

Wrapping Up My Summer with NCI

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Hello, NCI! My name is Julia Guy, and I am a rising junior finishing my second “semester” as a Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health intern, though it is actually my third semester working as a research assistant for Dr. Clare Daniel. This summer has absolutely flown by. It was my first summer in New Orleans, and while I spent it working and learning a lot, I still felt like I had a relaxing break from classes and the bustle of school year activities.

Much of that working and learning took place at NCI with my work for Dr. Daniel. In just two short weeks, we managed to launch two projects that aimed to advance two distinct areas of reproductive justice: working systematically to access to shame-free information about reproduction and relationships across Louisiana, and increasing equitable birth outcomes in New Orleans through maternal and child health.

The first project with which I assisted aims to examine the capacity for comprehensive sex education in Louisiana. In consultation with the Louisiana Institute of Public Health, we are focusing our efforts on specific areas of the state that have been the subject of fewer sex education investigations. Since Louisiana state law bars students from participating in surveys about their sexual behaviors and practices, little data exists on what exactly goes on in public school classrooms across the state, despite the state receiving federal grants for sex ed. Comprehensive and transparent sex education is essential for young people to make informed decisions about their body and reproductive choices, but without information on the current status of classrooms, legislators concerned about content, costs, and outcomes may dismiss efforts for meaningful change. Consequently, we plan to contact school administrators to discover what exactly is taught in their respective individual school. As Dr. Daniel assembles her proposal to gain IRB proposal, one of my roles has been to collect and catalogue all of the school and potential contacts across the state to potentially survey. As we continue this project into the fall semester, I am excited to see how the proposal advances and how my hours of work contribute.

The second project allowed me to explore a different side of reproductive justice: child and maternal health. In collaboration with Dr. Maeve Wallace at the graduate School of Public Health, I received the opportunity to research Maternal and Child Health Divisions in city health departments across the country. My findings will help inform a proposal to effect change in improving birth equity outcomes in our own city. While this project will not be my main focus going forward, I am eager to track the progress of efforts on such an urgent issue.

At this halfway point in my undergraduate career, I am incredibly grateful to NCI and Dr. Daniel for the opportunity to do work that has given me a framework for what I would eventually like to do after graduation. The research I do and the projects to which I contribute are important, informational, and hopefully influential, and that in of itself is a worthy accomplishment. However, gathering information and effective,

professional communication has been invaluable to me personally as well as applicable to other positions beyond NCI. For example, not only did this summer's projects helped me practice synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative information as part of the process towards greater reproductive justice goals, but my position with NCI provided me the financial ability to intern with another organization as well whose work applies more directly to my course of study. Using the skills that I developed in my research assistant position, I was able to help a small nonprofit with a variety of tasks, including their popular community environmental workshops, This hands-on experience combined with the weekly meetings with reproductive justice leaders across the city helped me realize that in my career, I want to help people overcome systematic barriers that prevent their participation in social, environmental, and reproductive justice through providing pathways that make these issues and their solutions more approachable and applicable. It is still a broad, expansive idea, and I am so excited to see where I'll go with NCI and how my position here will help me further define my goals throughout the upcoming semester.

Picture: the health districts of Louisiana guiding my research

Source: Louisiana Department of Health