



Batterers Intervention Program (BIP)

Placement Description

Psycho-education group program for men who batter their partners as well as groups for females

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Help facilitate or observe BIP (Batterers Intervention Program)
- Do court observation
- Do initial victim-contact calls as well as follow-up "safety checks"
- Complete research protocols, assist with data collection and ongoing research projects
- Conduct or observe BIP intake assessments
- May participate in other groups if available
- May attend local Domestic Violence Task Force, as well as other professional meetings
- May work with the Council on Domestic Violence/Choices Women's Shelter

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Fall 2016 – Casey Donnelly

The mission statement of the Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) is “to aid in the elimination of domestic violence by providing services to batterers, promote safety and justice for victims of domestic violence, and affect social change leading to cultural values that prohibit rather than support abuse within intimate relationships”. The site provides group therapy rehabilitation services for individuals convicted of or suspected of domestic violence. Therapy has an emphasis on psychoeducation that seeks to help individuals recognize abusive behaviors, eliminate partner blaming, increase personal responsibility, explore victimization, learn stress and anger reduction techniques, as well as ultimately end and prevent all forms of abusive behaviors.

This site offers many unique opportunities to individuals who are interested in group therapy, counseling, research, law, and social work. During my time with the Batterers Intervention Program, I was able to utilize my psychology education to observe the behaviors and verbal expressions of a unique subset of the population: domestic violence offenders. Given the increasing rates of domestic violence worldwide (with both male and female perpetrators), this is a critical population to study. Through observation of group therapy and interpersonal communication, I was able to learn about the perspectives of offenders as they navigate their charges and the impact it has on their lives.

Observation of group therapy was one of the main components of my time with BIP. Group therapy was composed of two parts: an assessment of each participant’s week and psychoeducation. The assessment of each participant’s week was meant to encourage participation from each group members and allowed the facilitator to address serious emotional or physical concerns that participants may be facing. I was able to provide my own feedback and support when participants disclosed events they had recently faced. Psychoeducation, the second component of the session, is critical to the success of BIP because it allows participants to restructure existing cognitive structures that facilitate the perpetration of abusive behaviors, as well as provides alternative behaviors to reduce emotional distress and eliminate the need for violence within a relationship. The lessons typically focus on topics such as: the impact of abusive behaviors, stress and anger reduction techniques, the impact of different male/female socialization, the various types of domestic violence (emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, financial), different communication styles, denial and defense mechanisms, and the domestic violence cycle. Within psychoeducation, I assisted the facilitators in adapting the lesson for each group, as well as keeping everyone on task.

As I will discuss further below, I independently facilitated several group therapy sessions with 4-6 female participants. This experience improved my counseling skills, as well as provided



me the opportunity to practice the teaching techniques taught to me by the facilitator I initially shadowed. I was given the authority to determine the appropriate lessons for the day, and address the emotional concerns brought to my attention during the session.

Another component of my placement site was observation and participation in court proceedings. Primarily, I observed the Luray Juvenile and Domestic Relations court. Given that JDR court is limited to outside observers, this is a unique experience offered by placement at BIP. In court, my responsibility was to record court proceedings at which the individual was referred to BIP as part of their sentence. The case information I recorded, as well as the court order and criminal complaints I gathered, were given to the director of the program to compile information on the offender before they attended their initial intake. I was also given the opportunity to speak and serve as an advocate for an individual who completed BIP.

Given that information on domestic violence offenders is relatively limited, the importance of compiling data on the offenders referred to BIP is one of the primary reasons the director of BIP has an interest in taking on interns. While I did not have the opportunity to do so, interns have the ability to perform the initial intake at which the collection of participant demographics, criminal history, mental health history, substance abuse, as well as exposure to violence during childhood is gathered. Using the information gathered by previous interns and BIP facilitators, I transcribed the information into an Excel worksheet where I standardized all the answers to ensure analysis could be performed. At the end of the semester, I utilized PivotTables to compare the male and female frequencies on the topics above. I also compiled information on the participant's final evaluations of the program, and the impact of the program as reported to us in partner evaluations.

