

A Great Summer at NORAPC

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Hey All!

Can't believe my summer interning at New Orleans Regions AIDS Planning Council (NORAPC) is coming to an end. This internship has been a really valuable learning experience. Below are some of my final reflections. However, first I'd like to thank the NORAPC staff, Planning Council and Community Partners for allowing me to learn from them this summer, and for their commitment to bettering their community. You all rock! Thanks for everything that you do!

Discuss specific tasks and accomplishments from this summer that support the learning goals and objectives you set at the beginning of the summer.

My internship began at a perfect starting point: preparation for NORAPC's annual Priority Setting Session (PSS). In preparation for this important event, I assisted NORAPC's Health Planner in creating guiding packets. These packets were filled with epidemiological data on the local demographic of the disease, the reported disease related needs of the affected community, and how well the services that are offered are meeting those needs. All this data provided me with a crash course on the impact of HIV/AIDS in the New Orleans area as well as the local infrastructure in place addressing the disease. This process also gave me a real-world look into how surveys and data are utilized to make health decisions.

Participating in the PSS enhanced my understanding of the population and their needs. Attending meetings and interacting with the council and community members who visited the NORAPC office deepened my appreciation and understanding of cultural competency and its importance in health care.

Next, I worked to prepare packets for the Resource and Allocation Setting Session (RASS). At this session council members decide the funding amounts for each priority area ranked at the PSS. From packet preparation and data analysis I learned so much about the various avenues of health funding and the effect the Affordable Care Act may have on the funding landscape. Additionally, at the RASS there were many representatives from the Office of Health Policy and AIDS Funding present. It was interesting to hear their insights. This opportunity gave me more understanding into the health policy and the planning process in New Orleans.

This summer I have had the opportunity to work towards all of my goals. However, I wouldn't say any were "completed", but that's okay. HIV/AIDS is a complex and multifaceted issue that is continuously changing. My understanding is just the tip of the iceberg of this complicated issue. It is clear, however, that things are improving. More people are getting tested. More people are accessing care. More people are staying in care. And with the Affordable Care Act, more people are becoming insured. It is going to be a long road, but we are headed in the right direction. I look forward to continue learning about HIV/AIDS and contributing towards reaching an AIDS-Free Generation.

What advice would you give to a student interested in an internship at your host organization? In this industry/field?

Absolutely do it! I firmly believe that public health is best learned outside of the classroom. I have found that working with community first-hand and encountering the successes and challenges of public health directly is so much more powerful and educational than reading about it in a textbook. I would highly recommend all public health students to latch onto organizations they are interested in and learn about what the real world of public health is all about.

Additionally, for anyone interested in learning more about HIV/AIDS a NORAPC internship is the way to go. NORAPC brings together people from all facets of the disease response ranging from affected individuals to service providers to primary health care leaders. I have had the opportunity to learn about HIV/AIDS in New Orleans from so many different perspectives. It has given me great insight into all the players that are involved in addressing public health issues.

What have you learned about becoming a more effective problem solver/change agent/citizen?

One of the greatest lessons I will take away from this internship is that the community members I met possess a wealth of knowledge. They know the problems in their community: that lack of affordable housing makes it difficult to stay in care, that the community needs more mental health services, and many more. Any interventions that fail to take advantage of these local troves of knowledge are ignoring a huge community asset. Nobody knows the problems of the community better than the members of the community. Health funders would be wise to trust local expertise more often when it comes to health interventions.

Thanks for reading!

Maggie