Access Reproductive Care - Southeast (ARC-SE) is known for their healthline project, which supports people in the Southeast who need reproductive health care. During my internship, I worked as a healthline associate. For the first week, I shadowed my supervisor, Oriaku. I picked up on the script pretty quick. Halfway through that first week, I would type the caller information into Salesforce as Oriaku did the call. Afterwards, I spent the vast majority of my time working directly with callers. With my help, ARC-SE completed nearly 500 intakes in ten weeks. I also worked on a Spanish translation of the healthline script. I added questions that would come up around practical support and lodging needs. I didn't have that many projects compared to the other RRASC interns, but I did like the direct interactions with callers. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

Patience, positive language, listening, and communication were the skills I used most often during my internship. Working the healthline was a customer service job. It was important to remain calm and be patient with callers and clinics. Whenever we couldn't financially assist a caller, Oriaku emphasized the use of positive language, so callers wouldn't feel discouraged from seeking assistance. I improved my communication skills every day that went by. I no longer feel anxiety answering phone calls or talking to clinics. It's made me more outgoing to approach anyone I see who needs help.

Throughout the ten weeks I was there, we received a higher influx of calls than usual. It got to the point where there would be up to forty missed calls as we were trying to get to live calls at the same time. It was very overwhelming, so I asked Oriaku and Quita for help. We split the voicemails and I would answer the live calls. I hesitated about asking for help, because I have
a fear of annoying the people around me — but the work is already hard enough, so I was able to rationalize asking for assistance to get all these people’s intakes done. With so many callers to tend to, funds were limited halfway through the week. Oriaku made it easy to know which cases to prioritize, which were second trimester pregnancies, minors, and cases of rape or incest. It was hard for me to tell callers whose cases didn’t fit the criteria to call back after fundraising and rescheduling their appointment. After my first unpleasant conversation, I was nervous about how callers would respond to the bad news. It isn’t hard for me to comfort a person; however, de-escalating an angry person was something I wasn’t used to at all. One of my last intakes ended with a woman yelling at me for asking her to raise a bit more for their appointment and reschedule their appointment to a more convenient time. I had to hand the phone over to Oriaku. Those types of calls made redirect my emotions towards an unjust system instead of the caller. I had to take deep breaths and put myself in their shoes.

One of the highlights of my experience was one of the first calls I made on my own. This caller was super excited for me to begin this journey to help other people. The call felt more natural with this person sharing how much they appreciated reproductive justice work. They were excited about being asked for their pronouns and the outreach we would achieve with the demographic questions. Another highlight was learning that our caller could go to their appointment before the gestational cut off through the help of donations. Working with six different states in the South limited the amount ARC-SE can pledge for their callers, and this caller would need more than our maximum pledge of $200. Oriaku posted on Facebook about this caller's story and there was overwhelming support. It broke my heart to hear about how this woman and her husband were excited for her pregnancy, but the amnio test showed that the baby wouldn't live past a couple hours after the birth. She was able to raise $800 with the help of
family and we were so happy to tell her that she didn't have to worry about the remaining $745. By hearing her sigh in relief, I felt that she would be okay with her decision and be in good hands.

Before I started my internship, I had only taken three Women’s and Gender Studies classes. One of those classes was Health and Gender. It helped me understand the importance of pronouns and that reproductive health isn’t limited to women. I felt somewhat prepared before the CLPP conference. I think I learned a lot more through experience rather than reading about it in a textbook. This semester I’m taking WGS201, a feminist research methods course, and this experience has given me a research topic to work on. I hope I can incorporate what I’ve learned this summer into my research.

Interning for ARC-SE reaffirmed that I want to continue to pursue a career as Nurse Practitioner in women's health. I do want to expand it to people who are gender non-binary and trans folk. I want to continue fighting for reproductive justice, and this summer it was amazing to meet people who get to dedicate their life to social justice. When I was in middle school, I really wanted to work in politics, but I was turned off by it when I saw the way media portrayed Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton. Seeing the large impact politics has on our everyday lives has made me reconsider that possible route. I feel that there are more opportunities out there as an activist now.

I absolutely love ARC-SE! They definitely made the space super welcoming and I felt like I was part of their family. Oriaku would let me give me feedback every week and if it was a stressful day, Ori would tell me how helpful I had been. I loved being their first intern and eating lunch with them. The work environment was fun and we always made each other laugh. I remember Ori telling me that they try to laugh every day, because we don't have to be serious
when we do serious work. It's a form of self-care, which I really appreciated their emphasis on. I remember one time that I was completely overwhelmed with calls and an unexpected message from a person I didn't talk to. Quita took over the call and I calmed myself down and spent the remainder of the day resting. Without those days off, I wouldn't have been able to continue working.

It became clearer and clearer throughout the ten weeks how politicians and policy makers use intersectionality to limit access to abortions. As I did intakes, I saw that the majority of callers were women of color, unemployed, uninsured or insured through Medicaid. Mandatory ultrasounds does not only force people to view and hear the pregnancy they are carrying — it may cost them the ability to have an abortion. The cost of the procedure is already expensive as it is, but adding the cost of an ultrasound takes away money that a person can use for their actual abortion appointment. An ultrasound isn’t the only roadblock to paying for an appointment. There are only a small number of clinics that provide abortion services in the South. I didn’t know until I looked at the clinic spreadsheet that Atlanta was the abortion hub of the South and that it had more clinics with longer gestational limits. Callers would be hours away from the closest clinic and they would have to raise more funds for gas money to get to the clinics who could help. These aren’t coincidences — these roadblocks are intentional. Roe v. Wade may have made abortion legal, but it isn’t enough to protect people’s rights to one. The Hyde Amendment and other similar pieces of legislation are preventing people from exercising their right to choose what is best for themselves, their bodies, and their lives.

The work you do is very important, but don’t neglect your own well-being! There were cases that were so stressful that I would need to take a couple minutes to breathe before answering another call. Asking for help won’t make you look stupid or come off as annoying. To
me, I would rather do things right, instead of making a mistake and nervously try to correct it. If you feel overwhelmed, don’t be afraid to voice that to your supervisor. I can’t stress enough about the importance of self-care, but my supervisor made it a priority for us. Have one of your first conversations with your supervisor to be about their expectations for you and expectations you have for them. It’s all about teamwork. They are there to guide you, so use that resource. Have fun wherever your internship site is. Even though I was in my home state for my internship, I went out with my best friends on the weekend to downtown Atlanta and visited museums, concerts and restaurants. That was probably the best thing about staying in state for me. I didn't have a problem with making ends meet and I got to learn the public transportation in Atlanta. Explore whenever you can!