The diversity of the experiences offered is a huge asset to this program. If you have any doubts about what fields of psychology interest you, this site gives you multiple opportunities to determine which fields of psychology (or additional fields) may be of interest. As demonstrated above, the experience allows you to participate and facilitate group therapy, improve and practice counseling skills, engage in research, observe and participate in courtroom proceedings, and examine the impacts of probation, the Department of Social Services, and fostering agencies from the participants as they share their experiences.

This site offers a lot of opportunity to take on additional responsibilities. I was given the opportunity to independently facilitate group therapy, and as such, was able to gain experience in counseling and leading psychoeducational discussions. I was also tasked with the responsibility to address the emotional disclosures of my participants and ensure the participant was in a safe mindset upon completion of the session. As a result of independent facilitation, I also learned how to perform the administrative tasks (billing/payment, recording attendance and participation,



submitting completion documentation to the appropriate court, paying rent for the location of therapy, and informing the director of the session) associated with operating a court-approved group therapy session. I was also encouraged to interact with additional courtrooms to assist the director with the referral process in both Harrisonburg Juvenile Domestic Relations court and the Luray Juvenile and Domestic Relations court.

The primary concern I encountered was the amount of driving and personal travel expenses this site requires. Since this BIP site spans 5 counties (Winchester/Frederick, Harrisonburg, Page, Warren, and Luray), there is significant driving time associated with attending group therapy and court. While there are two sessions located in downtown Harrisonburg, expect to drive 45 minutes (each way) to obtain the rest of your hours.

At the start of this site, I was intimidated by the knowledge that my participants had a history of violent behavior. As I increasingly interacted with my participants, I learned to regard them as individuals in their own right. Overwhelmingly, the individuals in the program were from underprivileged backgrounds so I learned firsthand about the social, physical, emotional, and economic struggles these individuals are attempting to overcome. My placement at BIP has encouraged me to pursue a career within the field of social work, so I can be an asset to my community and individuals who are struggling to overcome the enormous odds stacked against them.

Spring 2016 - Meg Mischinski

The Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) works to prevent and essentially end all forms of domestic abuse by providing services to the perpetrators. The services teach that violence is a choice in which the batterer must take full responsibility and ideally learn new skills to handle conflict within their intimate relationships. The program consists of 25 weekly sessions that cover topics including: identifying and managing anger; developing empathy and active listening skills; and the ways in which substance abuse, mental illness, cultural values, and gender socialization all play a role in domestic violence. BIP serves both men's and women's groups in the Clarke, Frederick, Warren, Shenandoah, Page, and Rockingham counties of Virginia. The majority of participants are court-ordered to attend the program as the consequence of an assault and battery charge. However, we do have some voluntary participants as well as those sent by the Department of Social Services. The span of the program for each individual involves an initial intake session, a victim/partner contact, progress updates sent to court (for those who are court-ordered to participate), and the weekly group counseling sessions.

During my experience at BIP, I had a number of great learning opportunities. I was able to observe Juvenile & Domestic Relations court, which gave me a glimpse of the judicial aspect of the process. I spent most of my hours sitting in on group counseling sessions. During group, I



would observe and decide to contribute when I found it appropriate and beneficial to the discussion. There were instances around mid-semester where I would substitute and/or facilitate groups with the supervisor present. Also, after observing the intake process, I had the chance to conduct intake sessions on my own. An intake is a thorough questionnaire regarding the new participant and his or her history with violence, substance abuse, mental health treatment, and their perspective of the abusive incident that brought them to group. I found this to be a very worthwhile experience because I had the chance to learn a significant amount about the person's background while also practicing one-on-one interaction in a relatively therapeutic setting. Considering that one of BIP's top priorities is to ensure the safety of the victim, we conduct partner contacts (or whoever the victim is in relation to the participant, as long as there is not a protective order issued) to hear their perspective of the incident, provide them with contact information for victim resources, and make sure that they feel safe. Similar to the intakes, after observing I had the opportunity to conduct partner contacts myself. Finally, I got a thorough look at the paperwork, such as the intakes and final evaluations, by recording certain demographic information for the program's annual data summary.

