

Nicole Galicia– Program Reflection

This summer, I interned at the Public Policy Institute of Community Advocates. Community Advocates is the largest human needs advocacy agency in the state of Wisconsin, and the larger organization of which the Public Policy Institute is a part of. Celebrating their 40th anniversary in 2016, Community Advocates is a well-established non-profit with a long history of service in Milwaukee. The agency offers a wide range of direct services to help low-income families meet their basic needs, such as housing and utility assistance. They also engage in advocacy and prevention work. Thus, the agency tackles the issue of poverty from all angles by ensuring families and individuals in low-income communities live with dignity while also advocating for policies to reduce poverty and supporting other direct services agencies in their work to prevent it.

The Public Policy Institute is the division of Community Advocates responsible for policy research, policy advocacy and prevention work. On the policy side, researchers investigate and advocate for ways things like health insurance, transitional jobs programs and social policies can be implemented to reduce poverty. One of their most notable projects is a 5-part policy package called “Working Our Way out of Poverty,” which outlines a set of policies that when implemented together would reduce poverty in the United States by 50%. Another notable accomplishment of the policy staff came this summer when Senator Tammy Baldwin came to Community Advocates to introduce the Stronger Way Act. The legislation calls for a national transitional jobs program and is based on several years of work done at the Public Policy Institute.

On the prevention side, a wide array of programs exist related to promoting behavioral health. Some of the areas of work include substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, and an initiative dedicated to minority male achievement and youth employment. At the Public Policy Institute, I served as the Prevention Intern. Specifically, I supported the work of the Milwaukee County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and the City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance, both housed at the Institute. These two community coalitions are made up of community members and representatives from various sectors who come together around the issue of substance use prevention.

During the summer I was assigned three different projects. My first assignment was to help the Milwaukee County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition promote the prescription drug drop boxes located at Milwaukee District Police Stations and the Municipal Court. At the drop boxes, people can leave their unwanted or unused prescription medications to prevent them from being abused. The staff at the Public Policy Institute helped get the drop boxes implemented in 2015 and is charged with raising awareness of them in the community. I helped compile a list of all pharmacies in Milwaukee County, contacted the pharmacies and then personally put together and delivered packets of 100 informational post cards to a significant portion of the 130 pharmacies. A member of the Coalition volunteered to deliver the rest of the packets. The staff at the Public Policy Institute were very happy with the fact that the initial dissemination of the information cards was completed this summer. They mentioned afterwards that it was a large task they didn’t believe would be completed so quickly.

The second project assigned to me was to create welcome materials for both the Milwaukee County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and the City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance. Both

groups have been experiencing a growth in membership recently and needed strong orientation materials to ensure that individuals who come to their meetings can see how they fit in. I created the initial drafts of the welcome packets. Creating these welcome packets led to me also crafting the outlines of brochures for both coalitions which will be taken to a graphic designer for completion.

My final task was to research and compile a list of all the churches, non-profits and businesses in the 53206 zip code—really anything that you would want on a good map. The staff at the Public Policy Institute focuses much of their work on this zip code and recently got large laminated maps of the area. They were looking to make them more comprehensive by adding neighborhood gems and establishments to them. In addition to these assignments, the staff at the Public Policy Institute invited me to attend their meetings internally and in the community throughout the summer. Community Advocates Public Policy Institute not only convenes coalitions but is a re-granting organization who helps support the work of many youth and family-serving non-profits in Milwaukee. This means they serve as a liaison between the grant-awarding organizations and those providing prevention programming through direct services. The Public Policy Institute applies for grants and then monitors the programs of their grantees to ensure the programs are done according to the requirements. Throughout the summer I had the chance to attend meetings alongside representatives of these grantee organizations.

If I learned one thing this summer, it was how a non-profit works and how the sector functions in relation to other sectors. Before doing this internship I really had no idea how non-profits ran or where the funding came from. Now, I understand how non-profit agencies are connected to government entities and the private sector. Another important thing I learned was that many levels of bureaucracy exist in these organizations because the way they are funded. To a large extent, funding dictates their work. However, this is true of many different entities, especially those receiving government funding. This sometimes causes issues because there is little control in the hands of those on the ground delivering the services, such as teachers delivering a classroom curriculum to youth. However, this is just a demonstration of the fact that place matters within larger systems and sometimes those who hold the purse strings get to make the most important decisions.

Another thing I learned is Milwaukee non-profits are extremely interconnected. Many times they serve similar populations, have coalescing interests and compete for the same funding. Moreover, they often work together to accomplish big goals such as reducing substance use among youth or preventing teen pregnancy through coalitions. The fact that everyone knows everyone means that relationships matter a great deal. As one of my bosses told me multiple times, burning bridges is not an option. However, my takeaway was that this reality forces those in the sector to put aside their own differences and collaborate to serve the populations they all desire to uplift. At the end of the day, everyone remembers that the “clients”—the individuals, families and youth served-- are what really matters.

Professionally, interning at the Public Policy Institute of Community Advocates allowed me to grow a great deal this summer. One of the most important lessons I learned was that communication is key in any workplace setting. Whether it be through weekly check-ins or formal meetings, directly engaging with your colleagues in the workplace prevents misunderstanding, ensures efficiency and allows a more satisfying and supportive work environment. Directly engaging

with colleagues across organizations is also extremely important. Especially in the work the Public Policy Institute does, engaging though meetings and supporting the work of partner organizations allows them to collaborate effectively. Also important in my work this summer was to set short and long-term goals. My first assignment was an initially intimidating task. Without breaking it up into manageable daily and weekly goals, I might not have been able to call all 130 pharmacies in the county and then visit a significant portion of them. Taking the task day by day allowed me to complete it efficiently and be able to move on to other assignments to make my summer work as impactful and fulfilling as possible. Overall, I believe I greatly improved my communication skills and my task and time management through setting and completing my work goals this summer.

If I had to give advice to a Badger Reach student about interning at Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, it would be to take advantage of all the opportunities to get to know the staff and interact with them. Everyone working at Community Advocates has a passion for public service. Their work demonstrates this. They are all well-informed and care a great deal about Milwaukee. They also like to help others, which applies to their interns in all aspects of their work and professional development. Take advantage of their willingness to get to know you and stay connected with them after you finish your internship. They are all extremely knowledgeable and want the best for you and those they serve. As far as project handoff materials, I can't guarantee the future needs of the Public Policy Institute will be similar to what they were this summer. However, I know the Public Policy Institute has an ongoing challenges they hope to resolve surrounding their branding. Understanding the Institute and what they do is a bit confusing at first, even after you begin working there. The two sides of the Institutes' work in policy and prevention are not well understood by those outside of the field, either. I believe the Institute may still be looking for ways to better convey their mission, which a future intern could definitely help with. This summer they were exploring taking the initial steps toward creating new literature about their organization and promoting their work using social media, which a tech-savvy intern could help greatly with