**Q: What organization hosted your internship?**

My internship was with Safe Passage, a not for profit in Northampton, MA with multifold investment in supporting individuals and families that are survivors and victims of domestic violence. The organization also works to create and facilitate resources and conversations that push anti violence initiatives across the social fabric of our communities.

**Q: What were some of the projects and tasks you worked on? And the results?**

I did a lot of nitty gritty work that needed to get done before I could make headway on the projects I took on at Safe Passage. I wrote three grants and I’ve never written a grant before. So, I had to figure out literally everything there is to that process and it's funny because some of it is just really bizarre and doesn't feel real; a lot of places that give out grants don't have a website so you have to do a lot of detective work to see how the information you've been given on certain databases holds out—and since I hadn’t done that kind of work before, it was just about mustering a little confidence so that I sounded like I knew what I was doing when I called some of the foundations.

Side note: when you say something with confidence and you don’t know what you’re talking about, you still don’t know what you’re talking about. At the beginning of the summer I went to Springfield every Monday for a few weeks to spend time at one of their public libraries – Springfield houses really amazing libraries. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking about the magic of libraries; they’re so important in a truly multi-faceted way and I see so many of them functioning as community based learning and building spaces. The Springfield Central library that I spend time in has
grant database that folks can use to find individual/company/non-profit grant opportunities. Finding grants is like I've said a douzy. Even with what feels like a super refined search I would get results that confused my intention and lead me to weird parts of the Internet (not that that’s a hard place to bump into). Alas, I found my way and it felt great to learn a new skill. Who knew that figuring things out feels so good!

I spent a lot of time this summer learning and building with a woman named Jay, who has been teaching trauma-informed yoga at Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correctional Center. In addition she teaches classes in Holyoke as well and a lot of formerly incarcerated folks attend those classes, many of which focus on women that are going through the re-entry process. I met with her because Safe Passage was working to offer a trauma-informed yoga class for folks who have experienced domestic violence in the community as well as including folks that are living at the shelter now. The project was sort of given to me in that the director of programs wanted me to find an instructor and work to realize a blueprint of what Safe Passage would need to secure the space and program. I worked to imagine a program that tries, as much as it can, to prioritize trauma-informed instructor (who I think I've met today!) that has a background in social work/domestic violence work alongside translators; a Spanish as a first language translator as well as a sign language translator for folks that are hearing impaired. The blueprint also outlines the goal and importance of securing childcare advocates as well so that we can offer free on site childcare. The program and grants secured funding for the instructor, translators, and childcare folks who will all earn stipends.

In addition to writing grants, as a direct service advocate I spent a lot of my time in the shelter spending time with families as well as being responsible for hotline shifts. We had a four
week direct service training for the first month of my internship, the training involved folks from the greater community; there were participants from all over Massachusetts invested in violence prevention and hands on social justice work.

**Q: What were the skills you used most often in your internship?**

As a French speaker, and also the only French speaking person among employees and volunteer at Safe Passage, I was able to spend a lot of time with someone who became very important to me. For confidentiality I am not going to say her name, but she speaks French as her second language, after Haitian-Creole, and we shared stories, knowledge, and ideas with one another. It was an honor to become close to someone as cool as her, so in this way I found my ability to speak French a skill.

**Q: What are some of the difficulties that you experienced? How did you address or overcome these difficulties?**

I had a rough time navigating my relationship with my dad, in addition to how his sickness and my experience letting go of him intersecting with my responsibilities as an intern and as a part time employee at a restaurant. For whatever reason that I don’t feel like unpacking right now I experience a lot of shame when it comes to setting limits and striking boundaries with people in an attempt to make space for what’s tearing me apart. I didn’t really communicate until much later with the people I was accountable to at Safe Passage what was happening with my dad, and it made me feel awkward all the time. As someone who identifies with feelings of craze and paranoia, I felt crazy and I felt paranoid a lot. I couldn’t fall asleep until 2 or 3 AM several nights during the week; I was low energy and had a hard time leaving the house during the windows
time I didn’t have to be anywhere. We can’t live like this y’all! Feelings are so difficult. Losing a parent is so difficult. But if we’re going to survive we have to allow those feelings to exist outside in warm light.

Q: How did your internship contribute to your career goals or life path?

I kept finding myself thinking about and researching the history and contemporary fabric of our health care system(s). I love research, which is something that became clear to me over the course of my internship, I can actually see myself being a research analyst for communities that are striving to reimagine and build a new health care agenda that centers survivors and victims of institutionalized violence and control. I think a lot about doing work that supports people on the front lines through compiling research and resources for them.

[an except from our rrasc blog/online reports that happened weekly]

July 7, 2016

@ Safe Passage

Shout out to [RRASC Supervisor] Amanda – she is a light! Truly an amazing person to be around when you're wondering where to go from a low position in life. I'm really feeling a whole lot. I got a phone call from a nurse that works at the nursing home my dad is currently at in Boston telling me that he's not taking his medications. There's like 1 nurse for every 40 patients or something preposterous like that. The nursing home he's in is a state nursing home, it houses primarily low-income immigrants and people of color. The medical industrial complex pretends it doesn't exist while benefiting from the violence that occur there. I don't want to go into it right now. There's so much that I don't know about my Dad. When I string together words to describe him, they all
feel strangely deserted. Deserted words. Like an unfurnished house that's belonged to someone for a long time. I will say that my dad is dying and every time I visit him I feel like I learn something new and huge about him; his journey to the US, his ancestry, his incarceration, me? I feel like a new person everyday.

I've been doing so much. It's incredibly multi faceted. This is good for me in that I'm definitely the type of person who gets excited about new ideas and projects all the time and wants to do everything all at once. I think it goes without saying, but it's an age old struggle to balance everything. I'm writing a grant and working with three different research projects. In addition, I've been available for childcare in the office each Tuesday. Mondays I go to the shelter and I hang out with some of the teenagers, we go on bike rides, watch telenovelas, cook, draw, paint our nails, you know, what anyone wants to do literally whenever. I'm also working with a Haitian woman who is undocumented; we've been working together to find her housing and health care. I am fluent in French because I lived in France for collectively two years, so our relationship is so fun and positive. I'm teaching her English, and she helps me with my French. It's perfect; she used to be a journalist and an activist in Haiti and is so brilliant. I really value the time we spend together. Tomorrow I'm going to the house again to work with her on certain documents, I'm going to make a lesson plan (leçon numéro 1) tonight that will be a guide for us tomorrow.

When I picked up the phone yesterday I lied to the people I was with when they asked what the call was about. I think that's the worst part, feeling like it's easier to lie about what's happening because explaining it feels exhausting and scary. It's exhausting and painful when talking about your dad scares some people to the point where you’re the one consoling them. I don’t know.
Not really discovering anything new about that reality. It's been feeling more and more unhealthy these days.

Safe Passage is great – I've been working on doing more research for the projects I've mentioned in earlier weeks, and I feel good about this work. Starting next week I'll be hanging out with 13, 14, and 15 year olds that are living at the shelter. I can't wait, we're gonna go on bike rides and craft. I am so excited to build relationships with them.

It's pouring rain here in Northampton, MA and it's important. You can't even put a toothpick in the dirt around here anymore without getting dust in your eyes, nose, mouth, ears, nails, in between your toes, etc.

Strength, love, solidarity, and healing

Pictures!

My iPhone broke last week and all of my photos are gone! However I was lucky in that I saved a few (including a very rare selfie of me on the first day of my internship). The other two are photos from a #BlackLivesMatter Amherst College chapter event that I got Safe Passage to donate some supplies to.