

A CSC SUMMER INTERN EXPERIENCE



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Before I begin to tell you about my experience as a summer intern with the Cleveland Foundation, I would like to present to you a challenge...

Close your eyes. Now try your best to read the rest of my post.

Odds are if you have made it this far, you have already cheated. This seems to be an impossible task, correct? That's what I, too, would have thought before my placement at the Cleveland Sight Center. Yet, the challenge I have presented you with is a reality for many people.

My first thought to solve this problem would be to ask someone else to read it to me. That is an option, but what happens if you want to complete this simple task on your own? The Cleveland Sight Center (CSC) offers individuals who are blind or have low vision the opportunity to achieve this independence. The services of this non-profit are invaluable to all those who utilize them but working for an organization like this teaches things that, once you experience them, make it impossible to walk away the same as you began.



I discovered this year's internship program with the Cleveland Foundation through my university. I thought it would be a great way to learn about the innerworkings of a non-profit; I not-so-patiently waited to hear if I was granted the opportunity to work so closely with one. What initially drew me to the Cleveland Sight Center in the first place was the possibility of learning more about a community of people, that, frankly, I had never interacted with before.

On my first day at CSC, I was introduced to a small team of people who helped me acclimate to the new work environment. The first question they asked me was, "Hannah, have you ever met a person who is visually impaired or blind?" I sheepishly responded, "No, I'm sorry I haven't." Then, the woman who had been speaking with me replied, "Well, now you have! I am a person who is blind." The enthusiasm in her voice and the smile on her face conveyed that blindness was a part of her that she had embraced.

I knew then those differences were to be celebrated here; however, I also had this overwhelming sense of guilt come over me as she followed that statement with exactly what I had been thinking. "I know I'm not a person who 'looks blind,'" she said using air quotes around the phrase. It was in this moment that I realized that everything I thought I knew was going to be shattered – a common theme surrounding my summer experience. The most valuable part of this entire experience has been being retaught the definitions of "blindness" or "low-vision" in an environment that acknowledges and embraces people's needs in a healthy, positive way.

Throughout the summer, I was responsible for assisting the Leisure and Lifestyle services department. It is responsible for planning recreational and social activities to create a sense of community at CSC, and unite people who share common experiences. Along the way, I had a multitude of fun adventures! Every day at work seemed to bring something new. We went on an excursion to Progressive Field to watch an Indians game, took a ride on the Good Time III sightseeing cruise, visited the Cleveland Botanical Gardens, and spent a few days at CSC's Highbrook Lodge camp in Chardon. Every day seemed to be a new adventure, and I was able to experience many of my favorite summer activities right at work. In my daily responsibilities, I helped with virtual or in-person recreational activities, writing client notes, and researching retention and recruitment for hiring counselors. As fun as the weekdays were, on the weekends, when I wasn't at work, I was able to take visiting friends to walk around Playhouse Square and go kayaking by the Flats—two things I would recommend to any first-time Cleveland visitor. It was certainly a summer to remember.

Now that summer is at its end, I will be marching toward my junior year of college, a feat that is as terrifying as it is exciting. I am, however, far more confident in my professional journey than I would be had I not had the opportunity to participate in this internship program. While I am still undecided as to where I want to end up long term, I feel confident in acknowledging that I want to work at a job that gives back to the community.



My specific career goals for after college waiver, but through this internship experience I learned one thing is for sure: I want to help other people. If I can do that, then I know that I will feel fulfilled in my future career.

For anyone reading this who is considering applying to the internship program, I would say, "Just go for it!" It is a risk worth taking, and an experience that is invaluable. In addition to the personal growth I was able to achieve through the Cleveland Sight Center, I was also able to grow professionally through the workshops held by the Cleveland Foundation. I learned about networking and resume building, skills that are helpful to have before officially entering the workforce.

Thank you so much to the Cleveland Foundation and Cleveland Sight Center for giving me a summer in which I've learned so much. It's a summer I will never forget.

-Hannah Taylor