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First Report

After a month and a half into my internship I can say that it has been so much more than I could have hoped for. I have accomplished more in just this first half than I expected to accomplish all summer. The people I work with are inspiring and the work we are doing feels so incredibly important, although often overlooked. This was my first choice for a summer internship and I had high expectations, although nothing prepared me for the experiences I have gained thus far. I have been given the freedom to try out several aspects of what the organization does in order to find where I am most effective, and given room to grow where I am comfortable.

While I have a formal supervisor, I often collaborate and meet with other members of the organization depending on what the project is. My supervisor has been a great resource for helping me connect to others within the organization as well as with other organizations doing similar work in the city. The projects I have been assigned are often very vague where I am given an end goal and the freedom to decide how to get there. This trust has pushed me to strengthen the skills that got me the position, and has so far been effective.

Some of the work I have been doing will be outlined further below:

Conferences/Summits:

On behalf of Project SAFE I attended and sat on a panel at Philadelphia's AIDS Education Month Prison Summit. The panel was titled "Interrupting Carceral Approaches To Sex Work" where we discussed the ways in which policing and the prison system contribute to the violence and public health violations that sex workers face. At Project SAFE the majority of our clients are both substance users and sex workers, we see and hear first hand what harms they come into contact with. During this panel I was able to advocate for this community and help interested parties understand these issues better. Criminalization of sex work often has negative consequences that many people do not understand or fully grasp.

I was also able to represent Project SAFE at a summit introducing Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs, which are hopefully going to be implemented in the Philadelphia area. These programs would allow law enforcement to divert low-level drug offenses and prostitution charges to a harm reduction based program instead of booking. The Sex Workers Outreach Project's national board recently released a statement supporting the LEAD program as created in Seattle. The summit was presented and led by those responsible for LEAD Seattle and LEAD

Santa Fe. As the clients of Project SAFE are most likely to be those funneled into this program it was a wonderful opportunity to advocate for their specific needs and network with those in charge of implementing the program in Philadelphia.

Public Speaking:

Outside of conferences and summits we provide educational training workshops for providers of female sex workers and substance users. I have been assigned to do a few more workshops towards the end of the summer and was brought along by my supervisor to see an example of this and to help answer questions. This initial workshop was given to social workers that are assigned cases of women frequently arrested on prostitution charges. They were concerned about not getting viewpoints outside of the legal system about how to interact with their clients. We spoke a lot about how stigma can interrupt effective services and how to combat that.

Advocacy:

The major project that I have been working on this summer is a booklet that serves as an introduction to Substance Consumption Facilities (SCFs) and how to advocate for them. SCFs currently operate in countries all over the world and have recently been gaining traction in legislation in the United States. However, many people still have not heard of them or their proven benefits to decrease overdose deaths and public substance use. The goal is to distribute this to harm reduction organizations around the country as well as building a workshop around it to be taught to interested parties or potential advocates.

Future work:

There is a major conference in a few weeks in New Orleans that a large number of us will be attending. I was recently assigned to headline a workshop along with two members from similar organizations. I have also begun to do some direct outreach and will continue to do more throughout the summer. After the New Orleans conference I will start creating the presentations that I have planned for the end of the summer. I will also be focusing more on expanding the outreach efforts by networking with organizations that have similar client bases that we have so far been unable to connect with. Many of the projects I am currently working on will be ongoing throughout the summer as well and will continue to grow as I push forward with advocacy.

I look forward to what the rest of the summer has to offer!

Nina Ovia