

Devin Johnson
Tonya Public Policy Internship
Executive Summary
Summer 2009

This summer, through the generous support of the Tonya Foundation, I worked with the Healthy Start Coalition of Flagler and Volusia counties in Daytona Beach, Florida. Healthy Start is, in essence, a women's and infant's health advocacy group. As a subsidiary of a Federal Healthy Start program, it works to enact a national mission to lower the infant mortality rate in the United States. The infant mortality rate is one of the sentinel indicators of the overall health of a community. Our country has the highest infant mortality rates of any developed nation in the world (not to mention, a rate higher than many global south nations). In other words, the work that Healthy Start does is a vital part of the health of my community, my state, and ultimately our country. I was honored to be apart of their mission.

I worked on several projects throughout the summer relating to policy on different levels. The "virtual billing model" is a model for a policy that would restructure the way pregnant women without healthcare apply for Medicaid. I did a literature review of sovereign immunity; one of the stumbling blocks for having the virtual billing model passed into state policy. Another project I worked on was called Project INFORM- a publication reviewing different statistical information about Healthy Start's service area. Such statistical data is the informational backbone for public health initiatives- without information quantifying problems, it is impossible to get legislators to make policy changes. Furthermore, it is this information that guides the way Healthy Start as an organization forms internal policy about its own initiatives. Finally, the most personally significant project I worked on was one that I saw through from beginning to end. The Trisomy 18 physician and patient toolkit is an informational guide for doctor and mother about how to deal with a baby with Trisomy 18. Trisomy 18 is a severe genetic disorder that usually means that a baby will be stillborn, or live fewer than 10 days after birth. Often these pregnancies have been poorly managed. I created a toolkit to be given to patients and doctors, which is currently in the process of being reviewed by the state-wide Healthy Start team in Tallahassee. My hopes would be that it will become a part of internal policy within doctors' offices to always hand a toolkit to any patient with such a poor diagnosis.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work at Healthy Start. The interpersonal dynamics within the office were always pleasant and rewarding. I loved my supervisor, Dixie Morgese, and all of my coworkers. Nonetheless, working for Healthy Start did teach me that I do not want to work in an office in my career. Although I do want to continue to work in the non-profit sector, I need an environment with more visual and auditory stimulation. I recognize that office work is an integral part of the work that non-profits do, but frankly, I'm not cut out for it.