One aspect that I really valued from the BIP placement is that I was primarily with the same group participants each week, which gave me the opportunity to develop a rapport with each of the participants. This is also a population I have never worked with before and probably would have never encountered if it weren't for this placement, which adds valuable perspective to my experience. Looking back at group discussions, I can appreciate the complexity of family dynamics and how many different factors have the potential to contribute to domestic abuse. Both Judith the program director and Felicia the group facilitator I worked closely with were great supervisors throughout this experience. They both challenged and supported me in their own ways and truly wanted me to get what I wanted out of the experience. For example, I originally planned to alternate every other week between going to court and going to group in Woodstock. As time passed, I realized I personally valued my experience at group more than I did at court, so I was then able to go to group every week after communicating with them. I would say that the only disadvantage of this placement is the distance (both Luray and Woodstock are around a 45 minute drive), which does lead to paying more for gas. However, when I conducted intakes on my own I got to keep the money for that session (\$25), so that helped to balance costs out. Also, I appreciate seeing and becoming more familiar with more of the region outside of the "JMU bubble." Overall, the BIP placement provides unique and worthwhile experiences that allow you to gain valuable insight and perspective.

During my time with BIP this past semester, I have been able to strengthen my work ethic as well as my leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills. My experience at BIP has reinforced my pursuance of working in a counseling setting. I was particularly fond of the group setting that teaches such vital interpersonal skills such as effective communication and practical utility of empathy. These are elements that I initially thought were generally well-known, but to see that teaching such skills are essential to constructively improve lifestyles and potentially end violence was really rewarding. I would be more than content to teach groups of a similar setting in my future. I still hope to get into trauma counseling, so my experience with a population that has experienced domestic violence has been beneficial, as there tends to be



elements of trauma in family history and abusive experiences. I am truly grateful for my time and experience with BIP and I plan to carry all that I've learned with me in my future endeavors!

Fall 2015 – Rachel Willard

The Batterers Intervention Program seeks to end all forms of abuse between intimate partners by providing services to batterers. It is a 25 week course where participants discuss topics such as the cycle of domestic violence, anger management skills, ways to promote healthy relationships such as developing empathy and communication skills, and the importance of accepting accountability for the actions that brought them to group. The BIP holds groups for men and women in Harrisonburg, Luray, Woodstock, Front Royal and Winchester, VA. While we primarily deal with individuals who have been mandated by the courts to attend the program, it is not uncommon to have volunteers or members who have been referred through other means, such as their probation officer or the Department of Social Services. In keeping with our mission, when possible we also conduct partner contacts and safety checks to hear from the victim's perspective, and make sure they are aware of the resources available for survivors of abuse.

As an intern at the BIP, I was provided with numerous opportunities. I observed the Juvenile and Domestic Relations court proceedings where cases regarding assault and battery of a family member are heard. This allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of our judicial system, a greater ability to empathize with those who must endure seemingly endless court dates, and the added stress they can incur. I observed and completed the intakes of new group members, where we ask about their personal history with violence, substance abuse, and other information that we believe might allow us to better understand their situation and provide them with the best support we can. I had the opportunity to observe and complete partner contacts. I attended and participated in the weekly BIP meetings, and eventually even led the group myself. This was probably my favorite aspect of the internship, as it allowed me to develop my communication and counseling skills by listening to the clients' stories, facilitating discussion, and learning how to appropriately respond to when a group member expresses harmful beliefs. Interns are also expected to compile data regarding BIP participants, such as certain demographic information. While this task can be a bit tedious, it is one of the only jobs at the site that I found to be so and makes up relatively few of the hours. And even while it is not always the most interesting job, it does help you develop attention to detail! By far, the opportunities available to interns at the BIP are much more experiential than they are administrative.

In fact, the only true disadvantage of an internship with the BIP is distance it takes to get to some of the groups. This semester, I traveled to both Luray and Woodstock once a week, which are both around a forty-five minute drive away. Unfortunately, this time does not count toward your 150 hours. While this extra driving time has allowed me to make my way through almost of all of the seven Harry Potter audiobooks, my gas expenses have been *significantly* higher this semester. Thankfully, Judith, the director of the BIP, is very aware of the inconvenience driving to these cities from Harrisonburg can be, and tries to make sure that if an intern is making the trip out there, they will at least be able to get several hours in a row. For



example, my trip to Luray each week was always well worth it, as I was usually able to get around 6 hours every Monday.

