Activism 101 teaches you that all forms of oppression are interconnected. The links between race, class, culture, ethnicity, economic background, and sex culminate in a mixture of barriers that prevent people being treated fairly. These categories also contribute to the circumstances of the people we help. From a young age I was drawn to button pushing as a full time activity. The pro-choice students I met in college were much like the gay community I worked with in high school, a controversial group advocating for the rights of women and men to control their fertility and knowledge of sexual rights. I had no idea that this controversial group was actually in the majority, 73% of Americans identify as pro-choice\(^1\), and one in three women will have an abortion in their lifetime\(^2\). My first week of college, I signed up to lobby the state house in Boston. Up until then I had always thought of myself as a laid back-easy going person. I began to speak with groups of people that strongly believed that women should have full autonomy of their bodies. This began to intersect with transgender rights I was familiar with and the ability to self-identify. As I continued to get involved with the Pro-Choice movement I quickly caught on that the topic of reproductive freedom was more than the supreme court decision *Roe v Wade*. In reality it was a daily battle that was still being fought. Buffer zone laws\(^3\) and lack of access to affordable quality health care are only two areas that continue to be a struggle for women.

\(^1\) Find statistics
\(^2\) Texas Equal Access Fund statistic
\(^3\) Buffer zone laws create a fixed zone in public ways and sidewalks around entrances and driveways to reproductive healthcare facilities
http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=cagopressrelease&L=1&L0=Home&sid=Cago&b=pressrelease&f=2008_02_20_buffer_challenge&csid=Cago
This summer I was afforded the opportunity to intern with the National Network of Abortion Funds (The Network/ NNAF) in Jamaica Plain, Boston. The Network works to diminish the financial barriers that prevent women from obtaining an abortion. The office works on various projects some of which include, “The Hyde Campaign: 30 Years is Enough!” and EC now campaign. Projects being launched by The Network include a new database, EC outreach campaign, and “1 in 3” a theater production about women’s experiences with abortion.

The Hyde Campaign: 30 Years is Enough, looks back on the 1976 decision to not fund abortion through Medicaid. Before starting this internship I knew about the Hyde Amendment, but did not have a solid understanding of how many women this legislation has affected. Some funding is specifically earmarked for Non-medicaid States because of the amount of funding that is available for women. Medicaid is funded both federally and by the state some states allocate money toward abortion procedures. Thirty six states are non-Medicaid. What does this mean? It means that there are low income women that are eligible for subsidized medical care, but are unable to choose whether or not to have a child because the choice has been made for them. Among the projects that our office took on this summer, Escillia, the other intern from University of Minnesota researched the Hyde Amendment. The EC Now campaign, originally started by the Women’s Emergency Network in Miami Florida, is meant to help women served by Funds find Emergency Contraception. Eighteen funds came together to mass distribute information about access and availability of EC in their communities. Each of the funds sent in the contact information, address, price and location of EC at local distributors. The information will debut later this month at ecnow.org.
Throughout the summer I was able to become involved in many different projects, including the organizing of the Annual Organizing Summit as well as the working group for the play “1 in 3”. The Annual Organizing Summit took place in June at Bryn Mawr College outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Two participants from each of the 104 member funds were invited to attend the Summit at a subsidized rate. Nearly 150 attendees gathered to talk about the need for sustainable volunteers and recruiting a younger member base. Workshop topics ranged from Fundraising 101 to Intake Policies and Procedures. The work surrounding the Summit was predominately administrative. The UPS man became a fixture in our office every morning as he picked up mountains of boxes to be shipped to Bryn Mawr. Tasks I took part in during this time included copying of in house publications, maintaining contact with the event organizers, placing orders for food, beer, and wine, assisting with travel plans, and organizing a shuttle service for attendees. I helped develop a restaurant guide which recommended local eateries to summit participants along with walking directions.

The Summit consisted of many different activities including workshops, plenaries, ice breakers, silent auctions, live auctions, and a banquet. During an intake workshop I was able to learn how different funds respond to calls and how client information is recorded. We talked about difficult callers, emotional callers, and women whose needs we were unable to meet. This session was led by board members Kate Weck and Lynn Jackson, the two women work closely with abortion funds. Lynn is the national case manager who attempts to piece together the last bits of money that are preventing women from obtaining a procedure.
Few snags took place during the overall Summit in part to the incredible organization of The Network. The Administrative Director/ Summit Coordinator was on-call 24-7 throughout the conference and used the program assistant and interns to help keep the Summit running smoothly. Summit stumbling blocks were minimal ranging from accessibility issues after our golf cart nearly fell apart, the number of showers available at one time, supplies needed for workshops, and internet accessibility. Each problem was handled with ease with a team of nearly four round-the-clock assistants.

As the summit came to a close the office began to swell with more paperwork that needed to be put into the system. Summit evaluations, plenary note sessions, group discussion notes all had to be typed and systematically filed away in an effort create a stronger more effective summit in 2009.

While at the Summit I was also able to attend a workshop put on by the Texas Equal Access Fund (TEA Fund) from Dallas Texas. The group has spent much of the past year writing and developing a theater production about abortion. The play, “1 in 3,” the average number of women that will have an abortion in their lifetime, features scenes told by various actors on stage. The questions women ask themselves, the variety of circumstances that lead them to their decision, and the personal nature of the decision-making process is captured in a twenty four scene play. Three scenes from the play were shown at the Summit. When I returned to Boston the following Wednesday, I spoke with Megan about getting further involved in organizing a national tour for the play. I spent most of my time over the course of July researching social and political theater. I looked at models such as The Vagina Monologues and BOLD (Birth on Labor Day) for inspiration about how the abortion rights movement could be transformed by this touring
piece of art. After the play summit attendees were able to leave feedback and let us know if they would like to be further involved in creating a marketing and public engagement aspect that would be coupled with the play. We got right to work setting up teleconferences and developing a timeline for a successful first run.

