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KING NUTRITION FELLOW

UNDERGRAD: YALE UNIVERSITY

GRAD SCHOOL: RUTGERS NEW JERSEY MEDICAL SCHOOL

KING NUTRITION FELLOW: AUGUST 2023 - JUNE 2025

How did you learn about TJC and its King Child Nutrition Fellowship?

I learned about TJC through a program offered by my undergrad that connected first-generation and/or low-income students with internships across a variety of industries. I really resonated with TJC's mission and decided to not only intern over the summer, but to apply to the fellowship my senior year following my great experience with the organization.

Why did you want to do the King Fellowship?

Advocacy work has always been at the forefront of my mind. Growing up in a low income household, I often had to watch my parents struggle to navigate the bureaucratic red tape that stood between us and vital safety net programs, particularly Medicaid and SNAP. Once I got into college and developed an interest in medicine, I often saw how a lack of healthcare coverage and nutrition assistance led to worse health outcomes. I therefore cultivate a strong desire to learn more about social determinants of health and TJC provided an avenue for further exploration through the King Nutrition Fellowship.

Did you have a typical routine during your fellowship, or did it vary from day-to-day?

My work was 50% casework and 50% advocacy work. In the mornings, I would work on creating SNAP training materials and flyers, preparing discussion points and slides for our monthly SNAP Access calls, attending food drives and outreach events. In the afternoons, I would spend my time contacting clients, determining their eligibility for SNAP, filing applications and appeals, communicating with the Department of Human Services, and overseeing the work of anti-hunger interns

Can you share more about one of the client cases you helped with during your Fellowship?

One of my more memorable clients was Candace Pegues, who I nominated for Mother of the Year in 2024. Ms. Pegues was the primary caretaker of 6 children and was struggling to find work to support her family due to a health condition. She lost SNAP due to an administrative error at the height of the SNAP backlog in 2023 and early 2024. I had the privilege of assisting her during this time and was able to reinstate her benefits. What really left an impression on me was her resilience and dedication to her children. In spite of her economic condition, she made sure that her family was always happy and healthy. She would continue to reach out to TJC whenever she found herself at a standstill with DHS.

What were some of your favorite memories at TJC during your Fellowship?

My favorite memories at TJC have been during outreach events. I enjoy going into the community with my coworkers and meeting our neighbors. I really enjoyed the first resource fair TJC ever held, as it brought so many members of the communities to our door, and I got to learn about the incredible work that other non-profits do.

Would you say you had a robust knowledge of (health care coverage/nutrition safety net, etc.) before your fellowship? If not, what did you learn?

I had some experiential knowledge from watching my parents apply for Medicaid, WIC, and SNAP as a child, and this was further supplemented by my time volunteering at free healthcare clinics that provide wraparound services to patients with either limited or no medical insurance. However, it was really at TJC that I learned about all the barriers that are in place that limit folks from getting the care they are entitled to. My entire worldview and my own biases were completely challenged for the better.

What were some skills you took away/learned from the fellowship?

The number one skill that I took away from the fellowship was the importance of teamwork. I quickly learned that this work is impossible to do without relying on your coworkers, supervisors, community leaders, and neighbors. At the center of the work I did at TJC was the concept of collective impact - that is equity is only advanced when people from different sectors come together and share their knowledge to make the world a better place.

How did your time as a fellow shape you into who you are today and the work that you do?

My time at TJC has definitely made me a more fervent advocate of the underserved. The knowledge that I can gain at TJC has been vital in helping me address the stigma individuals have about safety net programs, combat misinformation, and approach people, especially those with different backgrounds from me, with more compassion.

What's something you wish more people knew about (health care coverage/nutrition safety net)?

For most Americans, a car accident, a divorce, a death in the family, a missed paycheck, an illness, and so on is enough to tip people into poverty. It is therefore important for people to realize that they too can become a beneficiary of public assistance programs at any moment. That is why I wish more people knew that those who benefit from these programs the most are elderly individuals, veterans, college students, disabled folks, pregnant individuals, caretakers, foster youth and children. Why would you want to make it harder for your neighbor, your child's teacher, the cashier at your local market, your friends, grandparents to get the services they need to survive.

Do you have any advice for current and future TJC fellows?

My advice is especially tailored to recent grads who are interested in advocacy work, but don't necessarily want to become an attorney: apply to the fellowship anyway. At first, I was hesitant to work at a law firm as someone who was interested in going to the medical field. Now as an incoming medical student, I can definitively say that my time at TJC has made me a more well rounded and empathetic individual. Every single professor, medical student and administrator that I spoke with during the application process really appreciated my in-depth knowledge of healthcare and the hunger landscape. Whether you want to become a teacher, a doctor, an economist, non-profit leader, etc. TJC's work expands across multiple sectors and there are so many opportunities to explore your interests from a healthcare and nutrition lens.