



Mercy House

Placement Description

Services to homeless families

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Assisting caseworkers in regular contact with families
- Help determine barriers that have led to current homeless situation
- Attend counseling in-takes with Adult Service Coordinator and family
- Assist clients with job searches and resume development
- Attend Resident Community Dinner
- Assist with developing After-Dinner Activities and Programs for clients
- Assist families in setting goals
- Observe intakes and learning to do an initial screening
- Tutoring children
- Structuring group activities for children
- Assist with research and evaluation

Other Notes

Must be willing to commit time and effort; assist with clerical administration while training.
Must be flexible (willing to do various jobs). Must be able to work independently after training.

Contact Information

- Contact Person: Shannon Porter, Executive Director
- Address: P.O. Box 1478 Harrisonburg, VA 22803
- Telephone: 540/432-1812
- Fax: 540/564-0325
- E-Mail: sporter@themercuryhouse.org
- Website: www.themercuryhouse.org

Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Fall 2015 - Rebecca McCallister

I started the semester interning at Mercy House which is a homeless shelter in downtown Harrisonburg. The organization services families who have at least one child under the age of 18. The mission of Mercy House is “to provide clothes, food and shelter to homeless families with dependent children in the Harrisonburg, Virginia area in a safe community while providing services to help overcome the barriers leading to homelessness.” There are 11 efficiency apartments on site that the families stay in while working towards finding employment and future housing. Along with the shelter, there is also the main office, food pantry for the residents, and office building with the after-school tutoring room and day care located in it. Mercy House also has 3 different stores around the area that bring in a large amount of funding for the site and also provide an employment source for the residents to help them get back on their feet.

There are many different services offered at Mercy House that aim to assist the residents with returning to a stable life and moving out of the emergency shelter. The process begins with the central intake coordinator who keeps track of the numerous cases open that need assistance and directs the clients towards the services that might best help their current needs. This can involve prevention, rehousing or shelter services, all of which are offered at Mercy House. Prevention includes paying the back rent or current rent to avoid eviction by the landlord. Rehousing is a process where staff members work with clients to find them a new place to live and sort out any issues with past or current leases. The last service offered is the shelter at Mercy House where residents are required to abide by certain rules and take on specific responsibilities if they choose to live on site.

My supervisor, Jacob Russell, is the shelter manager at Mercy House. This has allowed me to have a lot of interaction with the residents and learn the cycle of homelessness. My favorite experience while interning has been sitting in on the weekly meetings the residents have with Jacob to discuss goal setting, finances and employment opportunities. It is so eye-opening to hear about the struggles some of the residents have faced that have led them to be in this dire situation. These meetings allow for me to hear the negative effects of homelessness and also to see the resilience and drive many families have to turn their situations around and learn from their past mistakes. Along with the meetings with residents, I sit in on weekly staff meetings Jacob has with the executive director, Shannon Porter. I have also performed inspections of the residents’ rooms with Jacob to be sure the families are following the rules of the shelter. Other responsibilities and experiences I have done at my site have been going on home visits, organizing a donation drive, filing paperwork, coordinating volunteers, overseeing the after-school tutoring program, helping out in the day care, cleaning apartments and tutoring children. My largest project has been coordinating between 2-3 volunteers a day to work in the tutoring room with the children of Mercy House and coming up with activities to be done each day with the kids. I created an activity book of over 144 unique crafts and games for each day of the week for the entirety of the after-school program.

Due to a change in staff and last minute role changes, my position at Mercy House first started off with some difficulties finding my place and taking on tasks. It was an adjustment, but Jacob and Shannon worked very closely with me to make it as smooth as possible. I quickly



discovered what my position would be in the organization as the volunteer coordinator. I loved the relaxed atmosphere at Mercy House that allowed for lots of lighthearted conversation. This really helped to bring up the mood and provide some breaks with some of the more serious cases that were discussed throughout the day.

I was very hesitant to work with the homeless population at first because I had no previous experience, and I assumed all of the residents would be bitter and have a chip on their shoulder because of their hardships throughout life. I could not have been more wrong. This internship has taught me so much more about life than any class ever would be able to. I made so many connections with residents who were just looking for support from anyone they could find and just needed someone to listen to them. The homeless population is not any different than any other type of population. The residents have just made mistakes that have led them down a wrong path and they were unable to pull themselves out of the rut without extra assistance. The passion for life and the dedication towards working hard and improving their situation has greatly impressed me. Often times, I have taken the simplest things for granted and not realized how appreciative I should be for the many blessings surrounding me. Mercy House has given me a new appreciation for my life, and I am leaving this site feeling incredibly grateful to have worked with such a motivated and driven population.

Mercy House is considered to be a site for social workers which is the main reason I chose to intern here. Previously, I was considering if I wanted to go after a Master's degree in social work or psychology. Although this site has been incredible and I have learned immense amounts of life skills and had lots of hands on experience, I have realized that I would like to work in the psychology field, so the relationships can continue for longer than they do at a site like Mercy House where services are terminated shortly after the move out date. I will be continuing to volunteer at Mercy House next semester with the after-school tutoring program and plan to stay connected to the staff as long as I am in the Harrisonburg area because I have now developed such a passion for helping those who have faced unimaginable barriers and are underprivileged.