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Third Wave Foundation
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**RRASC Final Report: My Experience at Third Wave Foundation**

This summer I interned at the Third Wave Foundation, a foundation that gives grants to community based organizations across the country. These organizations are often led by young people; youth leadership is something that Third Wave is very much invested in. These organizations work on reproductive justice and have recently been working on gender justice as well. Third Wave assists these organizations in building an infrastructure so that the organizations can sustain themselves. Third Wave plays a huge role in helping to start these organizations, allowing an organization to get visibility and creating their own grant donor base.

Some of Third Wave’s grant partners were SisterSong, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, and so many more. The Third Wave Foundation also had a national abortion fund that has just recently closed this summer. The Emergency Abortion Fund (EAF) served low-income people of color with abortion funding, focusing specifically on people who were in their late second and early third trimesters, and funding people who were under the age of 30. Because Third Wave is focusing on their work with their grant partners, they decided it was time that the EAF closed. This summer was the last summer the EAF hotline ran, which was sad but also a huge step forward for Third Wave and the work they are doing around building the movements for reproductive justice and gender justice. It was a big year for the EAF because this summer Third Wave released their EAF report which was a big deal in terms of reporting the people we fund and what abortion funds entail. Third Wave also increased the funding budget
from $1,800/week to $4,300/week and the last two weeks of operation consisted of a $6,000 weekly budget.

As the EAF intern it was my job to answer the EAF hotline and help fund abortion procedures that were being done within the week. I also wrote for Third Wave’s blog, reporting on the fund and my experiences. Answering the phone for the fund has opened my eyes to all the realities of abortion access: abortions are expensive, a lot of insurance companies don’t cover them, and the federal Medicaid program doesn’t cover any procedure unless the pregnancy was a result of rape, incest, or endangers the life of the person carrying the fetus. Also, clinics only provide abortion care up to a certain number of weeks depending on the state so if somebody is further along they have to travel hundreds of miles to another state, and sometimes people have to spend 2-4 nights at hotels near the clinic if the procedure takes more than a day. For example: I funded an abortion procedure that cost $12,000 for somebody who was 30 weeks into their pregnancy and had to travel to the other side of the country for the procedure. In total the procedure was well over $12,000 when you take into account the flight to and from the clinic and the nights that had to be spent in the hotel, seeing as that the abortion took multiple days to complete. I spoke to people as young as 11 years old, people who are incarcerated, rape and incest survivors, and undocumented immigrants.

At the beginning of my internship I was really excited and thought I could tackle all the tasks given to me. Soon, I found out that my job wasn’t so easy and I felt disconnected from my work. I felt like I was doing the same thing every day, and I really didn’t like turning people away. In fact it was the worst feeling ever because everybody deserves to get an abortion if they want but there were just other people who needed funding more, and those were the people I had to prioritize funding. It was a different environment than I had expected. I thought it was going to be simple answering the phone and talking to the people who called the fund. But after talking
to my supervisor I was able to answer the phone with more confidence and I felt like I was doing my job a lot more. The reason I felt so disconnected before was because I wasn’t doing everything I could to help the people I was talking to on the phone but after realizing that, I was able to give the callers a lot more attention. Calling people back and giving them other resources, calling clinics, and calling other funds to make sure the person would get seen was the most satisfying feeling. If I could have done my internship all over again the first thing I would do is put as much effort in at the beginning as I did in the end.

I had to use databases to input patient information, so I worked a lot on developing those skills. I also had to check profit, loss and details, change the information on the database and work with clinics making sure they received their checks. If we didn’t receive invoices from them I would give them a friendly reminder to send them in so we can pay them. I worked a lot on my communication skills because I had to do a lot of back and forth with clinics and other funds.

One of the greatest learning experiences I had at Third Wave was the day in which I learned all of Third Wave’s history. I think that moment made me appreciate Third Wave and the work they do so much more. There were binders of newspaper articles that mentioned Third Wave, dating back to 1992, which isn't that old but then again Third Wave is still a baby in terms of being a foundation. It was interesting reading through the notes that staff took down, and they recorded all the changes they made to Third Wave. I basically saw Third Wave morph into what it is today within a one hour staff lunch. I felt like I learned a lot just touching all of those papers. It's really inspiring to see what the creators of Third Wave had intended for their organization. I didn't even know that the women that started Third Wave went all across the country registering new voters, woman voters. They did such radical things; I was reading through their binders and found an article about women who were a part of Third Wave chaining themselves to the gate
outside of the White House. I don't know the exact details of what was going on since I was skimming through the binder, but the picture that was taken reminded me of the Women’s Suffragist Movement, and the women who stood outside of the White House while Wilson was in office. It was really nice just getting a look at all of Third Wave from the beginning to what it is now. This was one of the best days I had at the office.

Third Wave was a great place for an intern site in terms of my academic focus. I want to study public policy by looking into historical movements of oppressed groups. I am really interested in studying queer and race theory, and I am interested in Latin@ struggles and class struggles throughout history and connecting it to the struggles going on today. I don’t really know exactly how to word or even describe it because it’s still all scrambled in my brain, but I know that I want to work with communities like mine: poor, people of color, and from rough neighborhoods. I already have a background studying these topics and I have also interned and volunteered with grassroots organizations in my neighborhood. I was able to bring my knowledge to my internship but I learned a lot more being there than I had expected. I learned a lot just by interacting with people on the phone and I learned a great deal from my co-workers. My internship showed me how a foundation actually functions and though I don’t see myself working at a foundation, I feel like it is something I will encounter in the future so just knowing how foundations function was important. I am not used to working with an organization that doesn’t really work in the community, which was actually one of my struggles, but because I wasn’t used to it, I learned almost everything about a professional setting in a place that focuses on social justice issues. So though I do not see myself working at a place like Third Wave, I still developed a lot of professional skills and I learned a lot about the issues I actually am passionate about and care about.
Overall I appreciate and am thankful for my experiences at Third Wave, even if I didn’t enjoy every moment, I learned so much and it isn’t bad learning that there are some things you know you don’t want to do. I am interested in everything that Third Wave works towards, the issues they take up are important to me and I am really happy that they exist because without them, a lot of amazing organizations wouldn’t exist, organizations that I see myself actually being a part of, organizations that work closely with their communities. I didn’t expect my experience working the abortion fund to be the way it was but even though it wasn’t what I expecting, I still would have done it again for the experience. Like I mentioned, Third Wave is such an amazing place and they do amazing things, it’s just not a place for me. Still, everything that it stands for is something worth keeping for other people to experience, they are to thank for a lot of other organizations existing and their work focuses on a lot of things that other people would neglect because they want to avoid what people call “controversial issues.” Third Wave understands that everything intersects in terms of social justice; you cannot talk about one issue without talking about the other issues. That is something I really appreciated about Third Wave Foundation, the fact that they understood that though there are differences, the struggles still had a lot of similarities. They understood that reproductive justice was tied to gender justice, which is tied to racial justice and so on.

I would like to tell future interns to ask questions and participate and if the organization you are interning for touches on issues that you are really invested in, make sure you learn all you can, even if you’re having a hard time with it, it’s always better to learn than to have gone through an internship and not have gained anything. I wouldn’t take back my internship experience for anything.