



The Impact of Connecticut Voices' Fellowships

May 2012

Connecticut's children will always face challenges -- some we can anticipate, but many that we cannot. So Connecticut Voices helps to mentor the next generation of advocates so *they* are prepared to address these new challenges. Our Policy Fellowships provide full-time employment for recent college graduates at the start of their careers. They work side-by-side with us on Connecticut Voices for Children's research, policy, and advocacy projects. Please meet some of our past Fellows and discover what they learned at our organization and how the experience has helped them in their early careers.

Katie McKeon



Working in D.C. for Senator Dodd, I really wanted to get more into policy, so Voices was a perfect choice for me. From my first days on the job, I was involved with lobbying and advocacy, researching and creating fact sheets for a Senior Voices Fellow to present to legislators. Going with her to the capitol to meet with lawmakers and testify about issues I had been learning about were the kinds of responsibilities most people my age just don't get the chance to do. Each of us had our own special job, and being a Junior Fellow gave me the responsibility of seeing a project from start to finish. The staff's confidence in me directly correlated with developing my self-confidence, and increased my leadership capability because I had the chance to practice thinking outside the box.

Taly Bialostocki



The Voices staff approach everything with a critical eye, and I got to observe and practice how people use language and data, how to take apart and evaluate arguments. These skills set me on a strong course as a young professional, and becoming a Junior Fellow prepared me well for law school. Now I'm a new lawyer in Seattle.

I appreciate how I became a better writer at Voices, learning to be more clear and concise, and more sensitive to nuances in language and how information is presented to different audiences. Together with Senior Fellows, I wrote a report about certain models of legal representation for children. Trading drafts and noting their comments on what I had written was a great hands-on way to learn. And in the process we helped pass legislation to improve protections for needy children.

It's a collegial place to work; an excellent place to get mentored, and to see how senior people present themselves to the public. I had really great role models, and the experience opened up lots of opportunities I wouldn't have gotten any place else.

Anna Blanding



I learned to appreciate the way Voices approached work from a team perspective – brainstorming, discussing, even debating – and its lack of hierarchy. So Voices definitely influenced my decision to attend the Yale School of Management, especially given the school’s approach of creating leaders in business society through teamwork.

I left Voices with a tremendous sense of the value being mentored by strong leaders, especially women interested in developing the next generation of leaders. And I hold that experience dear. As I get further in my career, I hope to give back that sense of support to those who follow.

Tamara Kramer



I was thrown into the work right away, and my fellowship involved lots of responsibility for a 22 year-old. All my friends got jobs out of college, too; but they were doing secretarial work. Not me: I did research, writing and lobbying on child protective services and DCF. Our work was a real impetus to the legislation that was eventually enacted. Another Voices report on in-school suspensions and at-risk students resulted in the legislature passing a bill reforming school discipline practices.

This was an important win for young people, and I was involved -- testifying before committees, and making presentations at policy meetings. The whole Voices experience pushed me as a person, and I was proud of how far I came.

I took that experience with me to law school, and have returned to the issue of how poverty affects kids by interning at the law school clinic with The Center for Children’s Advocacy -- one of Voices’ partners. It’s emotionally challenging, but every day at the clinic I’m using what I learned at Voices. What great mentors the senior fellows are! Working under people who are so influential and highly respected in all the policy fields, having access to so many meetings and lobbying opportunities - these were exceptional experiences. This summer of 2012 I’ll begin working for a non-profit organization, the National Health Law Program. I know that my time with Voices was a huge part of why they selected me over other great candidates.

Emi Lesure



What I liked about Voices was being able to see the research in action. Being trained to document and organize for the public and lawmakers on issues of inequality and tax policy were important responsibilities for me as a young person, and really fulfilling. I was glad to be at Voices during the coordinating effort for One Connecticut, and to see how 100 agencies with different issues were able to pull together to form a powerful coalition.

That early exposure to research that Voices provided helped me think about what I want to do with my life - where I can have the best impact. I was grateful to be offered a Voices junior fellowship that was challenging, intellectually stimulating, related to a future career, and paid a living wage. Now I’m in law school at NYU and know that my time at Voices will continue to inform my future.

Amy Blankson



The Junior Fellows program offers a unique kind of training. The level of authority given to us showed that we could make a real contribution in projects, and I was actually helping to shape statewide policy changes, where other agencies would just use interns like go-fers. I got great grant writing experience. Later at business school I learned more about the key role philanthropy plays in the life of nonprofits, and I created the first annual Yale School of Management Conference on Philanthropy. I am proud of how that relates to what I learned at Voices, and even wrote my business school essay about the organization. I became Executive Director of a juvenile justice

agency because of my Voices experience.

I was surprised and impressed that at staff meetings everyone's work was seen as important no matter what people were doing. Those experiences early in my career taught me about the need to motivate every team member by making each one feel valued. I've taken that knowledge with me as a management consultant, Executive Director, and now COO. I've never seen another team like Voices, or one that functions with the same magic. Since leaving New Haven, I'm always trying to find a new CT Voices for Children wherever I am.

Cari Carson



How much the Senior Fellows rely on you and trust you with the substantive work of the organization is amazing. When I think of all the jobs I had after college, only at Voices was I put in a training role. You're not just an intern tagging along, and that was a really helpful learning experience. Knowing how to write and testify, doing research and presenting it-- that's a unique opportunity for a young person out of college.

I'm currently applying to law school in order to practice child welfare, juvenile justice, and special education law. The fellowship also gave me advocacy skills that I use at my school in South Louisiana where I am a special education teacher with Teach for America. Thanks to Voices I can research policy and legal issues much faster than I would have been able to if I hadn't been a junior fellow. I left Voices with a foundation in policy and advocacy, and I've recently discovered that policy and advocacy need to be important parts of my future career. I've decided to become a child advocate.