MY TIME AT VDH

Polly Wu, Intern with Office of Governmental and Regulatory Affairs, May - July 2023

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
INTERNSHIP ACADEMY

ANALYZE

DATA LEARNING COLLECTIVE

Share Data Resource with other Data Analysts: Keaton, another academy intern, and I worked together to deliver a presentation to the data learning collective group on Queer Data Equity during the PRIDE month. We shared the history of health research on sexual and gender minorities, currently available datasets that include sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) information, and best practices for collecting SOGI data.

Queer Data Equity: A Look at the Numbers Through a Lavender Lens.
By Polly Wu and Keaton Thorum

Hey, Polly! ›
— Profile 30% complete
Daily XP 0/250   Total XP 14136
Current streak
0 days   M T W T F S S
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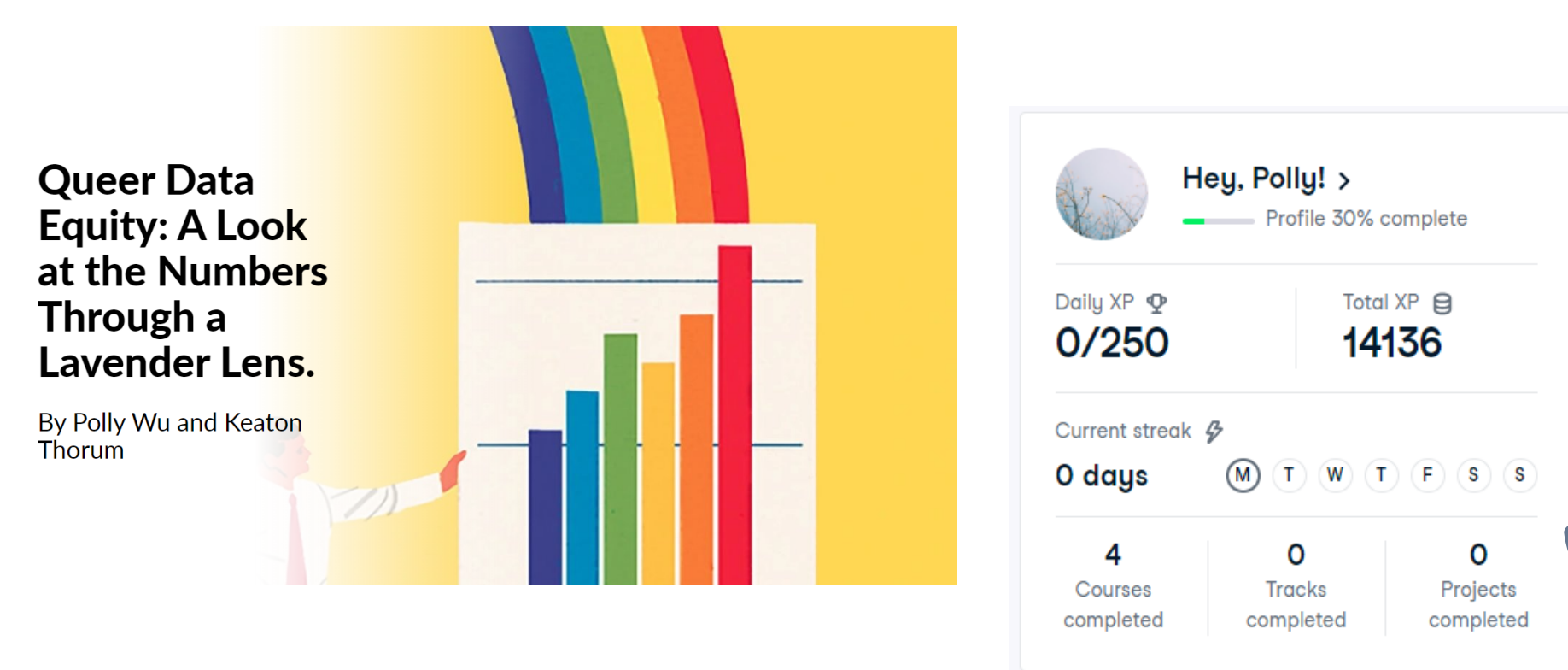
Learning new coding language: I participated in the SQL Bootcamp and completed several self-paced courses on Datacamp to practice my data analysis skill.

