Thanks to my RRASC internship at All-Options Pregnancy Resource Center in Bloomington, Indiana, I had the flexibility to make this summer one of the most important periods of my life through building my community, my relationships, and my future. Going into the internship, I had newly shifted my career goals in reproductive health to a future that may allow me to work more closely with and provide better care to people experiencing pregnancy, abortion, pregnancy loss, or birth. Working at All-Options PRC gave me much-needed insight into how these experiences impact people in my community in very real ways.

My first experience of the internship involved training with a group of caring and compassionate advocates to work the All-Options talkline. The talkline is a non-judgmental, caller-centered, open-minded space for callers to unpack emotions surrounding pregnancy, parenting, pregnancy loss, abortion, or birth, and to gain information and referrals to meet their needs related to these experiences. The intensive training forced me to confront my own biases around pregnancy and parenting, and taught me how to better communicate with people in a compassionate way not only on the line, but also in my day-to-day life and relationships.

Speaking to folks who call the All-Options talkline has given me a greater understanding of the wide spectrum of experiences that people can have in pregnancy or parenting situations. Our caller-centered conversations often brought up personal trauma for me or left me in a negative emotional space, but the All-Options advocate community taught me and encouraged me to unpack my trauma and experiences, and to seek support
from them whenever possible. Becoming a part of this caring and intentional group of people has been transformative for me, and I’m beyond happy that I get to continue on as a talkline advocate now that my internship has ended. Becoming involved in callers’ decisions and emotional processing can often feel emotionally draining for me, but I also feel a lot of satisfaction in being able to provide people with the kind of support that other resources, like crisis pregnancy lines, fail to provide.

My feelings are similar regarding the in-person counseling and services that I was able to provide to local clients who visited the center. On a daily basis, this looked like providing diapers, pregnancy tests, clothing, baby items, and general material support to folks who needed it. Beyond the basic material sharing, visits often turned into a space for clients to share the struggles and joys of parenting, their hopes and worries surrounding pregnancy decisions, or their anger at policies that prevent them from being able to meet their needs and the needs of their family. These visits often underlined for me the importance of remaining accountable to other members of our community — listening to their needs, ensuring that they have agency over their own lives, and addressing the true roots of the problems that keep us struggling to survive and thrive. Talking through people’s individual experiences emphasized for me that while distributing diapers, funding, and material support is helpful and vital to supporting our neighbors, it is doing no more that putting a bandage on the wound if we are not actively fighting in our communities to dismantle health restrictions, sexism, white supremacy, gentrification, and capitalism at large.

In another form of material support, I spent much of my internship working the Hoosier Abortion Fund, which provides funding to pregnant people in Indiana who are
seeking abortions. I mainly experienced the more interpersonal side of the fund, which involved contacting clients and clinics for intakes, funding, and referrals. A main frustration of this work was the feeling that it should not have to exist — that my efforts to provide people with funding and help them work through restrictions should be made pointless by ensuring that we all have access to the care that we need as we choose to seek it. It especially frustrated me to consider that on paper, clients of the fund typically had access to abortion care (save for those beyond certain gestational limits), but in reality, many were facing financial, transportation, and other accessibility issues that prevented them from getting the abortion care that they needed. Hearing these real, individual struggles made clear the importance of not only ensuring that people are legally allowed to have an abortion, but that their needs are met in a way that makes the care they choose to get (whether it is abortion care or prenatal care) accessible and safe.

I also spent time gathering information about a local crisis pregnancy center which, by being stationed directly next to the Bloomington Planned Parenthood, tricks people into coming in and feeds them shame and misinformation regarding their health and pregnancy decisions. This was not an official task that I took on as an intern at All-Options, but something that another intern and I decided to pursue after seeing directly how the crisis pregnancy center was harming our clients and other people in our community, all while receiving state funding. I posed as a pregnant person needing counseling regarding my decision of whether to terminate or continue the pregnancy, and I ended up disgusted by the danger of the misinformation they gave me, especially considering that I worked a lot of my true personal experiences into the session. While my intern friend was held in another room with her negative pregnancy test as an
employee tried to shame her into abstinence, I was lied to about abortion procedures, fetal development, and most dangerously, the potential effects of post-partum depression (which the ex-nurse told me I should not worry about, since PPD rarely lasts more than a few days to a few weeks). I did not expect to be as personally affected as I was, but it was emotionally difficult to acknowledge that had I in fact been pregnant and trusted their information, I could have ended up in a very dangerous situation. Based on this experience, I decided to incorporate in my talks with Hoosier Abortion Fund clients a warning about the existence of the fake clinic, as well as an offer that they could call us back if they had any questions about the crisis pregnancy centers or protesters, or if they received any information that did not sit well with them and wanted to check into its factuality. A real solution would involve widespread education and elimination of crisis pregnancy centers, but sharing facts has become for me a tangible way of addressing the problem.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to stay within my community for my RRASC internship, so it was important for me to see how the experiences of our clients and neighbors fit into local struggles, especially those against gentrification, sexual assault (and its promotion on campus and at local bars), and the lack of safe resources for drug users. Meeting with folks who had lost their housing (and were as a result forced to raise their children in an unstable environment) while luxury student apartments are being built all over town, who were experiencing the lasting effects of sexual and domestic violence with little community support, or who had experienced the death of a loved one by overdose while drug use is criminalized and made particularly unsafe in our community all made the issues very real for me. I feel compelled to expand my efforts to
fight against these root problems, rather than just temporarily covering up my neighbors’ experiences and waiting quietly for the next displacement or wave of overdoses to send more folks through the center’s doors. With my combined experiences at the pregnancy resource center and in other activist spaces, I feel that I understand the issues plaguing the people of our community in a way that would have been much more difficult for me had I not witnessed them through the overarching viewpoint of parenting and pregnancy support.

Something that is unsurprising to me is how little my academic studies prepared me for my internship experience. This may have been different had I been majoring in a field like labor studies or gender studies, rather than biology, but the fact that our university does nothing to expose students to the struggles of their neighbors and does everything to cover up poverty, racial injustice, and sexual assault is a problem in and of itself. Part of my work with the organization Students Against State Violence at Indiana University seeks to address this problem, and my realization that how the school functions has a large effect on safety and community wellness not only on campus, but also in the general community (including the clients of All-Options) has strengthened my efforts as a part of this organization.

I greatly appreciate my time interning at All-Options and am thankful for the connections I’ve made with wonderful people in my community fighting for reproductive justice. I believe that All-Options should be a model for other organizations that want to provide agency and care to pregnant and parenting people, and I plan to stay on as an advocate and volunteer for as long as I am a part of the Bloomington community. Throughout my internship, I constantly felt the internal conflict of working within the
nonprofit system, which I personally feel tends to take agency away from communities and put it in the hands of donors (and often volunteers and advocates ourselves) who may not directly have a finger on the pulse of the needs that a community is actually experiencing. However, I also feel that the All-Options Pregnancy Resource Center has shown me the ability of a community of advocates to move beyond the nonprofit model to centralize the self-determination and needs of our clients and the greater community, and is continuously progressing in the fight against our root problems like gentrification, domestic and sexual violence, poverty, exploitation, and racial injustice — while also meeting more direct and urgent needs, like ensuring that families in our community have access to formula and clean diapers. I am so glad that my RRASC internship connected me with All-Options, and I am excited to grow with them and see how our community can work together to change for the better.