

### **Internship Report: A Step Ahead Foundation**

This summer, I had the wonderful opportunity of interning with A Step Ahead Foundation in Memphis, TN. This non-profit was founded by Claudia Haltom, who served as a juvenile court judge for 17 years. She saw countless women who could not properly care for their children, and over and over again these women had no plan for effective contraception. Most times they were taking “the pill”, however, they were not taking it consistently, causing unplanned pregnancies. Judge Haltom realized the solution was Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARCS). With this newfound knowledge, Haltom set out to create a nonprofit organization that provides women with the resources to plan their lives and their babies. By offering these women free, effective birth control, she hopes to assist women in finishing their education and advancing in their careers before having an unintended pregnancy. These methods offered by A Step Ahead Foundation are over 99% percent effective, lasting anywhere from 3-10 years depended on the chosen method.

During my eight weeks with A Step Ahead Foundation, my talents were used in multitude of ways. I worked in the office, compiling spreadsheets to aid in A Step Ahead Foundation’s expansion throughout the state of Tennessee. I gathered information specifically regarding counties in West Tennessee, and I gleaned the

names of their hospitals, clinics, universities and nonprofits. I wrote an application for a grant that A Step Ahead Foundation was approved for. I led a lunch-and-learn presentation. I also was involved with A Step Ahead Foundation's "GirlTalk" program, a workshop, which empowers young women with the tools to plan their lives. We also touched on how having a family before you are ready could alter your life plans. GirlTalk also acts as a safe space where girls can ask questions they might feel too embarrassed to ask someone else. During this program, we administer pre- and post-tests, which focus on the methods of contraception that A Step Ahead Foundation offers for free. During the summer, I would attend and help run the GirlTalks and also enter the data of the pre- and post-tests into the system. I began to notice that some of the girls would answer incorrectly on their post-tests, even though I remember talking to them at the GirlTalk. When I was with them, they seemed to understand the material, however something about the test caused them to panic. Seeing both sides of the process, this was really frustrating to me. I wanted the tests to reflect what the girls actually learned, instead of painting an unsuccessful and false picture of how the Girl Talks were going. So, seeing this issue, I decided to make a poster of the methods for the GirlTalks. I hoped being able to see the methods displayed would help the girls obtain the information. Additionally, with the help of other interns, I created a "GirlTalk Jeopardy" game. This game has categories ranging from "Birth Control Methods" to "Life Plans" to "Teen Pregnancy". The girls really loved the game. They had a great time competing with each other, and answered almost all of the questions correctly. There are also

questions such as “What is a goal you have for yourself?”, allowing for meaningful conversation and goal setting. After playing the game, we gave the girls a post-test. They answered the questions correctly, and I know they had fun learning the information. This felt like a victory not only for me, but for the GirlTalk program as a whole.

I learned many valuable lessons this summer. I learned to use my frustration to find ways to improve areas of a project. Most importantly, I learned how to talk to people about an often-sensitive subject. With the stigma surrounding birth control, there are women who do not want to discuss the subject matter with a stranger. This is completely understandable, and there is nothing you can do about this. However, for some women, having access to these methods of birth control can completely alter their lives. These methods assist women in completing their education or dedicating themselves to a career. I learned to put these women above my hesitation in approaching strangers. My short conversations with them could possibly open the doors to wonderful opportunities for them. I gained confidence from my outreach work, as well as the feeling that I was making a difference in my beloved community. I plan to take this confidence back to Sewanee in the fall.

Before starting this internship, I was not set on a specific career path. However, working at A Step Ahead Foundation has showed me that I am interested in the public health field. Talking to women who have a Masters in Public Health has granted me valuable insight into the public health career path. It is definitely

something I feel passionately about, and without this internship, I would have never gotten a deep understanding and hands-on experience in this field.