



Healthy Families: Shenandoah/Page County

Placement Description:

Healthy Families is a national evidence-based program that assists parents of infants and young children by providing resources, education, and encouragement through ongoing home visits and group sessions. Services are provided using the Parents As Teachers evidenced- based curriculum. The rural setting of these counties provides unique insight and engagement opportunities. Healthy Families aims to optimize positive parenting and reduce child maltreatment as well to promote family health and well-being and school readiness. The program serves teen parents, single and married parents, and Spanish-speaking families, adding to the diversity of the placement. Some research and data collection opportunities are also available. Students generally drive to New Market, VA (20 minutes from JMU) to meet up with staff to go to the Woodstock or Stanley offices to reduce student travel expense/time.

Student Opportunities:

- Accompany staff on home visits; work with children/parents in their home environment
- Develop skills in documentation of home visits and parent/child observation
- Assist in planning and implementing activities with parents and children (prenatal to 5)
- Develop/lead support groups for parents
- Participate in health promotion and wellness education activities
- Work with a variety of families issues including substance use and mental health
- Observe and complete developmental and other health/mental health screenings
- Complete Parent Satisfaction Survey and Cultural Demographics/Sensitivity analyses
- Network with physicians and other community agencies
- Learn about the national standards for Healthy Families program

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Spring 2017 – Denise Bozek

For my psychology field placement, I chose to work at Healthy Families in Page County. The mission of Healthy Families is to provide consistent and ongoing support to families so that they can give their children a healthy and safe start to life. Many of the families that are served are new parents, but there are some that already have one or two children. We also mainly worked directly with the mothers in the families, but some fathers and grandparents were also involved. Healthy Families aims to achieve positive health outcomes for the families, decrease the potential of child maltreatment, help the children with their school readiness, promote healthy child development, and improve family functioning as a whole.

Throughout my time at this site I was able to try many different things that allowed me to strengthen and develop my skills. One opportunity that I had for the entirety of the semester was going on home visits. I accompanied a staff member, Becky Kipps, on home visits and observed how to incorporate the activities that we brought for the families to learn about their child's development. Each visit we would bring an activity, called a Parent As Teacher, or PAT, plan. These would differ based on the age of the child, and we taught the parents how they could do it on their own. Going on home visits is something that I really enjoyed because I was able to see many different kinds of families, each one with a unique story and background. After each home visit I would write up a home visit log based on what happened during the visit, strengths that were observed, reflective strategies that were used, goals of the parents, issues that were talked about, and what to do for the next visit.

Another experience that I had for several weeks at the beginning of the semester was multiple analyses. The main one was a cultural analysis and in doing this I saw where the needs were in the families and how this has changed from previous years. Another one that I did was a parent satisfaction survey analysis, and this analyzed the results from an anonymous survey that was provided to each parent that had been in the program for at least several months. I enjoyed this one because I saw the feedback from the parents, and I was happy to see that the majority of the parents had many kind things to say about the program as a whole. Lastly, I completed a home visit analysis and this was to have an overview of the home visits for the families from each month for the previous year. This analysis helps make sure that each family is receiving the appropriate number of home visits and what causes some months to be busier than others. Doing all of these analyses was helpful in learning more about the site while I was there, seeing where the most crucial needs were, and some ways to improve.

Something else we were able to start at Healthy Families was a parent-child playgroup, called Together Time. We started this group because there was a need for some parenting classes, and we thought it would be beneficial for the parents to have a group where they could do activities with their children in order to strengthen their bond. Although the group did not have great attendance, it was enjoyable to put the group together and research the importance of play between a child and their parents.

One final opportunity that I was able to have at Healthy Families was getting involved with an activity called Lunch Buddies. In doing this, we went to the local elementary school and were paired with a child who came from at-risk situations at home. We had lunch with these children on average, once a week, and some of the staff even went to the classroom to help the children with their schoolwork as well. I really enjoyed going to have lunch with the student I



was paired with because as the semester went on, I got to know the child better and it was something that I always looked forward to each week. The child got to know me better as well, and it was always so nice to see him yell hi to me from far away when I walked into the cafeteria. The purpose of Lunch Buddies is for the students to have something at school to look forward to and for there to be someone in the child's life at school who is making sure that their home life is safe by talking with them and asking them questions. I think this program is really valuable because the children can truly benefit from having another positive adult figure in their life, even if it is for a short amount of time.

