RRASC Internship: National Network of Abortion Funds

This past summer, I spent 10 weeks interning at the National Network of Abortion Funds (NNAF) in Boston, MA. NNAF is a non-profit organization that works to reduce barriers in abortion access in multiple ways. They bring together and support abortion funds throughout the country (and even a few outside of the country!) by providing training, one-on-one support, and expertise so that they can better help fund people seeking an abortion. NNAF also runs the George Tiller fund which provides funding for people seeking abortions in states that do not have abortion funds. Lastly, NNAF is helping to lead the fight for Medicaid coverage of abortion through the All* Above All Campaign which is a collaboration of organizations that "build support for lifting the bans that deny abortion coverage. [Their] vision is to restore public insurance coverage so that every woman, however much she makes, can get affordable, safe abortion care when she needs it,” (allaboveall.org).

When I first came to the office, the staff was in the final stage of preparation for their annual National Organizing Summit, a Summit for the abortion funders in the Network. For this, I worked on tasks that seemed small but without these tasks being done, the Summit would not have run as smoothly as it did. These tasks included: creating name tags for every attendee/staff member of the Summit, creating table tents for each session at the Summit that allowed the presenters to let their audience know whether or not they could post about their session on social media, creating the sign-in/sign-out sheets for the childcare providers so that they would know who was there and who was gone and who took them/brought their kids in for child care, creating agreements for the child care providers to sign basically saying that they would do the work assigned to them and the conditions that apply such as providing emergency care if needed
(i.e. contacting 911 if needed), and letting them know to keep the location of the Summit confidential for safety reasons, creating a handout with the information for the MetroRAIL map in Houston for Summit attendees, updating the form that attendees could sign if they would like to opt out of the photos taken throughout the Summit, sending hotel confirmation emails to every attendee, including speakers and staff letting them know what their hotel room confirmation was along with the address of the Summit location. I also helped create the “Behind-the-Scenes” Schedule that every staff/board member used to know what their role throughout the Summit would be and who would be doing what so that the conference could run smoothly. With this schedule, I was able to not only create an overall schedule for everyone to look over, but I was also able to create an individual schedule for each board/staff member so that they would know what they had to do each day throughout the Summit. Within the schedules, several people were selected as note-takers for every session at the Summit, and using the responses we received from a survey that every staff/board member took, I was able to assign who would be a note-taker. When we arrived to the location of the Summit, I also helped with assembling both the folders every attendee and board/staff member would receive but also the "swag" bags.

Throughout the Summit, I helped at the registration table greeting every attendee and speaker for the Summit. I also helped by taking notes throughout the Summit, when I was assigned to do so. After the Summit, there was still so much work that had to be done in relation to it. Some of the tasks that I worked on where: helping with the Storify page for the Summit, Processing the evaluations of workshops/sessions including the overall Summit evaluations by typing in everybody's written responses onto SurveyMonkey so that I could send every speaker an individual workshop report over how their workshop/session went, and also writing two reports, one over how each workshop/session ranked over each other, and another one over how
the overall Summit went that was sent to Summit-goers so that they would know how the Summit went. Aside from Summit, the next important thing that happened while I was there was the fact that the 2016 fiscal year was ending and we were entering into the 2017 fiscal year. For this, I was contacting clinics to let them know and that we needed any outstanding pledge forms so that we could reimburse them for the abortion procedures that they had done that we pledged to pay. I also was in charge of creating a database that combined two different files and put them into one for statistical purposes, so that they could get all the data they needed from that database. When I needed a break from the computer and working on all these tasks, I also took time to re-organize the storage room along with taking inventory of everything inside of it.

Lastly, I was in charge of answering the telephone every time it rang and delegating out callers to specific people depending on what they needed. This also included being on the front lines when people would call for assistance in funding for abortion procedures.

