

Insights

NICHQ Intern Spotlight: Macy Parakh

by Lyndsay Brooks, NICHQ intern

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Macy Parakh (she/her) is a Marketing Communication Intern Summer

2022 at NICHQ. She is a Master of Public Health (MPH) student at Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH). Macy is studying Community Assessment, Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation (CAPDIE) and Maternal and Child Health (MCH). She is originally from Toronto, Canada. Macy has a bachelor's degree in Communications from McMaster University. When Macy isn't studying or working, she can be found baking, dancing, and spending time with her dog.

All NICHQ interns get the opportunity to participate in a weekly Quality Improvement (QI) course. Throughout the duration of their internship, interns develop a personal aim and apply QI methodology to their Personal Quality Improvement Project.

What brought you to the field of public health?

I'm super new to public health. I happened upon public health by way of finding things I did not want to do. After graduating high school, I applied to fifty percent nutrition and dietetic programs and fifty percent communication programs. I was always unsure between the two. I figured that it would be easier for me to try out the STEM field of nutrition first and If I didn't like it, it would be easier for me to transfer into communications than the other way around. So, for my first year of university, I was in a nutrition program, and it was just not for me, that micro-level biology and chemistry.

I transferred after my first year and I ended up in a communications program, which I really enjoyed. I also ended up doing a minor in business, which I did not enjoy quite as much! Then in

my last year, right before COVID-19 hit, I was able to do an internship at my school's Department of Family Medicine. I worked with a lot of people who had their MPH degrees and were also doing communications and knowledge translation. I thought that was really interesting and that was when I decided communications and public health were a good intersection for me. I love that public health is such a diverse field – it doesn't really matter what your background is, you can still bring something valuable to it.

What MCH issue are you most passionate about?

Because I'm new to public health, I'm always being drawn into so many different areas, and altogether it's very exciting. But also, it's hard for me to focus in on just one issue. There are topics that I've been really excited to learn about during the first year of my MPH and issues that I'm personally passionate about that, unfortunately, haven't been touched on much in my classes.

For example, the health and, specifically, the mental health of children who have been separated from their biological families whether through adoption or foster care is something that's not touched on a lot. Of course, this also ties into reproductive justice and the right not just to have or not have kids, but the right to raise children in a safe and healthy environment. I think that piece is often left out of conversations and it's something I'd definitely like to dive into more.

What projects are you working on this Summer at NICHQ?

A lot of the work I'll be doing is centered on sickle cell disease so I'm going to look at all the existing content on our website and try to see what can be reused and reinvented to suit different audiences, particularly patients and caregivers. Alongside that, I'm working on an article about sickle cell disease and how there have been a lot of very promising developments in the work, but at the same time, there are still some big gaps in terms of accessing that care. Tying those themes into NICHQ's work on sickle cell disease is exciting because it's like one of their biggest areas of focus, and they've been working on it for over a decade. So it's been really interesting to dive into that. And then I manage the Instagram account, which is fun because it's the newest social media platform for NICHQ, so I get to have a little bit of fun experimenting with what works there.

Is there something you're excited to learn about at NICHQ this summer?

What I'm most excited about is learning the day-to-day workings of an organization like this because that's something that I really came in with no experience in. It's interesting to see how the different teams work together and how Jey (Weisgerber) and Domonique (Davis) work to liaise between all the projects. I also love seeing how they bring both their professional experience and lived experiences to this work and the content they create. It's been really interesting to see how people with communications and journalism backgrounds have been able to do so well with public health work that is extremely nuanced. It gives me some hope, as someone with a joint communications and public health background.

What is your QI project?

Truthfully, my room is always a mess. So, for my QI project, I'm trying to increase the number of days that my room stays clean each week. I've had mixed results so far but one of the fun things I've realized is that if I buy flowers to keep on my desk, I'm more likely to keep that space clean!

What are your ultimate career aspirations after your degree?

Similar to all my interests in MCH, that brings us back to me being very open to what the future holds! I used to be scared about pigeonholing myself in health communications, but if I enjoy writing and things like that, I don't see why I shouldn't pursue that.

Ultimately, I would like to see myself back home in downtown Toronto, serving the community that I grew up in. I'm not quite sure what that'll look like yet. I know some people see Canada as this perfect place with free healthcare, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done to advance health equity there too – particularly for BIPOC communities and people experiencing homelessness.