

## **Reflection on Gray Panthers, NYC Network Summer 2015 Internship**

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When I was looking for an internship this summer, I knew that I wanted to do some sort of advocacy work. This summer, I did exactly that and so much more.

Part of what I did, when I first became an intern, was that I put myself on a learning curve when it came to the issue of ageism. It was not an issue that I put much thought into before this summer, so I was learning on the run.

At times, I showed exactly how much of a learning curve I had. When I said “elderly” instead of “older persons”, I showed Jack that I had a bit of a learning curve when it came to the language used in ageism issues. When I made a comment about the state of affairs of the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, I showed the entire audience at this NGO Briefing that I had a bit of a learning curve when it came to international politics.

I have to confess that, on these occasions where I showed how little I knew about ageism or the politics of ageism, I felt a little embarrassed. However, without my statements and the embarrassments which came with those statements, I never would’ve learned some of the things that I did. For example, Frances would’ve never talked with me at length about the dynamics of UN politics, including that of the G77 (a group of developing nations that I never heard of before the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing).

Sometimes, it was not embarrassments that served as teachable moments, but moments when all of us struggled through a project. For example, the struggle to find capacity-building grants taught me that I am far from the only person who has at many points overlooked the issue of ageism. In fact, my research for capacity-building grants helped me find that many foundations make the same mistake.

However, the learning that I did throughout the process of my internship need not be limited to moments of embarrassment or struggle. In fact, one of my moments of triumph, which involved the creation and execution of the pedestrian safety survey, taught me how to do and conduct a survey in a way that I don’t annoy people too much (even though people are probably annoyed anyway with how Florence and me were taking up their days anyway).

So far, I have talked about what I've done and what I've learned, but my writing lacks at least one major component: my personal emotions to everything that I've learned and done. For me, there are three levels of emotion here: emotions about the state of the Gray Panthers, emotions about everything I did for the Gray Panthers, and emotions about who I met from the Gray Panthers.

First, I'll start off with my varied emotions about the state of the Gray Panthers. These were emotions which evolved over the course of the summer. When I started, I was actually quite confused, because I wasn't sure whether they really did ageism or whether they did general progressive/social justice issues. As I learned more about the Gray Panthers, that confusion turned into amazement; amazement over how the national Gray Panthers seemed to veer away from ageism as the central issue, amazement that this issue tore apart the national Gray Panthers, and amazement that the NYC Network of the Gray Panthers were able to hold together in spite of all these issues. I think that my emotion of amazement remains, because I still feel like that, albeit for different reasons: amazement that the NYC Network survives on a shoestring budget, and amazement that we do so much with so little.

Oddly, my emotions about what I did weren't as complex as my emotions about the Gray Panthers itself. Maybe it's because a lot of what I did this summer resembles a lot of what I've done before: research, scrounging for information in order to conduct successful research, and writing pieces which get published. However, there was one thing in particular that did (and does) give me goosebumps: the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing. Where should I start: the fact that I was among the youngest people there, or that the youngest people there ended up crafting a wonderful statement that was delivered at the United Nations? All I'll say was that it was incredibly surreal to hear my words (and Florence's words as well, to give her all due credit) spoken at the United Nations.

Speaking of the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, that experience (and other mediums) gave me the opportunity to meet some amazing people who work on the issue of ageism. From Mateo Estreme (probably forgetting accent marks), the chair of the OEWGA, to Erica, I met people who are on the forefront of ageism. Frances (our Frances) made an impression on me because of her wealth of knowledge and her ability to explain something as complex as UN politics to someone like me. Jack amazes me because of all the tasks that he manages to balance, along with being one of the more important voices for ageism (especially now that the national Gray Panthers have dissolved). And, of course, I can't forget about Florence, who was among the best groupmates I ever had (and I'm not just being nice here; I've had some horrible experiences in school with group projects), had incredible initiative (just like

the other people mentioned above), and is very smart. I know that this sounds like a list (and it is a list, in paragraph form), but I wanted to make sure that I included all the people who had an impact on me.

No way did I expect to experience all of these things, from the work to the learning experiences to the emotions. Sometimes, you just don't know what you're getting yourself into.

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