To complete these tasks, the skills that I used the most were my writing, time management, and data analysis skills. Although the work that I was given throughout my internship wasn't overwhelming, time management was a crucial skill that I used while interning with NNAF. Before the Summit, I had to manage how much time I spent working on each task so that it could be ready by the time that it was needed. After the Summit, I had to make sure each task was done by a certain time so that the reports could be sent out as soon as possible. I knew I had achieved my goal of completing everything in a timely manner because I would constantly receive compliments from staff letting me know that I worked fast and was most likely given more tasks because of this. Even though the written reports were a small portion of everything that I worked on, they were probably one of the hardest tasks because I had to basically come up with a report that had only been done once a few years ago, and my copy
would be a copy for others to use in the future. I usually like to work with some sort of template to follow and having to come up with something basically from scratch made me use all of the writing skills I had. Not only did I have to make sure they were well written, but they also had to be in the voice of NNAF. Lastly, to make these reports and to also create a new database, I had to use my data analyst skills, skills I never knew I had. I had to do a lot of crunching numbers, analyzing the information that I received, and making sure they all made sense to someone who was looking at what I was doing for the first time.

I actually didn't have any difficulties at the office, or with anything having to do with interning at NNAF. I did have some difficulties when it came to where I was staying though. I was staying in Fenway/Kenmore, right on Commonwealth Avenue, where there is city street noise 24/7. I'm from Texas, but I have lived in suburbia for a long time, and where I lived for college that semester, although it wasn't the suburbs, was still a pretty quiet area so I wasn't used to having noise when I was trying to sleep. It was really hard having to wake up at 7:30/8 AM because I had been previously awake around 5/6 AM because of the garbage trucks passing by to collect trash in the area. It was difficult trying to go to sleep at a reasonable time because around midnight, the train would still be running so you would hear it passing by BUT also, across the street there was a garage where the dumpster was located for the buildings there and around midnight, some worker would go out to the garage and bang something around there for several hours. See, normally this wouldn't be a problem but because it was located in a garage and in this sort of alley, the banging noises carried and you could hear them banging extremely loudly, and it was just not easy to fall asleep with all the racket created. On top of the noise difficulties, it was very hot. You see, I live in Texas, the land of AC. If you don't have AC here, it's probably because you're living in a coffin under the ground, meaning everyone has AC here because it can
literally get into the triple digits for several months during the summer (let's be real, any time of the year). Because of this, I'm used to living with AC blasting at me at all hours. Unfortunately, Boston is an older city with older buildings which means that having AC is a rare delicacy. I don't think it would have been that bad if I wasn't living on the top floor of my building with the sun facing my window all day, and if the hot weather wouldn't have spiked while I was there. I was told that it rarely ever got as hot as it did while I was there. I think that it being so hot there for someone like me who prefers the cold was my biggest difficulty. It was so hard going to sleep at night because I would be sweating and no matter what I did, I would always just be sweating.

Having to deal with the transportation was also another difficulty. Because I am from Texas, the drive to and back would have been “too much” for me according to my parents so they decided to pay for my luggage to get to Boston and back rather than me driving to Boston and back. This meant that I literally had to either walk, take the train, or take the bus everywhere. The thing is, to get anywhere in Texas, people usually need to take a car, or they will be walking for an hour and will still only be halfway to their destination, which means yes, I do have a car to get anywhere. Since I am so used to driving everywhere, dealing with these forms of transportation was difficult for me because if I wanted to buy groceries, I would have to either take several trips or take these heavy bags home with me praying that they wouldn't bust open (which I elected to do). It also meant that if I wanted to do laundry, it would have to be done every week so that I could carry it to the laundromat, which was a few stops away from where I lived.

Lastly, money issues were another issue. I feel like the RRASC stipend was not enough help for me. I don't think it was their fault exactly, Boston is just so expensive that I never had
enough money for anything. I had to borrow money from my mom to do laundry, to buy groceries, to eat when I couldn't make my lunch, and for transportation when I needed to get somewhere that was inaccessible by train, bus, or walking. Other than these difficulties, I had no trouble at the office and actually loved my internship and the people I worked with.

Because I volunteer with the Texas Equal Access Fund, a fund in the North Texas area and also a member fund of NNAF, I actually already knew most of the staff members, a lot of the member funds, and the work that NNAF does. While at the Summit, I received a lot of compliments and encouraging words from Summit-goers which was so sweet because it was a constant reminder that I would not only be able to survive at my internship, but also a reminder that I was doing important work. Another highlight was definitely being able to create new relationships between myself and the staff members. Even though I knew most of them because of previous encounters, I was now working alongside them as an intern rather than as a participating member of their events and programs. Lastly, just being able to say that I worked with such highly knowledgeable and incredible people was my favorite part of interning there. I feel like I learned so much while interning there, and although I had a few difficulties with staying in a completely new and foreign city to me, I definitely don't regret the experience that I gained.

