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KING CHILD HEALTH FELLOW

UNDERGRAD: WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

KING CHILD HEALTH FELLOW: AUGUST 2023-MAY 2024

Why did you want to do the King Fellowship?

I was the King Child Health Fellow during the 2024 election, which was the first election where I remember health insurance being a hot-button issue. At the time of the election, I was helping families- regardless of race, gender, income, or political affiliation- enroll in TennCare Medicaid. The common denominator among all my clients was that they all felt entitled to good health. Yet most families didn't understand the complex policies that were influencing their healthcare eligibility. Some families were trapped in a scarcity mindset, fearing that broader access to healthcare would take theirs away.

As a result, I focused on educating the public during my time as a King Child Health Fellow. The King Child Health Fellowship was an unprecedented opportunity to reach such a wide audience across the state. I saw time and time again that Tennesseans agreed about public healthcare more than they disagreed. I wanted to peel back the myths about public healthcare so that everyone could be more informed about public healthcare policy and eventually advocate for healthcare for all.

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

Several of my clients have fundamentally changed the way that I view the world, but I am going to focus on a story that fundamentally changed the way I want to love someone else. I worked with a couple who had been together for decades. The wife, who had been relatively healthy for her entire life, was unexpectedly diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Her husband worked tirelessly for months to help her enroll in insurance that could give her the care she needed. He was her full-time caretaker, the full-time caretaker of their son, and the only person navigating their extensive medical debt. He never lost patience or faith in his wife nor in the complex healthcare system. Everything he did was with love, and she was lucky to be with someone who cared for her so deeply.

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

My favorite memories at TJC were memories of my coworkers. I loved working with everyone at TJC. I intersected with the casework team, health advocacy team, and communication team. My peers and managers challenged me to think about new perspectives and remain optimistic when faced with overwhelming systemic hurdles.

I also loved talking to my clients. I had several clients who would call or text just to share good news. One of my clients would send me pictures of her son, and her son, who was still learning to talk, recognized my voice when I called the household. Another invited me to dinner with her daughter (who I had helped get onto TennCare Medicaid) after I returned from a period of active-duty military orders. I developed deep relationships with my clients and often felt a deep calling to make sure they felt cared for.

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

The King Child Health Fellowship taught me to be an adaptable, compassionate, patient advocate. It also taught me to apply complex healthcare policies to unique scenarios and break down complicated regulations comprehensively.

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

I became very passionate about the economic policy of public safety net programs while I was a King Child Health Fellow. Most Americans can agree that everyone has the right to live a healthy life, but they disagree on the price tag associated with expanding the public safety net. My research found that expanding the public safety net would decrease the healthcare price tag for the average American- whether insured or uninsured. As a result, I became very interested in economic policy and the intersection of law with the healthcare business. I am currently applying to both law and business schools for the 2027 cycle.

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

In the state of Tennessee, it is extremely difficult to get onto the public healthcare system, even if you are a vulnerable member of the population. Even though healthcare should be a right for all, only low-income children, caretakers, and medically complicated individuals are eligible for public healthcare benefits. It is a misconception that people are "using the government" for healthcare benefits in the state of Tennessee, because TennCare Medicaid only exists to support those who may not have access to healthcare in any other way.

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

The King Child Health Fellowship is an opportunity to support your neighbors' basic rights of life and the pursuit of happiness. Remember that your work has a lasting impact on people's lives, and you are entrusted with a lot of responsibility.

The Tennessee Justice Center was my first job after graduating from college. I felt an extreme sense of purpose from my job, and I cannot imagine doing a job that doesn't involve working towards something greater than myself. In the military, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to defend the country, but the Tennessee Justice Center gave me the opportunity to defend its citizens.