My internship began as Dr. George Tiller was murdered in his church in Kansas. The National Network of Abortion Funds had just held a memorial service in honor of Tiller when I started my first day in the office. One of my first tasks at NNAF was to research where the memorial service was written about and record it, which involved reading many articles about Dr. Tiller, his life, and his interactions with thousands of women and reproductive rights organizations across the US. This project gave me a deep understanding of the impact that he had on the pro-choice and reproductive rights movement, how much he meant to individuals involved in this work, and how important he was to the millions of people who have been affected by the choice to have an abortion.

Did I know much about Dr. Tiller before his death? No. Did I know much about abortion funding in general? No. Honestly, I had no idea of the impact Dr. Tiller had on the reproductive rights world and the impact he had on women’s lives. I did not know that he often reduced the cost of later-term abortions for low-income women across the US and that he was a strong ally of many of the local and national fund organizations I became familiar with throughout my internship.

As my internship progressed, I would later see his name on documents; for example, the name of his clinic was in the Kansas section of the Network’s clinic references. I realized how much he was ingrained in the organizing work of abortion funds. His death was a tremendous loss. The impact of his death and subsequently the loss of his clinic was reinforced by the calls I
took from women living in Kansas who now have to go to other clinics for procedures, or from individuals referencing his death, because there were even fewer providers to go to.

I went to the National Network of Abortion Funds organizing summit in Chicago during the second week of my internship. At the summit conference, I was exposed to the interconnectedness between Dr. Tiller, clinics, and abortion funding and I was surrounded by passionate abortion rights activists from across the country. I was honored to be a part of the gathering of people at the summit conference who talked about knowing Dr. Tiller and shared their experiences of working with him. People passionately and lovingly spoke about the man whose famous motto was “Trust Women.” Clinic and abortion fund staff from across the US spoke about how now is the time to speak out about the work that is being done – that we are not going to remain silent or undercover just because of the murder of Dr. Tiller. It was truly inspiring to be an intern amongst many of these accomplished, determined and focused individuals.

This intensity of emotion and determination was exemplified when we were alerted to the fact that the hotel we were in had had three bombs called in to the manager. This was the first time I personally faced the fear and heat of the abortion fight. Before this internship, I had been on the periphery of the reproductive rights fight - a strong pro-choice supporter, but never an employee or volunteer in an organization or clinic that faced this hate day after day. Here I was, in the middle of it. The unity and support of the attendees at the conference was incredible. The work was not going to stop, and we took small precautions of turning our name tags around when we were in public areas of the hotel. As one attendee wrote aptly on their evaluation of the summit, “We have to keep working until abortion is no longer a swear word,” and that strong belief resonated throughout all of the attendees as the summit progressed.
I took these extensive and emotional experiences from the conference back into my internship in Boston. My understanding of abortion funding had broadened by attending workshops, and talking with employees and volunteers who worked with certain funds. I received a quick introduction of how National funds, local funds and the National Abortion Federation all played into working towards helping fund women’s procedures. This all became more clear when I was back in Boston and got trained to take calls from women who were calling for funding information. The calls were emotionally moving and wearing – people calling from so many different situations – all in crisis situations, without the money to pay for a procedure that 1 in 3 women have throughout their lives. I took calls from women whose procedures ranged from $200 to $7200. I talked to women calling for their homeless daughters, friends calling for friends dealing with serious addictions, boyfriends calling for their partners who were unsure of what to do, women calling who were in abusive relationships, women who didn’t speak English, social workers calling for immigrants and rape survivors, genetic counselors calling for clients, and one in particular that will forever give me shivers- an angry, aggressive boyfriend who had secretly checked his girlfriend’s voicemail. For many of these callers, abortion was not a political decision, it was a matter of doing what was best for them, and what many women needed was someone on the other end of the phone to trust and believe them.

