

Dream a Better Dream

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My internship at DREAM (formerly Harlem RBI) was so much more than I could have ever imagined. Not only did I fulfill all of my goals that I had set at the beginning of my internship, but I've also had so many different experiences that have opened my eyes to new perspectives. My biggest goal this summer was to develop and hone my resource development skills. The fact that DREAM was a mid-sized non-profit organization in New York City did wonders for my development skills.

Many of DREAM's donors were corporate donors that required clear and consistent communication skills, as well as the ability to improvise because their schedules were often changed at the last minute. For example, we had a Blackstone volunteer event that was originally scheduled to be held in Central Park, but on the day of the event, the heat index was too high for the players to be outside. Our baseball and softball coordinators were always prepared for the weather, so my supervisor and I had already contacted prior to coming into the office, to ensure that an alternative schedule was in place for the players and the volunteers. Thankfully, Blackstone was very flexible with the change and things went according to plan. My time at DREAM equipped with the necessary skills to think on my feet and improved my written and verbal communication skills, which were heavily relied on for this particular event.

I was also able to network with a variety of different people at DREAM. From the High School Campus Culture Director to the Director of Community Engagement and Government Affairs, I was able to collect a plethora of new information. I learned from DREAM staff as well as DREAM participants. During my weekly site visits to the East Harlem and South Bronx sites, I was able to interact with the players. I began to slowly, but surely form bonds with the on-site staff members, as well as the participants and when my time was up at DREAM, it was hard to say goodbye. This summer, I made an important decision regarding my academic career at Tulane and future professional career. My unique experiences at DREAM had inspired to change majors from Political Science to Anthropology with an emphasis in Linguistics. I had originally planned to teach in New Orleans for at least several years before heading off to law school to study education policy. But

This summer, I made an important decision regarding my academic career at Tulane and future professional career. My unique experiences at DREAM had inspired to change majors from Political Science to Anthropology with an emphasis in Linguistics. I had originally planned to teach in New Orleans for at least several years before heading off to law school to study education policy. But because I had some incredible and insightful teachers for roommates, as well as my lessons at DREAM, I decided to pursue a career I was more passionate about. I am confident and motivated about my future. I want to study linguistics so that I am more equipped as an ESL certified teacher to serve my students.

Being located in East Harlem and providing programming South Bronx, two heavily diverse areas, I was able to learn more about productive and sustainable community engagement. Having learned these skills, I was able to transfer them to my work as

an Ignite EXPLORE OC at Tulane. Ignite is an EXPLORE program that strives to connect first-year students the available resources here at Tulane, as well as people within our New Orleans community. During Ignite, we touch on various social justice issues in New Orleans while on our service and learning experiences. Because I had learned community engagement skills from DREAM, I was able to facilitate meaningful conversations and discussions with my participants and encourage them to pursue sustainable, impactful, and collaborative efforts with community partners. In Ignite, we heavily emphasized that participants should not be entering communities with the mindset that know what is best for the community and its residents, but instead they should enter these communities with the mindset that our community partners and the residents are the experts, and we must learn to listen before we attempt to provide help. This work not only catalyzes their leadership potential, but it also strengthens Tulane's relationship with the New Orleans community.

As I had previously mentioned in my other blog posts, DREAM provides participants with 4 hours of social emotional learning (SEL) programming every week. This programming is critical for it does not reinforce the toxic patriarchal standards and stereotypes that are currently present in our society. This programming allows children to simply be children, but to also recognize the impact of their actions. SEL programming provides the necessary tool for healthy emotional development in impoverished areas. Some topics that were discussed in SEL programming was respecting regarding each other's identities and gender stereotypes and how they can impact our identities. It is important to note that these conversations were not watered down conversations, but conversations that were designed for the age level that it was being delivered to. Examples of gender stereotypes and its effects were examples that rising 4th and 5th graders could understand. For instance, an example of a gender stereotype that was provided was if a player had told one of his teammates that they hit "like a girl." The on-site social worker explored the various consequences of that term and by the end of the discussion, students were confident in their understanding of respect and the negative impact of gender stereotypes. Tackling these issues and conducting important dialogues such as the ones at DREAM ensure that we are raising a generation of inclusive members of society.

My advice to female-identifying individuals looking to pursue in the non-profit sector is to prepare yourself for the long journey ahead. Non-profit work is not easy work and often times, the change we would like to see does not occur in a timely manner.

Be resilient, be a catalyst for change, and be unwavering. We are strong and we are leaders. Success is what YOU define it as and it is important to not place a monetary value on the work you may accomplish at non-profit organizations.