Mika Hernandez
RRASC final report
Forward Together – Summer 2013

Working at Forward Together was an enlightening and empowering experience. I was given more autonomy and respect than I ever expected in an intern position, which truly informed the way in which I was able to do work and contribute back to the organization. From the smaller tasks that I did to the long-term organizational goals I assisted in accomplishing, every moment with Forward Together was a teaching moment, a growing moment, and a positive experience.

While with Forward Together I was able to be involved in a number of different projects and initiatives. My primary realm of work was in the organization’s youth organizing program. The youth organizing program is a semester and summer based afternoon space for teenage youth of color (predominantly Asian youth) where they participate in reproductive justice and social justice geared workshops and trainings. The program, known as Core, meets on Mondays and Wednesdays and a substantial amount of my work revolved around preparing curriculum, logistics, and materials for program days. My favorite aspects of working with the youth program were leading discussions, developing curriculum, and hearing the way my youth were interacting with the topics we were covering. I was happiest during my internship when I was working with the youth because they brought my passions to life. I applied to RRASC with the hope of working with young people; little did I know I would be coming away from it with an extremely renewed fire for hearing the way teenagers experience oppression and how they in their daily lives combat and resist the things that adversely affect them.

For the work I did with youth, I was able to draw on my pre-existing experience and skills around workshop and training facilitation. I was able to refine and exercise these skills because working with and engaging youth, especially teenagers, is no easy feat. I learned different ways to communicate ideas, concepts, and issues that I usually speak about in really formal and academic contexts. This was a skill I was immensely eager to develop.

When I wasn’t working directly with the youth or developing curriculum for the time I would be spending with them in the program, I worked a lot on online engagement
and honed my skills in social media and media representation of the work the organization was doing. I shared my office space with the manager of online engagement for the organization and we were able to form a really great working relationship. He needed assistance around social media representation for the youth arm of the organization because he has his plate full working on Forward Together and its affiliated initiatives’ web pages and media sites. I worked with him and my supervisor Mai to develop parameters and a work plan around my efforts to work on the youth program’s online engagement needs.

In addition to working on my social media and engagement skills, I was given the opportunity to research relevant reproductive justice policies and discuss them with the youth I was working with. I was able to exercise my writing by working on blog posts that reflected my conversations with the youth I was working with (which were subsequently posted on the organization’s web page). I very much enjoyed when all my areas of work came together.

I did not face very many difficulties during my time with Forward Together. The most prominent struggle I faced was learning how to schedule my work on a realistic and effective timetable. I was initially just so eager to be involved with as much as possible, but soon realized that I would be loading my work day up front with too much and it would leave me tired and without as much substantive work to do in the second half of the day. It took me about two weeks to get a feel for my best working timetable. I was able to overcome this issue because I was candid with Mai and told her about my concerns. She gave me feedback and we decided together that I would set two tasks for my morning schedule and three tasks for my afternoon schedule. It worked well and would fluctuate depending on what exactly I was working on, but it made my mental working space so much more clear cut and clutter free.

I am so pleased about all the work I did this summer. From helping plan events, to updating media sites, to talking to community members, to chaperoning youth conferences, to doing staff tai chi every Wednesday, everything I did with Forward Together felt so positive and affirming of what I want to do in the world and with my life. I was able to see a clear connection between my organizing and activist ideals and the real work on the ground that I want to do when I graduate from Hampshire. By far, my
favorite part of working at Forward Together was learning from and with the youth in Core. Each of them brought and shared interesting, honest, and insightful opinions to our program space. Getting to know them and hearing their stories, sharing my own stories, was the most invigorating and empowering aspect of my time with Forward Together. I was so glad to be around teenagers in the program, older staff people, and young professionals closer to me in age because everyone treated one another with so much respect and care. A culture of compassion and commitment to justice permeated all the work that I did throughout my internship.

Throughout the summer I was able to re-learn about the ways in which my work as a student and community organizer intersect with policy work and lobbying. I was able to see and experience both aspects of organizing while at Forward Together and it made me so excited to know that sites and organizations like them exist in the world, making change and connecting with other individuals and groups that are also just as passionate about creating social change and achieving justice.

I had the great honor of working rather closely with another intern while at Forward Together. She and I were able to talk about our personal and previous experiences with organizing and talked a lot about our ideal spaces in which to continue doing the type of work we were doing with Forward Together. By the end of our time at the organization we had completed collaborative curriculum for workshops, organized events and shared logistical responsibilities, and compared a lot of notes and had a lot of conversations about the policies that Forward Together was publicly endorsing. While we were very proud of ourselves and knew that we had accomplished a lot as interns, a big realization we had was how much respect, support, and interest we received while working on all these things from the staff of Forward Together. We came away both echoing the thought, “this place has really set the bar high” and it really has. In the future, I want to work at a place like Forward Together that values all its collaborators, volunteers, staff, and interns in high esteem.

I feel that I have genuinely made a strong connection with many of the staff at Forward Together and built a strong foundation and understanding of what it should hopefully feel like to do this kind of work. Not only was I able to experience a professional and effective work environment that was committed to social change and
justice work, but I felt validated, cared for, and respected as a person. I am proud of the work I was able to accomplish this summer and know that I learned a lot about my work habits, needs, and interests. I can confidently say that RRASC, Forward Together, and my own passion for this type of work melded and met in a beautiful way that has given me a lasting sense of enthusiasm.