DATA ANALYSIS & VISUALIZATION FOR POLICY

To my surprise, there are a lot of data analysis involved in my policy research. I became familiar with several Federal databases, for instance, Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System, Census data, and the American Community Survey. I practiced using pivot tables and power queries to join different datasets together within excel to facilitate my analysis.
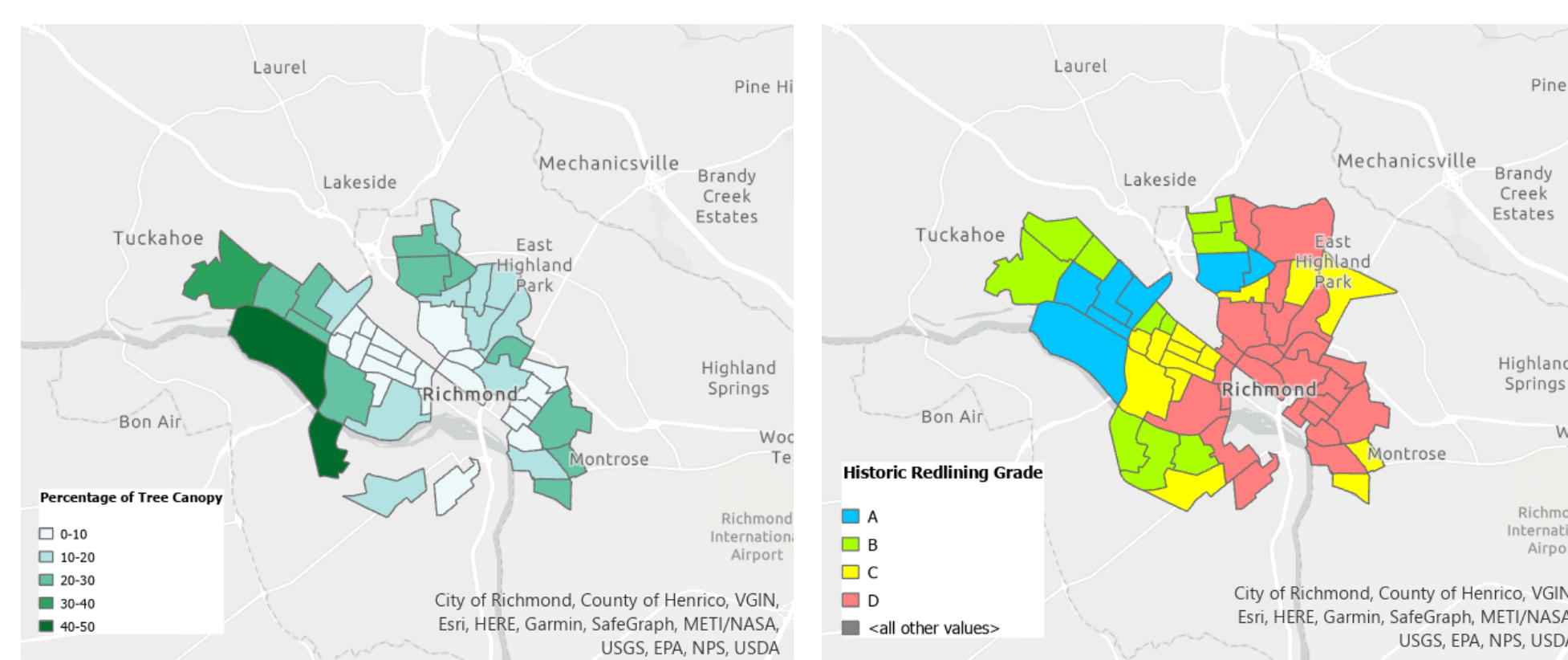
I learned and utilized ArcGIS to create visualizations that help explain the association between tree canopy and redlining policy in Richmond City.

