During my short time with California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ), I worked on a variety of projects that truly informed my lens on the different aspects of reproductive justice. The first was my work on CLRJ’s archives. At the beginning of my internship, I was introduced to this project through a training given by the previous intern at CLRJ. The training explained the initial steps in the archival process as well as the importance of the archives for the organization. From then on, I was able to work on the project within the office and I began to understand the herstory of CLRJ. From previous advocacy days to conferences and meeting agendas, I was able to learn about their programs and movements from the past and how those inform their programs now. Although I completed the organization of the archives within the office, my shift of focus to other projects and the lack of time prevented me from completing the process within the Southern California Library. As a result, I concluded this project by organizing the online materials and by providing a detailed update to my supervisor.

One of the major responsibilities I undertook while interning was the planning and outreach for CLRJ’s first ever Advocacy Week called “California Latinas Presente!” This week of political action was the first of its kind, being held in four different regions across California including San Diego, Los Angeles, the Central Valley, and the Bay Area. Throughout these regions, there was a variety of events such as networking socials, policy and reproductive justice trainings, and opportunities for people to speak to their federal or state legislators on a policy or issue that was important to them. As someone who was excited to partake in the event itself, I was even more excited to be part of the team that helped plan and outreach for the week. In terms of planning, I assisted in looking for a venue for San Diego’s networking social as well as
securing the catering orders for the Bay Area and San Diego region. By calling the caterers, the flow of events in both regions ran smoother which also helped the staff focus on the task at hand. In addition, being part of the outreach committee and leading the San Diego outreach subcommittee was also a major project I undertook in preparation for this event. In order to reach out to the community in San Diego to register and participate, I gave classroom presentations at various colleges, tabled at conferences, spoke to various community organizations, and emailed, called, and texted previous Advocacy Day participants and CLRJ chapter members. Overall, this experience taught me the most effective strategies in increasing registration as well as the importance of support within a team.

In relation to Advocacy Week, I was not only tasked in helping organize and outreach for the event, but to participate in it as well. Although I did help with hosting and setting up, when it came to the legislative visits, I was a full participant. As someone who had never interacted with a legislator beforehand, I was both nervous and excited to see how the visit was going to turn out. Despite my nerves, by going in a team and after the experience of speaking to one representative, I felt much more confident with myself and the policy process overall. This experience taught me that Latinas are more than capable in holding our representatives accountable with issues that are affecting our communities. As something that was repeated throughout the Advocacy Week of events, we are truly the experts of our own communities and our experiences. By having events such as these that create a more accessible approach towards policy and uplifts the power within our own voices, we are able to advocate for ourselves and issues that are important for us.

I was also able to interact with the community through co-facilitating the Young Parent Leaders Council (YPLC) meeting in the Central Valley. The YPLC is part of CLRJ’s Justice for
Young Families (J4YF) initiative. Meeting the four moms in the YPLC was such a privilege and a huge learning experience for me. They were all amazing, intelligent, and kind leaders and I could feel the sense of community they had with each other. As one of the first community-based events I participated in during my internship, being able to listen to these individuals' experiences in that space made issues really come to life for me. Although through my work in the organization I know the seriousness of systemic oppressions, coming back from this meeting, it was clear how much more we should be compensating young parents for their labor, as well as how academic jargon marginalizes certain identities and makes information not only inaccessible but also places an unnecessary hierarchy on access. Through this, I was able to begin to understand what it means to fully support young parents and their families, and how all of those issues are important in fighting for reproductive justice.

One of the most memorable projects I assisted with was also during my time in the Central Valley. In addition to meeting the young parents in the YPLC meeting, I also had the opportunity to help record a young parent and their mentor for CLRJ’s Speaking Story program. This program uses storytelling as a form of resistance and healing by capturing people’s experiences on film. After listening to both of these women talk, it had the intended effect on me. Although I heard their stories in person and not through video, the emotions within the space as they spoke showed the power of storytelling. This experience impacted me by motivating me to develop a similar oral history project on my own time, such as a documentary.

As a Women’s Studies major and Counseling and Social Change minor, I was introduced to spaces where women’s experiences were centered, along with the systemic oppressions affecting them, before beginning my internship. This prepared me for working inside a Latina-focused reproductive justice organization, as my studies not only touched upon topics of
reproductive health and rights, but also the social justice issues that together make up the reproductive justice movement. Although at the time of my internship I was still unaware of the extent of reproductive justice, having a grasp on social issues made it easier to develop an understanding of how deep the connections are between reproductive rights and social justice. In addition, as a Latina doing work for my community throughout my collegiate years, I had already recognized the importance of community engagement and uplifting the voices and experiences of Latina women.

After getting experience working in both an office environment and in various community settings, my opportunities to engage with the community were the ones where I experienced the most growth and enjoyment. In addition, being surrounded by people who value social justice and work towards growth as a team was vital. As a result, my time in my internship reaffirmed my need to work with my community in person and to continue to do social justice work. Moreover, my time at CLRJ provided me with the opportunity to understand the importance of having a reproductive justice lens within the counseling or therapy community. As someone who hopes to attend graduate school for counseling, this was very important for me to comprehend. Talking with young parents reminded me of the amount of teen pregnancy shame that is prevalent in schools and with counselors now. Due to this stigma and many other issues, I know there is a need for counselors and therapists that know about reproductive justice.

For future interns, I would suggest setting deadlines for yourself and connecting with the staff as much as possible. At the beginning of the internship you have the opportunity to have one-on-one meetings with staff members, as well as group lunches throughout the summer that are amazing opportunities to ask questions as well as share a little bit about yourself. Furthermore, don’t be afraid to ask questions or share your voice. Although I always felt
supported by the team, I didn’t always feel comfortable talking or asking about queer reproductive justice topics. As a queer woman of color, I was not only eager to learn about how reproductive justice affects women of color but also queer people as well. However, it didn’t seem like they were as active or knowledgeable on queer issues as others. Overall, I would suggest to not only step out of your comfort zone through your internship experience, but ask the people you work with to step out of theirs by sharing your perspective and ideas.