

Joy Dartey

Liman Fellowship Report

Summer 2017 at Children's Defense Fund – New York

During the summer of 2017, I worked as a Budget Policy and Faith-Based Partnerships Intern for the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) in New York. CDF is a non-profit organization that works to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are met and that all children have a successful passage to adulthood. The organization pays particular attention to children of color, children who live in poverty and children who are disabled. CDF's New York Office is relatively small in comparison with its other offices because it has only nine people on staff and this characteristic allowed me to make the most of my internship experience and learn much about all of the organization's policy priorities, and not just what I was assigned to work on for the summer. This in turn, was particularly helpful in guiding me through thinking about post-graduation plans. I am forever grateful that the Arthur Liman Fellowship made my summer experience possible. I got the career exposure that I wanted this was only possible because of this fellowship.

My primary role was a Faith Based Partnerships Intern. This demanded that I work as a representative of CDF and seek out and develop lasting relationships with faith communities and strategic congregations across New York State. I spent the first two weeks of my internship conducting research on CDF's policy priorities and understanding how the organization had interacted with faith communities in the past. My goal was to identify where potential collaborations between CDF and faith communities could be possible, so I also spent a significant amount of time analyzing strategic congregations and communities and learning what their main areas of interest (when it came to social advocacy) were. I then proceeded to examine

CDF's present relationships with faith communities in an attempt to note which strategies were working, which ones needed to be improved as well as new ones that could be employed. I shared my findings with the CDF New York team and with the approval of the Office's Deputy Director, worked to find and approach faith communities, congregations and leaders that were not Christian. We thought it best that CDF's faith partners be diverse, so I worked on connecting with different faith communities.

I was given the opportunity to attend CDF's Proctor Conference in Tennessee as well as several meetings and workshops with faith leaders outside of the New York Office. These were particularly helpful for my role because they helped me see how faith-based advocates worked together to dismantle what CDF aptly dubs "the Cradle to Prison Pipeline." I interacted with different faith leaders (old and young ones alike) and educators to learn more about concrete steps individuals could take to work on justice for America's vulnerable children. And this in turn, impacted my own work in the organization. It was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable parts of my time with the Children's Defense Fund.

In addition to helping CDF strengthen its partnerships with faith communities and congregations, I also spent some time following the nation's budget for the 2017-18 fiscal year. I reviewed the Presidential and House budgets and worked on policy briefs to be used for CDF's outreach efforts. These briefs discussed the ways in which the Presidential and House budgets would impact not just the residents of New York, but New York's vulnerable populations. The goal of these briefs was to allow the residents of New York to understand the implications of the budget and to prompt these people to remain committed to their social and civic responsibilities. CDF put out several calls to action this summer, and the organization's New York team understood that one of the ways to encourage people to participate was to make them aware of

ways in which what was happening on the political front could affect their everyday lives. This explains the organization's commitment to putting out policy briefs throughout the summer and I was very fortunate to be given the opportunity to contribute to this endeavor.

What I most enjoyed about my experience this summer was the opportunity CDF gave me to learn about more than what my assigned role entailed. A staff member led a brown – bag lunch each week and used this as an opportunity to discuss his or her own role within CDF, as well as his or her educational background and professional path. Career exposure was one of the main reasons I was interested in an internship with this organization so I found these brown-bag sessions very enlightening, as they offered guidance as I thought through post-graduation plans. I was also able to attend CDF's health forums, and offer administrative assistance to CDF's direct service initiatives like the Beat the Odds and Freedom Schools Programs. This allowed me to gain an in-depth knowledge of all that the organization does, and it also exposed me to a variety of professional careers I had not considered. I went into the experience with the intention of learning solely about how education policy works, and I left feeling like I had learned so much more about not just policy, but about what a meaningful career path looked like.

I am incredibly thankful to the Liman Fellowship Program for making this experience possible. I learned so much about not just the Children's Defense Fund, but also about my own values, interests and skills. My main takeaway from this summer is that in the future, I would like to work for an organization that serves disadvantaged populations and works to even the playing field for all individuals. I am now considering law school and consulting for organizations that are engaged in public service.