About New Voices Pittsburgh

This summer I was honored to be paired with New Voices for Reproductive Justice, an organization located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania [with additional bases in Philadelphia and Cleveland, Ohio] that advocates for the overall health and wellbeing of Black women and girls. Through a variety of different programs and community engagement opportunities, the core mission of New Voices Pittsburgh is to create a leadership pipeline through community building, social justice education, youth advocacy work and development. The organization has hosted a variety of programs including SistahSpeak! Youth Project™, an educational youth enrichment program which centers the importance of sexual and reproductive health, mentorship and community organizing in the leadership development of Black girls and femmes; the Lorde-Baldwin Leadership Institute which takes a unique concentration on the LGBTQIA+ education through a queer affirming and inclusive lens; Voice Your Vote! Project™ which encourages voter engagement and policy education through multiple dimensions of community outreach; as well as the Reproductive Justice Leadership Network which engages Black women and Women of Color over the age of 25 in policy advocacy through movement-building, community organizing.

New Voices Pittsburgh also hosts several annual events including their environmental justice Kinks, Locks & Twists conference, which promotes the acknowledgement of the body as an environment which takes place every April and their eclectic celebration during Women of
Color HERStory Month™ which overlaps from mid-February, Black history month, to mid-March, Women’s History month.

Projects and tasks

Over the course of nine weeks, I spent a great deal of my internship putting together three-month’s worth of curriculum material for SistahSpeak! The majority of time was investing in collecting information from other educational resources and finding ways to merge their content into the core mission of the program. The curriculum I put together covered a wide array of topics including comprehensive sex education, healthy relationships, combating rape culture, practicing self love, addressing and deconstructing antiblackness, and safe sex practices for different types of sexual orientations and bodies.

My tasks also included creating data sheets for outreach work for the Voice Your Vote! Project™ campaign which mapped out the percentages and numbers of Black women and their families in Cleveland and Pittsburgh, as part of the first step toward understanding where voter engagement and advocacy work is needed as various election dates and deadlines approached. I also put together a list of juvenile detention centers and prisons within the state of Ohio to connect New Voices with incarcerated voters. This was one of the smaller projects that had a greater impact on me. Having originally been under the impression that formerly incarcerated felons lost their voting rights permanently, this was a meaningful clarification. This also put into perspective how incarcerated folx are further marginalized and oppressed through the voting disenfranchisement and highlighted how this specifically affects poor communities of color.

Another one of my tasks entailed reviewing Public Ally candidates for New Voices. Public Allies is a service corp program run through AmeriCorp, and this will be New Voices’
first year receiving an ally. I assisted the program manager in deliberating potential candidates through two rounds of interviews. Through this process, I learned so much about what it means to be on the other side of the table and how to gauge the interest and capacity of a quality candidate.

One of my final crucial tasks was securing donations and sponsors for NVP's SistahSpeak JUMP! Back-to-School event. I reached out to different stores for sporting goods, school supplies, clothing, shoes as well as restaurants for gift cards to raffle off during the event. Unfortunately, the event was unable to come together before I left, but was able to contact and secure donations and sponsorship from a number of local businesses and organizations.

Skill Building

Networking, community outreach, tabling, event prep and time management were among the most utilizes skills during my internship. With weekly deadlines and social media quotas, I also learned to manage my time more and more efficiently. Additionally, the events that New Voices hosted during the summer as well as the People’s Convention we attended in June were all excellent networking and outreach opportunities. I quickly caught on and donned my own version of the NVP elevator talk, rattling off our different programs and annual events as efficiently as possible. For each event, I learned that it was critical to know what tabling materials to bring in order to cater to the people in the space. Tabling with New Voices was one of the means of community engagement and a method of doing outreach work. The skills that I built throughout the summer with New Voices greatly contributed to my professional and individual development.
Highlights of my internship experience

During the SistahSpeak! retreat before my first week of work, I had the opportunity to observe participants engage in meaningful discussions about the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and other aspects of identity. The most groundbreaking moment was seeing that one of the participants, a 12 year old girl, learning about social constructs and intersectionality at such an early age. The topics covered during the retreat, framed through a radical reproductive lens, included information that I didn’t learn until my first year of college. As a whole, the retreat was one of the most memorable and valued moments of my internship experience.

How did my academic studies help to prepare me for this internship

As a Spanish major, most of my classes have been geared toward literary and cultural studies. Entering into my senior year, I’m taking most of the classes for my minor now, including a course of feminist bioethics. Until this year, I haven’t necessarily had the opportunity to explore reproductive justice within my academic courses. Much of my knowledge of reproductive justice work I acquired through personal ventures. Constantly reading articles from Everyday Feminism and The Body is Not An Apology as well as curating projects such as I, Too, Am Wellesley have been the contributors to my passion and dedication to reproductive justice and identity work.

In short, my academics provided me with the skeleton, but my personal interests in reproductive justice and the work that I completed during this internship provided me with the meat.
Internship contribution to career goals or life path

Because I thoroughly enjoyed contributing in the prep and planning process of the youth program, I see myself best fitting the role of program coordinator. This role feels the most tangible and involved to me as far as being able to directly connect with program participants and ensuring that the program's facets had a dynamic effect on youth perspective and empowerment. More specifically, I would want to work more directly with schools in order to implement programming for queer and trans students, providing resources and workshops as a means of educating program participants as well as faculty and staff.

My perspective of NVP

I hold the mission and vision of New Voices Pittsburgh in high regard. I believe that they have room to grow as far as ensuring that they fulfill their mission to the fullest extent. In the future, my hope is that they adhere to some of the critiques that they have garnered along the way, that there are means of making the organization more accessible and inclusive for all Black femme bodies.

Intersections of reproductive rights and social justice issues

I learned a great deal about the importance of decision making and agency. During my interview with Cavanaugh Quick from Dreams of Hope, I was able to make connections between the acknowledgement of individual accountability, the power of decision making, and the concept of agency, taught through an inclusive, intersectional lens. These elements are built around understanding our control/autonomy as people and how we maintain it, an ethic which many of us place at the core of reproductive justice.
Suggestions for potential future interns

My advice to future interns would be to embrace feeling uncomfortable, to approach every hardship with radical love and compassion but to take care not to internalize the actions of others. Focus and work diligently because once your time at the organization is up, your work is what will remain. I encourage future interns to meditate daily, to jot down any thought you believe is of importance.