



SOURCE

Star of the Month

June 2021

Chanel Lee

School of Public Health



Congratulations to our Star of the Month for June 2021, Chanel Lee from the Bloomberg School of Public Health! Chanel completed the Baltimore Community Practicum working with our partners at FreeState Justice on community outreach efforts and has left a lasting impact on FreeState's social media engagement. Read more below!

Tell us a little bit about yourself. What program are you enrolled in, and what brought you to the Bloomberg School of Public Health?

I am a 1st year MSPH student in the Department of Population, Family, and Reproductive Health concentrating in women's sexual and reproductive health. I did my undergraduate at JHU, during which I really got involved in menstrual equity and LGBTQ advocacy work on campus and in Baltimore. These experiences exposed me to community impact and got me interested in public health in an informal way, and already familiar with the School of Public Health, I wanted the chance to study public health formally at a leading institution in the city that I had grown to love.

What made you want to get involved with FreeState Justice for a Baltimore Community Practicum placement?

I had known about FreeState Justice and how it is a wonderful organization that serves and uplifts LGBTQ Marylanders, and I saw this practicum as a

way to fulfill my professional and personal goals. I was seeking an applied public health experience at an established nonprofit comprised of experts from whom I could learn about community engagement. Additionally, I was looking to gain greater insight into the day-to-day operations of a Baltimore-based LGBTQ organization and play an active role in influencing community health at a somewhat grassroots level. I love working with community organizations and wanted to help out during this challenging time.

How have you been able to foster and maintain connections with community members during the pandemic?

I hosted virtual events including a holiday social (which was a joint event with Baltimore Safe Haven and the LGBTQ Dignity Project with a guest appearance of the State's Attorney of Prince George's County Aisha N. Braveboy) and a murder mystery night, to foster community and connection within the LGBTQ community during the pandemic. I think the people who came had a really good time and were able to use the event as a safe space to share their thoughts about the pandemic. I was also responsible for creating original social media content to promote FreeState Justice's online visibility and presence. For example, I created an LGBTQ holiday survival guide in November and highlighted queer Black historical figures in February in honor of Black History Month.

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How does your community work complement what you're learning at the School of Public Health?

This practicum was very relevant to my understanding of building successful collaborations across different entities in public health. Trust is the foundation to effective partnerships, especially in community-based participatory research and community-academic partnerships. It is earned and has to be built. Honesty, mutual respect, and open communication are other important characteristics to maintaining good relationships. Overall, being a public health student during a global public health crisis has been surreal and moving like no other, and the pandemic is a reminder to me of how undeniably important and "real-life" public health is.

What advice would you give to other students looking to get involved in service-learning?

Go into service-learning with an open mind and heart and honest intentions. Community organizations have been doing this work for a long time, so take their lead because they are the experts. Be clear about expectations that you have for your preceptor and the internship as a whole and about expectations that your preceptor has for you. It is unlikely that you are going to suddenly solve an issue that the organization has been facing for years, and that shouldn't be your goal honestly. Sometimes the best thing you can do is to listen and learn, not necessarily to "fix" something. The way you enter and exit the organization are also important, and similarly, what you put into the experience is what you will get out of it. Make sure to have fun!

Thank you Chanel for your commitment and service to our community!