The most valuable skill that I acquired while working with NNAF was grant research. I was given the opportunity to go to a morning-long training given by AGMConnect⁴ (Associated Grant Makers). This training gave me access to billions of dollars in grants that are currently floating around. I was made aware of important documents in 501(c)3s such as the 990 form. I learned how to look up what foundations are funding similar organizations. I was introduced to the Chronicles of Philanthropy⁵

Among all of the things I learned this summer about running a non-profit I received a crash course in abortion funding. Before now it never would have occurred to me how expensive an abortion could cost. Over the course of the summer women called asking for as little as $150 to pay for a procedure and as much as $9,000. Network member funds are often unable to cover the full cost of procedures and some funds prefer that the women come up with some of the money on their own even if it is only $25. While I was aware there were dwindling numbers of clinics throughout the United States I was made aware of another resource women were lacking: travel and lodging. Women who were not able to have procedures done in their home states were required to travel. I spoke to women from Mississippi, New Jersey, Florida, and South Dakota all which were forced to travel to obtain an abortion.

---

⁴ http://www.agmconnect.org/
⁵ Chronicles of Philanthropy
Of all of the calls I took this summer I will most fondly remember a young man that called on behalf of a friend. The friend was having difficulty deciding whether or not she was capable of having a child. The woman had most recently been struggling with mental health concerns and was just beginning to take care of herself again. Since the woman was not calling I recommended that he ask his friend to call Backline, a counseling service for women. Our office policy is that we will not fund any woman that may be coerced into having an abortion - we believe “the choice” should be that of the woman and the woman only.

In the past, my experiences with Planned Parenthood have always been positive. I worked as a liaison between Planned Parenthood and the University of Massachusetts student group Vox: Students for Choice. Anytime I tried to call the Western Mass clinic I had a direct number to contact our grassroots coordinator, I even brought a few girls to the Worcester Planned Parenthood clinic in high school for emergency contraception. This summer was the first time I attempted to call, listening to their forever long options trying to get through to a real person. I often pressed the wrong number and was routed to another person or list of options. I kept thinking to myself, “Is this what women go through?” It is an incredibly lengthy process trying to call only to receive impersonal service.

In an organization with fairly similar goals to the National Network of Abortion Funds it was incredibly disappointing to learn that the National Abortion Federation was not able to provide us with an updated list of member clinics. They simply said,

---

6 Backline is dedicated to addressing the broad range of experiences and emotions surrounding pregnancy, parenting, adoption and abortion. We provide a forum in which women and their loved ones can engage in discussion that goes beyond political rhetoric. We are committed to addressing the individual and diverse realities within our communities. Our vision is of a society in which pregnancy options are discussed with openness, honesty, and the deepest respect for reproductive justice. (yourbackline.org)
“Unfortunately, we cannot distribute the list. It changes so often. The online listing is a good place to start, though it also is not completely up-to-date. You can always call the appropriate Case Manager to verify whether a particular clinic is a member.” An outdated website and networks of organizations striving to achieve the same goals that were not able to work with each other. Not once did I receive a message notifying us that a new clinic was added or a particular clinic would no longer be accepting funds.

The most rewarding aspect of my interning the Network this summer was having the opportunity to answer the phone in our office and talk to women. The Network strives to find ways to help every woman who calls, from the national office we often refer to local and national funds. In an effort to meet the needs of clients the Network is starting to implement travel and lodging networks to help women get to appointments. While it is heart breaking to hear a woman’s emotional voice on the other end of the phone I would hang up feeling like I may have given her the slightest bit of hope that someone is out there to help her out. Women called from domestic abuse situations, homeless shelters, teens called about family abuse, mothers called for their daughters, grandmothers called for their granddaughters, and best friends called for one another. The entangled web of women working to support one another in the difficult decision about whether or not to have a child was inspiring.

Even though most of the work contained disproportionate amounts of administrative work vs. field work it was clear that each envelope I stuffed was either asking or thanking a donor for a contribution towards our work. Each e-mail I drafted was creating a stronger relationship between a member fund and the national
organization. The relationships that I began to build with member funds allowed me the
opportunity to call on them to piece together funding for women regionally or nationally.

In closing, I enjoyed the opportunity to become involved in another deeper
compartment of the Civil Liberties and Public Policy program through the Reproductive
Rights Activist Service Corps. I had the opportunity to meet incredible people and
reconnect with others. I felt welcomed into the office and to the movement by fellow
activists. The most incredible experience was being able to feel tension being lifted by
the women calling who finally felt that someone was listening on the other end of the
phone. I learned about the disproportionate struggles that low-income women face in
relation to sexuality and the choices that are available to them. As the National Network
of Abortion Funds continues to grow as an organization and they are able to reach out to
a greater number of women I am confident that society will soon begin to de-stigmatize
abortion in our society. After participating in the RRASC program I feel that I have
gained a comprehensive course in reproductive rights. I will forever be fighting for
women to retain the right to control their bodies. My foundation of knowledge has only
just begun and I am excited to continue in this field of work.