

Internship Report:  
Tennessee Disability Pathfinder at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

For 8 weeks this summer I interned for the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder. Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free information and assistance call center for persons with disabilities, their family members, and service providers. It is a joint project of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. The goal of Pathfinder is to help individuals with disabilities and/or their family members connect with community agencies to find the services they need. In addition, Pathfinder offers education and training on community resources, disability awareness and sensitivity.<sup>1</sup>

I completed many diverse tasks while working at Pathfinder, some of which include adding events to the website calendar, sending mail out of the office, organization of the office and helping to prepare staff for meetings and events, updating agencies' information for the Pathfinder database, attending meetings and presentations about both the Pathfinder and other agencies, and performing follow up surveys from previous clients who received resources from the Pathfinder. The most interesting responsibility that I had was attending presentations and meetings regarding changes in agencies or new agencies that Pathfinder was interested in adding to their database as another source for individuals with disabilities. I enjoyed this component of the internship particularly

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<sup>1</sup> <http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/pathfinder/>

because it sparked my interest in the business side of Pathfinder and all the new possibilities for the agencies and their clients. This made me confident that Pathfinder is a successful program and will continue to be successful moving forward.

This summer, I mastered the skill of using proper terminology for people with disabilities and was able to really understand the importance of treating people with disabilities as people first, not their disability. I also learned that there are infinite resources and agencies that provide services and education for people with disabilities. Being able to converse with clients of Pathfinder, I was able to enhance my speaking and interpersonal skills. This allowed me to better communicate with individuals with disabilities and their family members to find the resources they were looking for. Because of my age and different range of skill sets, I believe that I was a huge asset to the office. I was able to bring new ideas and incorporate different experiences to each task I performed. I am confident that all of the skills I gained during this internship will be valuable assets moving forward, regardless of the career path I choose to take.

This internship affected my career goals in a different way than I expected. Coming into this internship, I was positive I wanted to work in the field of special education or physical therapy for children with disabilities. As a result of this internship, I found a whole different array of options that sparked my interest. This internship is located in the Medical Arts Building on the Vanderbilt campus

and is associated closely with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, both of which are in close contact to the Vanderbilt Hospital. This internship has allowed me to learn more about various types of disabilities and the sources needed to support these disabilities than I thought possible. From this, I have become increasingly interested in the field of psychiatric nursing. I feel as though this career would allow me to incorporate my interests with my love for interacting and assisting individuals.

My favorite aspect of interning at the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder was having the opportunity to not only learn about disabilities and the resources provided to help people in need, but also being able to converse with the clients about their individual needs and hearing them express how Pathfinder changed their life. The staff at the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder are extremely caring and generous. They made my time worthwhile by making me feel welcome and by teaching and instructing me through each task I was given. Interning for the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder was an incredible experience and one I will always remember. From this internship, I not only was introduced to new knowledge and experiences but also new people that have made a significant imprint in my life.