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Dr. Milne

Internship Experience

This summer, I completed a 120-hour internship at the local women's domestic violence shelter. The shelter is located in Charlottesville, VA, and is called the SHE Shelter. The SHE Shelter is very well known in Charlottesville and is a nonprofit organization that provides trauma-informed services to victims of domestic violence. As a sociology major with a concentration in family science, and a minor in women's gender and sexuality, I have always wanted to be in a work environment and field where I am helping others. Sociology at Longwood University offers a wide range of classes and offers a concentration in Family Studies which is what I am. In my spring semester of junior year, I took a course called Sociology of Family Violence. This course opened my eyes to how much violence and domestic violence there is in our world within families. In that course, we had many different professionals come in to tell us about their jobs. We had a case manager, police officer, and CPS worker come in and tell us about their experience and what their job consists of. I was able to learn from the police officer how they handle domestic violence situations and used that information in my internship at the shelter. I love that the major of sociology offers a wide range of job options, and I am glad that my major and minor helped me in getting this internship.

After completing my training hours for SHE, I was transferred from the outreach office to the shelter. The shelter is at a secret location that only staff and clients know and is on lockdown meaning that you have to call in at all entrances of the building. The shelter includes 10 bedrooms with each room having a full size bed and a set of bunk beds for children. I was

very surprised when I received my tour of how big the shelter was and how many people were there. My schedule for the majority of my internship was Monday through Friday from 8 am-3 pm. When I arrived, I would scan in and meet with the case managers in their offices to see if there were any updates from the day before. I had an office at the front of the shelter that I sat at daily. My role was mainly to answer the hotline calls and help the case managers with anything they may need throughout the day. I learned how important it is to communicate with the staff in an office and how important it is to stay organized. There were several binders that contained information that staff needed to update daily. For example, all of the hotline forms completed went into a binder, if a client needed medication it needed to be marked in the medical binder, and if a client came or left from the building they would need to sign in and out so that staff is aware. I was also able to work with the Child Life Advocate and made posters of free child and family activities in the area which I really enjoyed. My favorite role was answering hotline calls. Though it is very stressful, I really enjoyed it. When a client calls the hotline, I would fill out the hotline form to see if they qualified for shelter and ask them many questions about themselves and their abuser. If a client does qualify for shelter, I would contact a hotel to book them a room for a night before they are able to come over to the shelter. I was in charge of making rooms prepared when we had a client coming over. This included making the bed, setting the room up for children, and making sure they had all toiletries and towels. The next day when they arrive at the shelter, I would help them unpack their things into a sanitizing machine before they met with their case manager. The client would then receive a welcome packet, any items they may need, and a tour of the shelter. Every client had their own bedroom, as well as their own fridge and pantry which was labeled.

During my time at the shelter, I became close with several clients. There was one client that I helped daily with several different things. When this client arrived at the shelter she had

absolutely nothing with her. I spent many days sitting at the computer with her. This included applying for a new Medicaid card, driver's license, birth certificate, food stamps, and contacting her bank. These are all things that I have never had to do before and was happy to help her while we learned together. I learned many skills while completing my internship at the SHE shelter. I have always considered myself to be a very organized, caring, and patient person, and this internship definitely helped me improve those skills even more. I needed patience while answering the hotline, talking to clients about their past, and asking very hard, emotional questions. My skill of organization definitely was helpful since all paperwork has a place. I definitely think that my skills of having a caring and loving personality came into play well. In this field, you have to want to help others and be patient and very understanding which I was able to do. I helped many women apply for jobs, and housing in Virginia, and apply for benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid. Helping women do these things made me feel like I was doing something that will benefit their future.

There is a lot of knowledge I take away since now completing this internship. I am so glad that I chose this as my internship and wouldn't change it for anything. I was always in a self-debate if I wanted to work with adults or children in the future, and I can now take away that I want to work with children. I loved helping adult women, but my passion is for helping children. I was very surprised to see how many children were at the shelter with their mom and it made me so sad. Prior to this internship, I did not know exactly what a Child Life Advocate did, and now I do and am very interested in that role. I have also learned what it is like working in an office space with other employees and how to communicate with them which was a great experience. I have also taken away that not everyone that you try to help wants help, which is a hard pill to swallow. It can be frustrating wanting to help someone or getting them help and them not wanting it. I have learned that being patient and understanding is very important.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed my time at the SHE Shelter and wouldn't have wanted to complete my internship anywhere else. I really enjoyed working with all the women in the office in such an uplifting, women-empowering office. I loved all the staff and the staff made me feel very comfortable and appreciated for being there to help. I have taken many things away from this internship experience. My biggest takeaway is now knowing that I do in fact want to work with children over adults. I plan on going to graduate school and receiving a master's degree in Mental Health counseling so that I can help children and make a difference in their lives. I really enjoyed working in a smaller office setting and being able to become close with fellow employees. My supervisor and I became very close and had lots in common! I hope that my time at the shelter made an impact on another woman as it did on me.