In my opinion, the Batterers Intervention Program is an excellent field placement opportunity for any individual who hopes to someday work with victims or perpetrators of intimate partner violence, or is simply interested in the field of counseling or social work. You are able to learn from experiences of people who have lived in an abusive relationship, and see first-hand the effects these unhealthy relationships have on both the perpetrator and the victim. You are able to not only observe, but gain hands-on experiences facilitating groups and interacting with clients. Most of all you have the opportunity to work with and learn from Judith, and Felicia, one of the BIP's extremely capable facilitators. They both acted as my supervisors over the course of my internship, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to work with them. Judith has been working as a LPC since 1990 and runs a private practice in conjunction with the BIP. I have benefitted many times from her extensive knowledge and the example she sets in groups. I also appreciated how committed she was to interns having a positive educational experience with the program and especially saw the importance she placed on those experiences being practical and engaging rather than secretarial. She was also very flexible in allowing me to choose which groups I would attend, and when I would attend court. Felicia has been trained by Judith as a facilitator, but her expertise also comes from her own experiences, as a survivor of domestic violence. I have learned so much from the compassion and respect she shows each member of her groups. She consistently went out of her way to help the men and women in her groups whenever and however she was able, and extended the same kindness to me as an intern.

My ultimate goal is to become a counselor for survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. I purposefully chose this site hoping it would challenge my beliefs regarding the perpetrators of abuse, and allow me to empathize with individuals who are usually thought of in incredibly one-dimensional ways – and I absolutely believe that my time with the BIP has done this. Just as many of the BIP's clients have shown they are capable of choosing violence, they have also shown me that they are capable of choosing kindness and compassion. In truth, I now believe that whichever *any* of us chooses relies in what we have been taught. In the future, I believe I will also be better equipped to empathize with survivors of intimate partner violence. Victim-blaming is prevalent in abusive relationships as people ask why the victim stayed or even entered in the relationship in the first place. By being able to recognize the humanity in someone's abuser, I hope I will be able to act with less judgment and more compassion for a survivor's choices. Overall, I know I will someday be a better mental health professional because of my experiences with the BIP, and am so grateful to have had my field placement with them.



Spring 2015 – Lauren Horton

The purpose of the Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) is to stop domestic violence by providing services to batterers, advocating and providing safety for domestic violence victims, and encouraging a different cultural and societal mindset about domestic violence. Those who work for the BIP believe that violence is a learned behavior, a choice, and it's never acceptable. The BIP seeks to teach the batterers their philosophy and have the batterer take full responsibility for his or her behavior. The BIP is a 25-week long program. The participants must attend one, hour-long, class once a week. Each class costs 25 dollars, and the participant should bring payment each week. In the class the participants discuss various topics like: the domestic violence cycle, improving communication skills, fair fighting, beliefs that legitimize and sustain violence and oppression. The BIP serves the counties of Harrisonburg/Rockingham, Winchester/Frederick, Clarke, Page, Warren, and Shenandoah.

The initial session of the BIP is an intake interview. During the interview the facilitator asks questions pertaining to the violent situation and the previous history of the batterer (i.e. education, race, mental health history, previous relationship dynamics etc.). This interview also evaluates the current abusive status of the participant's relationship. As an intern, I watched and interviewed some of the participants. During the beginning of the semester I just watched the facilitator conduct the intake interviews. After watching a couple of times, I facilitated the interview under the supervision of the group facilitator and gradually facilitated the interviews on my own. I enjoyed watching and conducting the intake interviews because I got to acquaint myself with the participant on an individual level. These interviews give the facilitator a pretty good view of the participant's current and previous lifestyle. This also helps the facilitator format the classes to best suit all of the participants and teach them valuable, applicable, lessons about their current situation.

