

Rachel Arnesen

I spent this summer working in Kigali, Rwanda at the WE-ACTx HIV/AIDS clinic. I, along with one other American intern, spent the summer working on a couple major projects as well as assisting with/observing the day-to-day activities of the clinic. I spent most of my time working on a growth chart program, which involved creating a digital database with every child's growth chart history. The program charted their growth progress according to percentile and using the standard of BMI-for-sex-and-age, identified which children were underweight and in need of extra assistance. I also worked on compiling results of a Child and Family Assessment survey, the results of which were extremely interesting. Using this information I was able to compile a list of the different families in the clinic, which is harder than one would think given that last names are not passed down from parents to kids nor are they shared by siblings. I was also fortunate to be able to observe the different activities of the clinic, including sitting in with the nurses in consultations, working in the pharmacy, attending support groups, working with Musicians without Borders on some music therapy, and helping with food distribution.

Overall, I had a very good and enriching experience this summer. Everyone at the clinic was very friendly and welcoming, and willing to help if I ever needed anything. I feel like it was a very good first experience working abroad. However, the language barrier was way bigger than I was expecting. I had no trouble communicating with the clinic staff using English or French, but found it almost impossible to converse with any patients, including kids. I could talk with most of the peer parents, but other than that, my communication was very limited. This in turn, somewhat limited what I was able to effectively help with. Sitting in with the nurses and visiting support groups would've been fascinating had I been able to understand what was going on, but I really didn't get much. Occasionally someone would translate a bit for me, but it would be a one sentence summary of the conversation that had been happening for the previous 20 minutes. I

absolutely understand, as I did not want to disrupt or inconvenience anyone by making them translate, but that made visiting support groups not particularly informative for me.

I think this experience was a perfect introduction to working in health abroad. I liked that I got to see all different aspects of the clinic, from sitting in nurses' offices, to going on home visits, to looking through medical charts, etc. It has made me realize, however, that in the future, if/when I work abroad again, I want to go abroad with a) a specific project that I will be working on and b) specific skills that I can use, rather than a general "help out" approach. However, I would not change this summer's experience, as I think the "general" internship is ideal for a first experience. Thank you very much for granting me this fellowship, which made this opportunity possible!