Each and every call was different. I believe that I did more than just give information to these callers, I was also there for them to talk to about what was going on their lives. Some people would share many details about their situations, many just wanted some clear information about what their next step should be. Getting funding and finding a clinic that provides abortions can be beyond challenging. Many women have to travel far to get to a clinic depending on how
far along they are, and what city and state they are located in. It’s difficult to synthesize all of the information, where to go, who to call to get funding, and what information you need to have, especially when you are dealing with something as sensitive and emotional as getting an abortion. The intricacies of the funding information was challenging and intimidating at first to me—having to find out where the caller is from, how much money they are looking for, and where they are going for the procedure all seemed daunting to me at first, especially when callers were often frustrated with the fact that they had been calling around to many places and hadn’t been able to get through. My training as a Counselor/Advocate for the Everywoman’s Center helped with calming my nerves as I began to take calls from women, and the more I did it, the more accustomed I became to the whole process of intake counseling.

One of my most difficult calls came my first full day when I received a call from a woman calling for a friend with a serious addiction. It was a very intense and emotional call, but ultimately I was able to give her funding and clinic information for a couple of different states depending on where they decided to go, and I began to feel more confident in my abilities after I had talked to her a couple of times. Funding information was ingrained in me when my internship came to a close in early August. I began to look at the US in terms of what was available for abortion funding, and whenever I heard the name of a state, I immediately thought of the names of local and national fund organizations available to women there.

Similarly, as I took calls from women and men, I simultaneously researched clinics in Medicaid states to find out how far along they did procedures. I called many clinics to find out this information, and also subsequently found out about providers who had stopped practicing. This task, although somewhat repetitive, was rewarding because not only did I learn what clinics existed in certain states, I realized again the safety precautions clinics and employees have to
take. Many clinics required that you call from an unblocked number, and also a few clinics refused to tell me how far along they do procedures up to. Again, I felt the implications of the danger and fear of working in this movement.

I know this information will be a source of knowledge that I will take with me throughout my future jobs, interactions, and experiences. Taking calls was, by far, the most rewarding and beneficial aspect of my internship. I was able to connect the experiences that were talked about at the organizing conference with the actual women who were calling the Network’s phone. Abortion funding, for me, went from a theoretical and organizing issue, to an emotional and personal one, as I talked with people from across the United States.

The other very important aspect of my internship was the time I took to talk to my supervisor about the goals and projects I wanted to accomplish in the weeks I had left at the Network. I wanted to make the space to voice my feelings about hoping to work on certain projects that I had not had the chance to do before. My supervisor was receptive to my desire to take on more projects, and I was able to delve into fundraising issues. Throughout the remaining weeks, I read many articles on tips to successful fundraising- how to personalize your interactions with donors so to hopefully get even higher donations, and how to reach fundraising goals in a six week campaign. Fundraising is integral to non-profit organizations, and learning about it was interesting and eye opening. It was something that I have not taken the time to understand before, and I was finally able to during my time at the Network. The notes I took on fundraising will hopefully be used in a handbook that the Network will publish for local funds to use when they are starting up and looking to fundraise money. Similarly, established funds could also use the handbook to work on their fundraising skills. As the Network is the umbrella organization of the local funds throughout the US, there is quite a lot of material published by
NNAF to be shared with other funds and I’m pleased that I was able to lend a hand in some of that work!

Taking the time to chat with my supervisor about what I wanted to get out of my RRASC internship was imperative. It gave me the opportunity to think about what I wanted to achieve and gain experience in, and took courage to do! I would recommend that all interns in the future, if they have questions or concerns about the projects they are working on, the work environment, or how they are feeling, take the time to talk to their supervisors.

This summer has proven to be one full of many emotional and influential moments. I feel that I have been part of the reproductive rights movement at a very difficult time— I entered NNAF after the death of a strong, feminist provider who was a fighter. But what I learned along the way is that every individual affected by abortion, every volunteer, employee, and intern who works in an organization dedicated to reproductive rights is a fighter. I have learned that working in this field means being surrounded by passionate, determined individuals who are fighting eloquently for the right – the human right – to affordable and accessible abortions.

My “trust women” pin in honor of Tiller will always rest squarely and securely on my bag, in solidarity with the many individuals I talked to on the phone this summer and with those I know well who have been touched by abortion. It will always remind me of the experiences I gained from this internship and to practice what I know is right - to speak out against inequality surrounding abortion and to always, always trust women.