The remaining 24 sessions are discussion-based classes. The facilitators educate the batterers on various topics and have a discussion about the topics. Most topics come with a class assignment, homework, or both. Each facilitator has her (all of the facilitators are females) own style of teaching and way of facilitating the class. I had the pleasure of working with the facilitator Felicia. She's worked for the BIP for six years. She facilitates male and female groups in Luray, Woodstock, and Harrisonburg. For the most part, I participated in the class; adding my two cents here and there. There were a couple of times where I was able to facilitate some of the group sessions on my own. Participating and facilitating the groups was my favorite part of working with the BIP. My facilitation of the groups gave me hands-on experience with group counseling. I learned how to teach the various topics of the BIP, how to keep the conversation going, how to ask though provoking questions, as well as, actively listen to what the participants had to say. By watching and talking to Felicia and Judith (the supervisor) I learned how to create



an inclusive, nonjudgmental community within the groups. Both Felicia and Judith create open communities where the participants feel comfortable sharing about their week and life experiences. Although I like to think of myself as a nonjudgmental person, I learned a lot from Judith and Felicia on how to be a good facilitator and make the participants feel comfortable during the class.

As stated earlier the facilitators each have their own facilitation style. Judith, the supervisor, also gives the facilitators the option to teach other topics within their groups. For example the facilitators can teach parenting skills, alternatives to physical discipline and violence towards their children. I had the pleasure of facilitating a group that focused on the strengths of the participants' and positive aspects in their lives. These extra topics, especially the parenting topics, really help the participants and add an extra service from the BIP. Judith is open to the facilitators or the interns teaching other topics that are helpful to the participants. I learned so much through outside research on batterer intervention programs. This research taught me what other programs are doing and what we can add/do with the BIP of Harrisonburg to help enhance the program.

Each week I attended court in Luray (morning and afternoon sessions), participated in Luray, Harrisonburg, and Woodstock groups, and did administrative work. I had the option of attending court in Harrisonburg, which I did a few times throughout the semester. I also attempted to make a partner contact—a phone call between facilitator and the victim about the history and status of the relationship—but no one ever answered when I did. As stated earlier, I watched and conducted the intake interviews and facilitated a couple of group sessions. The administrative work consisted of filing the participants' information and final evaluations, researching various methods of meditation, and taking papers to the clerk's office when Judith needed me to. Overall this was a wonderful experience. I've learned so much by working with these lovely ladies. I learned about BIP's and their services, how to facilitate a group, how to conduct and interview, court terms and conduct, and much more. It enhanced my organization, research, and professional skills. I strongly recommend this site for JMU students, especially those who are interested in domestic violence.

The one limitation is the driving. I had to drive a lot between Luray, Woodstock, and Harrisonburg. Although I only went to each place once a week, the mileage and gas added up. Although I don't think I want to work for a batterers' intervention program full time, I would love to work for one part time in the future. I'm going to graduate school in the fall and I'm hoping to find a batterers intervention program where I live where I can work part time. It was great meeting the participants and listening to their opinions each week. Through this experience I've become a more assertive, mindful, and grateful person. Listening to the participants' stories



and the BIP curriculum helped me better myself. I wish the next intern the best of luck and I hope they get as much out of this experience as I have.

Fall 2014 – Kelsey Barnes

In the fall semester of 2014, I worked as an intern with the Batterer Intervention Program (BIP). The BIP is a 25-week program for perpetrators of domestic violence; most often our clients are court-ordered to participate after receiving a charge of assault and battery, but we do receive some volunteer clients and clients with other charges. In essence, the mission and goals of BIP are to end all forms of abuse by teaching offenders essential skills, such as taking responsibility for their actions and establishing healthier relationships. There are separate groups for male and female offenders in Luray, Woodstock, Winchester, Harrisonburg, and Front Royal, VA. BIP's director, Judith Weaver, oversees all locations. Our services extend farther than violence between intimate partners; we have also had clients who have assaulted their children, parents, siblings, etc. A majority of our clients are first-time offenders and will have their charge(s) dropped after completing the BIP and two years of good behavior. While most of our work is involved with teaching and meeting the needs of offenders, we also conduct partner contacts (if the victim is/was their partner) to ensure the safety of the partner during the situation, as well. We recommend certain resources to the partners who may need to contact the department of social services, legal authorities, or domestic violence shelters. I have had the opportunity to complete these partner contacts, as well as conduct new client intakes, participate in groups, teach lessons in groups, and witness judiciary proceedings for our clients. Though sitting through the judiciary proceedings is not directly working with the clients, it taught me a lot about what a client must go through before they are adjudicated to the program.

