

August 2019

Reflections from Mackenzie Schade

The last few months while being a member of the Gray Panthers have been nothing short of a dream come true. The people I met, the conversations and meetings that took place, all revolved around genuine people wanting to make a positive impact.

Mr. Kupferman, thank you for taking a chance on me. I knew the second I learned about Maggie Kuhn and the Gray Panthers I wanted to be a part of it. I advanced the agenda of the Gray Panthers and explored my passions in ways I would not have been able to anywhere else.

From the beginning, you asked what I was interested in and who I wanted to meet. In one of our first phone calls, I told you about my interest in the guardianship system, Elder Law and that I looked up to Ashton Applewhite. Not only did I meet Aston, but through your help, I was able to schedule a meeting with The Guardianship Project in the Vera Institute of Justice. This summer, I did not just feel like another intern. It was clear each intern got a tailored experience based on their perspective passions, and that is truly unique and appreciated. The prestige and reputation that comes with the Gray Panthers allowed people to take notice of us past being a group of eager young adults. As an example, scheduling and attending a meeting at State Senator Liz Krueger's office, was possible and not out of the question.

Being able to not only attend, but represent as a member of the Stakeholder Group on Aging at the High-level Political Forum was a sincere honor. It genuinely surprised people when I explained I (as a 20-year-old) was an intern for the Gray Panthers, who is a member of the Stakeholder Group on Aging, representing the rights of older adults. I indeed had a few people

laugh in my face. Even at the UN people needed to be debunked of stigmas and learn about ageism. The individuals I connected with and learned from are beyond what I could have wished.

Mr. Kupferman, thank you for being a true role model of what it means to have a passion. No matter what was going on, day or night, you were there for us at an unprecedented speed with support. Your willingness to take on countless board positions, speak on behalf of the SGA during the VNRs, and take on five wide-eyed interns, shows a glimpse of what you are willing to do to advance the rights of elders all over the world. I am beyond grateful to have witnessed a level of initiative like what you have. And one day, I aspire to have it myself.

The Gray Panthers will forever have a place in my heart. The opportunities of meeting admirable GP members, to form bonds like none other with the other interns, and to be in New York City for the summer are experiences I will look fondly over for the rest of my life.

Mr. Kupferman, the other interns, and Gray Panther members, I thank you. This summer solidified my passion for a career in gerontology and my love for helping people.