RESEARCH

PROBLEM STATEMENT DEVELOPMENT

I generated three problem statements for the Virginia Public Health Policy Agenda, which is an initiative that help the agency to identify potential health policy issues to address. I focused on three topics:

Obesity & Food Insecurity

Food insecurity and food deserts have an association with obesity in Virginia. The African American population had higher prevalence of obesity, at the same time being underrepresented in federal supplemental nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC.
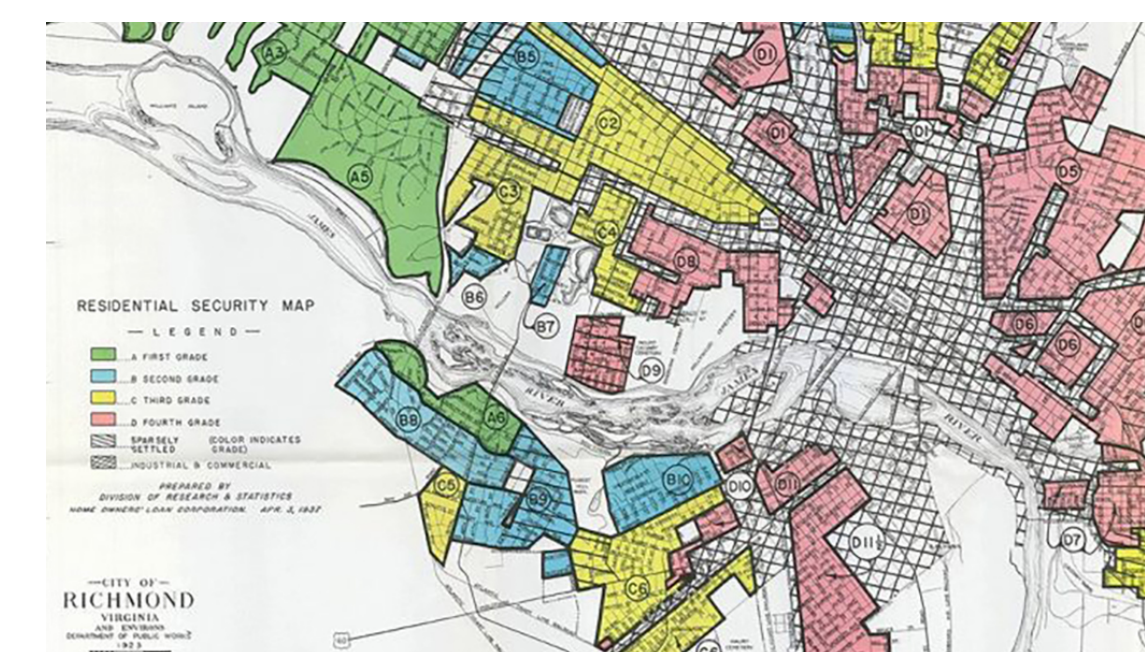
Redlining Housing and Environmental health