The advantages to working with BIP are numerous. In the three months I have worked with BIP, I have spent the majority of my time with my two supervisors, Judith Weaver (director of BIP) and Felicia (facilitator), and over 30 different clients. By interacting with so many different people, I have received many different perspectives and a greater understanding of violence, gender roles, and humanity. Aside from being exposed to many different perspectives, I gained a variety of useful skills, too. I acquired a lot of experience in building rapport with clients, which I particularly enjoyed. Each of them has a story to share, if you show an interest. Furthermore, my communication, leadership, planning, and teaching skills have improved. By creating lesson plans, I had to anticipate the types of questions that could be asked and the discussions that could happen along the way. While this process is not always easy, it is incredibly rewarding when clients are engaged and offering their own opinions. Often it seems that our clients learn more by discussing the topics with each other than from a one-sided lecture. The hardest part about this placement was the travelling distance to each site: I worked with the BIP three days a week, and two of those days required a 45 minute drive to Luray or Woodstock. Though I do enjoy driving, the commitment could get quite expensive and time-consuming, as driving hours do not count toward the required minimum of 150 hours of experience.



Though I learned many practical skills that I expected to come from this internship, I also learned a great amount that I did not expect. For instance, many people may be apprehensive with working with people labeled as “batterers”; however, I have found that we often see people only as fragments. I expected to see my clients only as “batterers”, but the fact stands that my clients and I are human beings. We are so quick to reduce others and ourselves into the fragments of “batterer”, “student”, or “facilitator”, but we humans have many facets. Though some of our clients have made awful decisions, they are still capable of empathy, love, and selflessness just like anybody else. Much of the time, our clients are people who truly do not know how to resolve conflicts, deal with their anger, or communicate in healthy manners. I believe this internship has made me into a more well-rounded and understanding person. After working with the clients at the BIP and recognizing my ability to see them with a wholesome perspective, I am certain that obtaining my Masters in social work is the correct career pathway for me. I highly enjoy working with people pushed nearer to the edges of society, which I would consider many of our clients to be, as they lose many opportunities, resources, and relationships after being charged. Though my ultimate goal is to work with victims of abuse, I would definitely consider working with offenders after this experience.

Spring 2014 – Sean Newhart

The Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) was created in 1992 to help batterers examine their behavior and the belief system supporting it. The mission of BIP is to aid in the elimination of domestic violence by providing services to batterers, to promote safety and justice for victims of domestic violence, and to affect social change leading to cultural values that prohibit rather than support abuse within intimate relationships. In the program, participants complete 25 one hour classes that cover topics such as anger management skills, types of domestic abuse, the impact of abuse, communication, qualities of healthy relationships, and other concepts related to domestic violence. These classes are offered to both men and women in Winchester, Woodstock, Harrisonburg, Luray, and Front Royal. While some participants are voluntary, the majority are court-ordered to the program. There are a range of opportunities offered to individuals who intern at this site. The primary experiences involve the observation of Juvenile and Domestic Court around the Shenandoah Valley and the observation of multiple BIP groups. Interns are expected to attend weekly BIP meetings and observe or contribute in an appropriate manner. Interns also conduct the initial intakes of new participants in order to gain a better understanding of their background and conduct partner contacts with the victims of domestic assault. Another valuable experience offered by this site is the opportunity to facilitate or co-facilitate group sessions. This allows the intern to be immersed in one aspect of the supervisor’s job. Interns also compile annual data from participants who complete the program.

There are many advantages to being placed at BIP. Those who are interested in the counseling profession can experience a glimpse of group counseling and observe the specific risk factors associated with the population of batterers. Another advantage is being able to work with Judith Weaver, who both directs the BIP and serves the Shenandoah Valley as a licensed professional counselor. This gives interns an insight into many different aspects of the



counseling field. Throughout my experience, I specifically enjoyed working with my supervisors and the participants. Being able to hear about the diverse backgrounds of participants has encouraged me to be more open-minded and wary of my own biases. The only disadvantage of BIP is the travel it requires. Interns usually drive to Woodstock and Luray weekly, which may not be possible for some students. As previously mentioned, this site has given me invaluable insight and skills that apply to the counseling profession and has inspired me to work more closely with individuals involved in domestic violence.