It was an advantage for me while being at the site of Healthy Families that I was able to do many different things during the semester, so I was able to try multiple things and see what worked for me and what I liked best. My supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, allowed me to have different opportunities and do things that were suited for me and could strengthen my skills. Overall, my favorite things were going on home visits and doing Lunch Buddies. Some disadvantages and limitations about the site was that there were some days or weeks that many parents would have to cancel their home visits, so there would be some days when I was not able to go on a visit and write the logs. Unfortunately, this was out of our control most of the time because it was the parents who cancelled, but when this happened, staff members worked hard to find more opportunities for home visits and made sure I was going on enough of them.

Throughout my time at this site I learned many things that influenced my goals. Healthy Families was a good fit for me because I love working with families and learning about child development, so this was a perfect place to incorporate both of those things into one. After working at Healthy Families, it has reaffirmed my goals and desires to work with people, particularly families, in need.

Fall 2015 - Jen Conn

I chose Healthy Families in Page County for my Psychology field placement. The mission of Healthy Families is to promote child well-being and prevent child abuse and neglect through home visiting services. To accomplish this, Healthy Families provides support to parents who are at risk of negative parenting outcomes. Parents who qualify for services are often single, have inconsistent housing, insufficient income, mental health concerns, or a history of substance abuse. Since services are 100% voluntary, families who choose to enroll have a desire to be involved in the program. A Family Support Worker meets with the family in the home on a regular basis to provide information on how parents can support their child's development and to help parents achieve goals that they have set. Goals often include things such as graduating high school, obtaining a job or even buying a house. Ideally, Healthy Families services begin prenatally and can last until the child is five years old.

In the mornings, I drove to New Market and then carpoled to the office in Stanley with a staff member. At Healthy Families, I was able to shadow a Family Resource Specialist on intake interviews, in which we learn about the family that was referred and determine if they qualify for services. I was also able to regularly accompany a Family Support Worker on home visits. This allowed me to see growth as certain families overcame major challenges throughout the course of the semester. After attending home visits, I was responsible for writing up home visit logs



which monitor the progress made towards goals, parent-child interactions, the Parents-as-Teachers curriculum introduced and the overall well-being of the family. I also helped to score parents on assessments that were administered during the visits such as the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale and KIPS.

I was able to assist with monthly playgroups that Healthy Families organizes for parents and children involved in the program. Another opportunity that I found particularly valuable was attending Inter-professional Family Reviews each month. At these meetings, substance-abuse professionals, psychiatrists, and Healthy Families staff come together to discuss specific cases and problem-solve the issues faced by families in the program. Interns are encouraged to participate in these discussions and even present cases by the end of the semester. Even while reflecting with over lunch with Healthy Families staff, my input was always valued highly.

There were a few minor projects that I completed in my spare time at the office. I worked with my supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, to develop contact information sheets that helped improve worker safety. Upon completing that, I gathered data on the multicultural factors of each client currently in the system. I ran statistics on these factors and compared them to previous years. This semester, interns also received training on how to assess for domestic violence and conduct interventions during home visits.

I am very grateful to have been placed with Healthy Families Page County. I have been able to develop close relationships with the clients and young children that I have visited each week this semester. Since Healthy Families is a strength-based program, staff members work *with* families, and treat them with respect. There is a highly positive environment at Healthy Families that is fostered by professionals who selflessly care for the well-being of clients and one another. Every person that I encountered who works for Healthy Families truly believes that there is meaning in their work. It has been such an inspiring and educational experience for me to work alongside these individuals.

If you choose to intern at Healthy Families, Yvonne will help cater the experience to your specific interests. If you want to focus on the research aspect of the program, work on outreach or introduce a topic for playgroup, you will have the opportunity to base your experience around that aspect. I enjoyed the ability to travel each day and complete a variety of tasks. Since no two days felt the same, it was easy to constantly remain interested and engaged while at the site. Though you are likely to encounter unfamiliar and potentially uncomfortable situations while interning with Healthy Families, the staff is always available to offer support and perspective.