I am currently an undergraduate student studying to get my Bachelors in Social Work. A lot of social workers end up working in non-profits helping others in need. This helped me out quite a bit during my internship. For example, I received some material to go over so that I would know how to deal with the population of people that NNAF helps, but because of the studies I've done, I really only had to skim what I was given because I already knew everything that the material had. At the end of my studies, we have to do an internship before we are able to
graduate which means that throughout our studies, we are preparing to do this internship, so while I was interning with NNAF, I was able to use the skills that I had acquired to actually intern with them. In return, the skills that I have acquired while interning with NNAF has helped me with my internship that I am now doing for my studies.

My internship has been a major contribution in regards to my career path. My internship has validated the fact that I do want to work in the Reproductive Justice movement. It has validated the fact that I am in the right path, helping others, specifically to be able to get an abortion procedure done. It has helped me network with others, and of course, it is a giant boost in my resume. I know that I am in the right path right now because my internship has made me realize that I love what I am doing and it is so reassuring to know that even though I started off wanting to be a teacher, that doing this is what I meant to be doing.

If there is anyone that is considering interning with NNAF, I hope that you decide to do so. Every single staff member was very accepting and helpful. If I didn't have money for food when we would get food, they would make sure I would still be able to eat. If I didn't know where to go to do my laundry or get groceries, they would help me look for good but cheap places. If I wanted to sleep in, they would let me come in whenever I wanted to (as long as I stayed a little later). If I had a doctor’s appointment, they would make sure I would go instead of making me schedule my appointments after work. Basically, they were very accommodating and understanding. While I was there, there was a shooting in an area that some of my best friends and dad were at (my dad was working while my friends were at an event there) and I wanted to go to work to be around people and they made sure that I was taking care of myself and not overworking myself. They would make sure that I was taking care of myself before anything else. This is a big indicator on how the organization treats its staff. If all they care about is that
their staff gets their work done no matter what, then it might not be a great organization. Since NNAF actually cares about its staff members, I know that it is a great organization. Although NNAF wasn't paying me to intern with them, there were other interns who were getting paid by them. When we were going out to lunch once, we had a discussion about how much they pay and it was actually a good amount per hour. I know an organization is good because of how much they pay their part time workers. Honestly I just really love NNAF and my time interning with them only made me love them even more.

Throughout my internship, I felt like I learned so much about the intersections between reproductive rights and social justice issues. I know that if we don't have reproductive rights, then we don't have any other rights. It was interesting to see how one could fight for these rights while promoting reproductive rights. NNAF’s definition of reproductive rights is “a person’s right to create and parent the family she wants, when she wants it, under the conditions and the community she chooses” (fundabortionnow.org). Using this definition, it makes it easy to understand that reproductive justice and environmental justice go hand in hand because a person has the right to raise their family in a safe and healthy environment or that RJ and Racial Justice go hand in hand because a person deserves the right to raise their family without worrying that someone might get shot because of the color of their skin, and so on.

For any future interns at NNAF, I suggest that you do research over where you will be living while staying in Boston if you are from out of the area. I chose the place I stayed at because I procrastinated over finding a place to live due to leaving literally the day of the last finals for the semester and having to pack up my entire apartment since my lease was over. I also suggest bringing clothes for ALL types of weather. Although it is a summer internship, Boston can get pretty cold, in the 50s sometimes even! I also suggest managing your time while
interning. Make sure you're not getting overwhelmed with your work. It's okay to talk to your supervisor(s) and let them know that you have too much work, or that you need more work if it's getting “boring”. I also suggest befriending the other interns. It's really nice being able to go out to lunch with them and rant about whatever is bugging you, because even though you can rant to the staff members, the interns know more about what you are dealing with because they are in the same position as you too. Lastly, don't be afraid to give input when needed. If you think something isn't working for you, make sure to let them know and don't just try to get through it. I absolutely loved my internship, and I hope everyone else will too.