thankful to the people of YP4 for lifting me as they climbed. Honestly, I also learned that this world is pretty messed up. YP4 taught me to question everything, even the systems you have grown up trusting. It’s going to take radical people doing radical things to change the systems of oppression that exist.

Every day, I feel more and more thankful I had such an amazing internship. Living in D.C. and working with YP4 was the best thing that could have happened to me. It solidified the work I want to do and the people I want to have as part of my life. For the first time I feel like I can be my authentic self. I would encourage everyone to apply for RRASC, even if you feel you won’t get it. My biggest piece of advice is to go for the elite, competitive internships. I never thought I would get the
RRASC internship, but somehow I did. It was an incredible experience and gave me a look into the future I will (hopefully) have when I graduate.