In 5 urban cities in Virginia, the policy of redlining lead to disparities in investment for social infrastructure and green spaces within the neighborhoods. The legacy is affecting people's health relevant to more extreme temperature and higher level of air pollution.
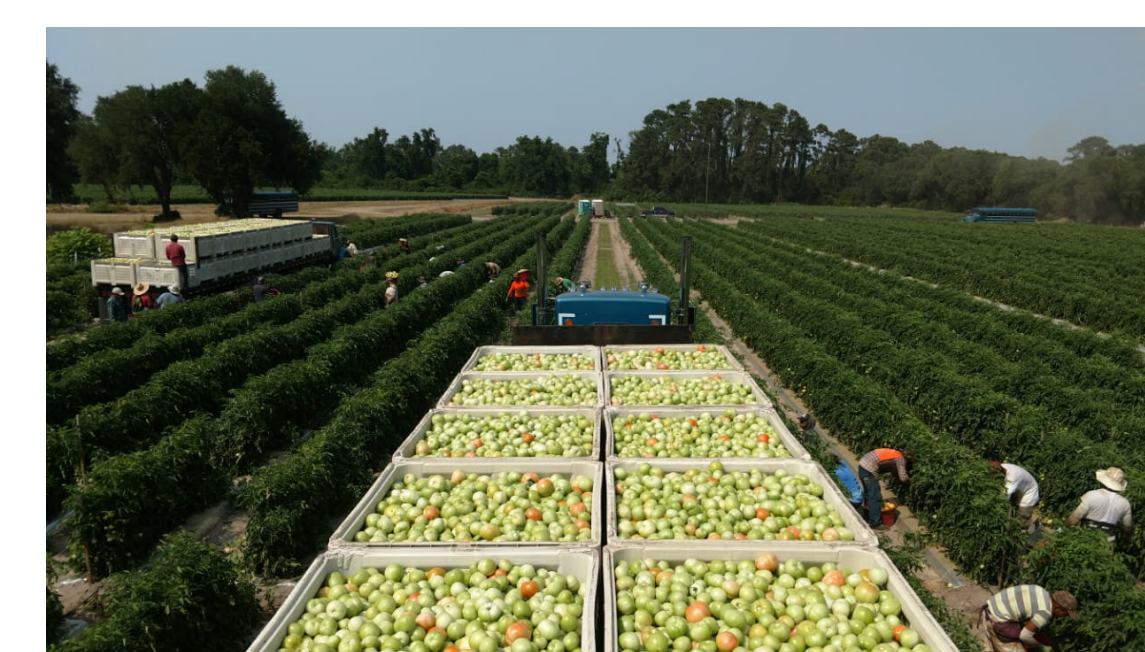
Migrant Labor Camp and Health Risks

Current regulations are unable to ensure migrant and seasonal farmer workers to live in healthy and safe houses. Substandard housing of migrant labor camps impose a variety of risk factors for migrant farmers.

WHAT I LEARNED?

- **What are some 'hidden' health problems in Virginia?**
- **How to identify vulnerable population and health disparities?**
- **Describe and understand the interdependencies behind health problems**
  - For every health issue, there are always different state agencies involved
  - A potential solution to a health policy issue may come from stakeholders outside of public health
  - Understand the different federal and state level programs that help address health relevant issues (e.g. WIC, SNAP, Medicaid & Medicare)
- **Research and storytelling for health policies**
  - How to use data and research evidence to describe the scope of the problem?
  - How to describe a complicated issue using concise language?

Special thanks to my mentor Alex Jansson, Michael Capps, Joe Hilbert, Jeff Stover, Sam Walmsley, the GRA team, OCOM for supporting me during my internship.

POLICY MEETINGS

In addition to my personal project, I developed further understandings of the frontline of health policy work by attending several public meetings and policy group sessions to see how health policymakers and other stakeholders work together to develop new ideas for health policies.

Health Policy Relevant Meetings & Training:
- Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity
- Maternal Health Data and Quality Measures Meeting
- Virginia Board of Health Meeting
- Public Health Academic Advisory Council Meeting
- Regulatory Periodic Review for 2024 Legislation
- Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Webinar on Opioids & Synthetic Drugs
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) meeting

COFFEE CHATS

I connected with different offices at the central office to learn about their programs, including:
- Emergency preparedness and COVID response
- Maternal and Child Health Data and Surveillance
- Refugee Health Program and TB for newcomers
- Data Modeling and Forecasting for Infectious Diseases
- Migrant Labor Camps and Environmental Health
- Program Evaluation and Design
- Population Health at Central Shenandoah Health District

CONNECT

ABOUT ME

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