

Mallory Shaner  
Gray Panthers Summer Intern

I had no idea what to expect this summer when I applied to be a summer intern for the Gray Panthers. I knew nothing about the problems of older persons and nothing about their treatment and their standing in the United Nations. I have met so many fascinating and hard-working people, people who work day in and day out fighting for things most people have no idea are happening. One of those people was my boss, Jack Kupferman.

My first project of the summer was to research nursing home grievance processes in other states and the audits that had been done on nursing homes. Together, Jack and I composed an email that asked if any audits had been done in each state on nursing home grievance processes, and if so, when. I found the contact information for 49 state auditors and sent off my request. Jack had warned me when I started this project that it was very possible I would not get many, if any responses. We were shocked by the responses. Over 30 of the states contacted replied to me, but unfortunately many of those states had not done audits of nursing homes, and if they had, none were current. But what was most surprising was the reactions we got from the states: so many of them had not even realized how much of an issue this was, and my emails inspired many of them to take a closer look at nursing homes and the unseen problems there. Even if it was a small difference, it felt amazing to know I had changed something. I followed up with the states by emailing the governors of each, to make the governments aware of this problem and in hopes of trying to get them to do something. Most of the governors never answered, but those that did were shocked about these problems. I wrote up a report, and some volunteers from Gray Panthers are going to take it to the New York State Auditor's office to encourage New York to do something.

Another large component of my internship was helping volunteers from the NGO Committee on Ageing conduct mission visits with the permanent missions to the United Nations. I visited Luxembourg, Malawi, Ireland, Laos, and Australia with various representatives from the committee. I took notes of each meeting, learning more on my feet about each country and their positions within the UN than I ever could have from any Google Search. The experiences I had at each mission proved to be instrumental during the Sixth Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, when I got to see the results of each mission visit. Member states we had visited actually came to the working group, and many spoke on the issues of older persons. At the working group I also got to hear the voices of several NGOs on Ageing, from AgeUK to HelpAgeInternational, and of course, Gray Panthers. It was amazing to see the passion and dedication of the representatives from the NGOs. These people had been working for the past six years to have the rights of older persons be recognized by the UN, meeting with member states and forming Groups of Friends and writing statements, with little reward. It was motivating and empowering to hear the stories of the abuse of older persons from their point of view. They told

candid tales in between sessions of the working group, making the jaws of everyone in the room drop. I had the privilege of having dinner with one of the speakers, Mr. Sayeed of Pakistan. His stories were unbelievable, something I had never been exposed to until this summer.

My experience this summer was unexpected and unforgettable. Not only did I improve my practical skills like research and surveying, but I gained real-life experiences meeting people and interacting with diplomats and NGOs from all over the world. I did not know what to expect when I started, but I am very happy with my results of this summer. Even if it is only for one person, in one small place, to know that I have helped is better than any feeling.