

Finding Joy in Advocacy: My Summer with UNFPA in D.C.

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“Washington DC is so fun” was the first response I got when I told friends and family I would be interning with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in DC, which I found hard to believe. Not because I thought they were wrong but because I hadn’t visited DC in years and assumed that working in and around Capitol Hill couldn’t possibly be fun. I didn’t remember anything about DC other than the White House, museums and monuments. US politics, from where I was standing seemed too divisive to achieve anything or be considered “fun” – especially in the realm of sexual and reproductive health (SRHR). Standing at the end of my 8 weeks living and working in DC I can gladly say it is “so fun.”

Living and working in DC is like summer camp for driven, passionate and excited young adults and I am so lucky to have gotten this experience alongside the lovely women of UNFPA North America Representational Office. My position both in DC and with the UNFPA allowed me the chance to fully immerse myself in the world of reproductive health and advocacy – I went to Special Foreign Operations Appropriations hearings, Capitol Hill meetings with Congresspeople (one of who

oQered me snacks in a particularly lengthy hearing) and a celebration of the reproductive health work of Nancy Pelosi, all in my first two weeks. In a city where everyone is young and hungry to be involved in “the process” I was exposed to countless opportunities to learn about policy development and SRHR advocacy. The most astounding part, as someone who came into this experience slightly cynical about what it might be like to work around the Hill, was that it was fun. The group working to advance sexual and reproductive health both within the US government and in civil society were interesting, engaging and, most importantly, extraordinarily passionate about the topic. I was surrounded by truly the most incredible community of advocates hoping to see me succeed (and trying to woo me back postgrad). The most daunting idea that DC was a “boys club” and that I would be an outsider both as a woman and within a feminist organization, but to this I can also happily have been proved wrong. The DC network of powerful women working to advance the SRHR mission created an incredible support system, especially within the evolving sexual and reproductive health landscape on Capitol Hill. In a line of work that can often be upsetting and draining, the support system that UNFPA and DC provided me with was a lifeline.

As cheesy as it is to say, my time with UNFPA showed me what the working world is like, and the future is bright when you truly love what you do.