

Emma Romell – Program Reflection

One of my internships this summer was for City Year Milwaukee, an education focused non-profit that places over 100 young AmeriCorps volunteers, or Corps members, in 11 schools around Milwaukee to provide academic and emotional support. My main project was doing political research for the executive office. I compiled an action plan for how City Year Milwaukee might work with legislators over the next 18 months to gain more state funding. My report consisted of information on the Wisconsin budget process, a calendar of important legislative events, notes about significant Wisconsin legislators, and suggestions for outreach opportunities. This report also included my own advice drawn from my experience working in Congresswoman Moore's office and the political knowledge I've amassed during years of listening to NPR... The aspect of City Year I enjoyed the most was the incredible friendliness and positivity of all of the staff. I've never experienced such a happy workplace environment where everyone seems to be so excited about their job. City Year Milwaukee's work is incredibly important – I shadowed a Corps member at Rufus King International Middle School, where I met a girl who had just returned from a two-week suspension due to her decision to punch a teacher. It's a hard job, but the Corps members and staff are truly the right people to handle it. I will always admire the drive, idealism, and immense empathy of all of the people I worked with. For anyone who has an interest in education, poverty, race, or children's issues, City Year Milwaukee would be a perfect fit...

My second internship this summer was in the District Office of Congresswoman Gwen Moore. I began the summer performing typical intern tasks, like answering the phones, fetching the mail, and drafting letters for constituents. Mid-June, my bosses decided to trust me, a 20-year-old with absolutely no previous formal office experience, with a paid position as the Congresswoman's scheduler. I took on the responsibility of updating and organizing three separate schedules, which ended up being far more complicated than I was expecting. It turns out that times and locations and topics for meetings and speeches change many, many, many times before they are finalized, so I ended up in the middle of a tornado of mailed invitations to birthday parties and emailed updates from DC about the Congresswoman's flights, not to mention the never-ending barrage of angry constituents who tended to call the office at the worst time possible. As insane as this sounds, I loved it.

The theme I noticed over and over again in both of my internships was "Consider Your Clients". In my work at City Year and for Congresswoman Moore, I had to continuously imagine life as someone other than myself – a young, able-bodied, white, upper middle class woman. At City Year, the "clients" were kids who qualified for free or reduced lunch, attended schools without art classes or musical instruments, and experienced violence and hunger on a day to day basis. At Congresswoman Moore's office, I helped struggling veterans, disabled homeless people, and perhaps most memorably, a grandmother who was having problems adopting her granddaughter because they were part of two different native tribes. I realized just how difficult life is for some people, and how lucky I am to not worry about putting food on the table or having a roof over my head. Both of my internships shaped my thinking about my community and my future, and that was made possible by Badger Reach.