

An Empowering Trip with Planned Parenthood to Washington D.C.!

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My trip to Washington D.C. this summer was definitely one to be remembered. While I have the opportunity to travel in the past, this was the first time I'd be flying to a new city all by myself, with no family ties or educational obligations awaiting. Luckily, I had three traveling companions—Sam, Keshia, and Meesh—though I did not know them before the trip. Arriving at the airport, I found that our flight had

been canceled due to storms in D.C. and we all rushed to re-book, leaving myself on my own with a flight later in the night.

As I contemplated this trip, I set some goals for myself before arriving.

1. Meet someone new and try out this skill called “networking”
2. Learn more about Planned Parenthood as an organization facing some of the largest attacks on abortion rights since the passage of Roe v. Wade
3. Find out more about how I fit into the Planned Parenthood family

To my surprise, I not only achieved those goals on this trip but also reinforced my passion in this field. Over several days, I attended workshops for people of color, the Planned Parenthood data system, Van, and managing self-care. I met so many wonderful ladies from the Arizona branch and shared several meals with them. I even had the chance to speak with Louisiana Representative Cedric Richmond about the amazing strides that Planned Parenthood has been making in New Orleans and Baton Rouge as well as share a the role that Planned Parenthood has played in my story (left).

But perhaps some of the most lasting memories are the stories that I shared with Sam, Keshia, and Meesh. Sam is a volunteer for both Planned Parenthood and Sexual Trauma Awareness & Response (STAR). She has received calls from the very women that our organizations are determined to protect—and many of them still cannot receive the care that they deserve due to the restrictions from state legislation and community stigma. Keshia is Baton Rouge’s wonderful Community Engagement Team Manager, who had to learn the difficulties of being both an African American woman and teenage mom. Throughout all that she has experienced, she remains one of the kindest and most compassionate people I have met to date. Meesh is such a force to be reckoned with. Raised in a tight-knit African American community here in Louisiana, she is strong-willed in her ideas and yet so curious to learn about the cultures of other people.

There was a night after the conference had finished for the day when Meesh, Sam, and I found ourselves on the hunt for a small snack in the bustling city that is D.C. We spoke honestly about our experiences growing up as people of color. Sam, who is half African American-half Panamanian, spoke about how she came to terms with being an individual who identified with two unique cultures. Her and I share commonalities in being first-generation as both our parents immigrated here from

their respec

tive countries in hopes of providing a better life for us. Meesh, who's family has a vast history in Louisiana, asked us thought-provoking questions about our experiences as children of immigrants from nations across the world. I am so thankful for her honest questions as I got the chance to really dig deep into my childhood as someone who had rejected my Chinese-Malaysian heritage in the past. While I did grow up going to Chinese language school and bringing Chinese food daily to school lunches, I recall how easy it was for me to not see any value in my background. As a child of immigrants, my parents' first priority was to make sure that their daughter was raised American before anything else. The prevailing social structures at the time also enforced this thinking. Reconciling with this truth, has ultimately helped me find peace as an Asian-American. Today, as an intern for Planned Parenthood and the Co-President of the Asian American Student Union on Tulane's campus, I see the inherent value and struggle that comes with being a person of color. I am so grateful for my experience this summer in exposing me to this reality and helping me step into my power. It is these moments of genuine discussion, companionship, and honesty that urge me to continue this important work that we do in reproductive rights and reproductive health!