This past summer, I was an intern with a non-profit organization called Tennessee Disability Pathfinders, which is located in Nashville, Tennessee. Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a joint project with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. Their mission is to provide a free, statewide clearinghouse of disability-related resources and services for individuals with disabilities, and their family members. As an intern this summer, I worked with many different aspects of the organization. I helped out our information and referral coordinator by serving as a backup on the phone helpline and completing intake forms from callers as well as assisted with updating the 2,100+ agencies on the Pathfinder's database. Along with updating Pathfinders database, I also helped with making follow up phone calls and filling out surveys on the client’s satisfaction with the help and resources they had received from a Pathfinder staff member. While making phone calls, I also helped disseminate Pathfinder materials to individuals and agencies serving individuals with disabilities as well as event planners identified through Pathfinder's calendar; maintain record of dissemination audiences and numbers.

I help I also helped assist our social media coordinator by promoting Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and other disability information on Facebook. I created a Pinterest account for the organization, which I regularly updated with information on different types of disabilities, education, self-help and mental health. While interning for TDP, I was not always doing my work in the office. I spent a portion of my time going into the community and working with
some of Tennessee Disability Pathfinders partners. One of the groups I worked more closely with was the Down-Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee. I worked at a two DSAMT camps this summer, a creative arts camp for young adults and a kid’s camp for children ages 2 to 7. I also attended two of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center workshops on Autism. Each workshop focused on different aspects of Autism such as preparing and taking children to the doctors or how IEPs work for children on the Spectrum.

While interning for Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, I was able to update over 400+ agencies in their database. By updating the agencies, I was able to provide current resources for the organization and was able to discard the agencies that were no longer available. I enjoyed making phone calls to different agencies because it allowed me to gain experience with making professional phone calls, and I learned how to navigate the Tennessee Disability Service system. I was able to gained experience when I also made follow-up phone calls to clients of Tennessee Disability Pathfinder. I made phone calls to consumers, parents of an individual with a disability, and to agencies and asked them questions pertaining to their overall experience with TDP. By making a wide variety of phone calls, I was able to learn how to interact with individuals over the phone and work the system. I was able to comfort individuals when they needed support and was also able to assist in finding them immediate resources when needed.

My time out of the office was just as rewarding as my experience within the office. However, working the camps was one of the highlights of my summer. It was incredibly having the chance to interact with all different ages of individuals with Down syndrome. I helped them with their sensory motor skills and their verbal skills, as well as helped them with physical exercise and health. While at camp, we spent time our time participating in multiple different
activities such as painting with shaving cream, making pizza, doing yoga, running around the track, or playing board games, dancing to music, and other sensory activities that they would not be able to do at home.

Overall, working with Tennessee Disability Pathfinders has been one of the most rewarding and amazing experiences. By getting the opportunity to work with individuals of Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, I have realized that I have made some amazing life long connections. This summer, after participating in the work I did for Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, I realized that I do want to pursue a field where I am helping individuals with disabilities. I would love to attend the Peabody School for Education within the next few years and continue with the work I did this summer.