Working with Healthy Families has affirmed my interest in working with a low-income population. Though I have always envisioned myself working with refugees or people of low socio-economic status, I had very limited experience with either of these groups prior to my field placement. In my time with Healthy Families, I have learned about the many challenges faced by people living in poverty and how difficult it can be for someone to break out of a cycle that they were born into. I have come to more fully recognize the extent of my privilege through this experience. Additionally, I have learned how many people of low socioeconomic status are hardworking, generous and resilient. After seeing the meaningful relationships that are



developed, I am positive that I want to further explore this type of work. I have also been inspired after witnessing the effective change that programs such as these can have on people's lives. My confidence that I want to pursue a similar career has also increased as a result of realizing that I would be able to work alongside the sort of compassionate and motivated people who are drawn to this work. Though I know the population that I would prefer to work with, I am still unsure of whether I want to become a counselor or social worker.

Healthy Families could be a good fit if you have ever had an interest in social work or counseling. This could be a beneficial placement for people who are interested in substance abuse. Entering the homes of clients provides a more holistic view of their situation and creates the sort of personal relationship that is not always possible when they travel to an office to receive services. If you have a desire to learn more about home-visiting services, working with parents and/or young children or grant-funded programs, then I urge to seriously consider Healthy Families for your field placement.

Spring 2015 – Lauren Moretti

Healthy Families is an organization whose mission can be summarized in this simple phrase: “empowering families everyday.” They have dual goals of optimizing parenting and preventing child maltreatment. A number of services fall under that mission and those goals. A large portion of what Healthy Families family support workers (employees who work directly with families) do is providing home visits. During a home visit, the family support worker works primarily with the parent. They educate the parent on a number of different topics—child development, safety, developing a bond with the child, how to praise and how to discipline, etc.—that promote healthy, effective parenting. The family support worker introduces different resources to the parent, as well. For example, the family support worker connects the parent to different resources in the community—organizations that give food and baby supplies, health care agencies, nutrition programs, child development specialists, and so on. What sets Healthy Families apart, in my opinion, in terms of services provided, is the emotional support and empowerment they give to each member of each family. I noticed first in my interview how clearly invested the Healthy Families employees are, and as I continued to work with those employees my understanding and appreciation of their emotional and professional investment grew.

There were a wide variety of opportunities for me to participate in. To start, I was able to both view and become active in home visits. I shadowed for a few initial home visits. I was able to see the how the family support worker interacted with both the parent and the child. The family support worker, showing genuine care, would “check in” with the parent. She asked how life, in general, is going, if previous conflicts were resolved, what were possible solutions to unresolved problems, how things are going with the child, among other things. The family support worker would describe the lesson she planned that related to some aspect of parenting, demonstrate that lesson while working with the child, and finally coach and praise the parent as she worked with the child and learned.



I later had the opportunity to work directly with the family. I met with the family support worker before the visit to create a lesson plan and to talk about the goals of the visit. At the visit, the family support worker would work with the parent and I worked with the child. I did activities that were aimed to support development with the child. Some of the developmental areas we focused on were language, social, motor, and educational development.

My favorite experience was developing and working with Born to Read. Born to Read was a preschool group that introduced children to books and the English language, showed them how to socialize with other children, and prepared them for preschool. I worked with a great group of interns and a family support worker from the first day of my internship to the final group at the end of the semester. We created lesson plans that would be both educational and exciting for little kids. We brought music, movement, art, and play to each meeting, as well as had story time and educational activities. The interns and I also had the opportunities to teach our lesson plan and work directly with the children.

What was most enjoyable and most valued to me while working with Healthy Families was the amount of independence I had. I was given a task with general instructions and information about its purpose. From there, I was able to use my own creativity to complete the project. Of course, I still had supervision with these tasks. If I ever had a question, my supervisor was always available to answer it and when the project was completed she would review it with me and discuss the next steps. To go along with the skill of independence was the skill of being self-motivated. I was able to choose how I would spend my time during the day. I had a number of tasks to do and had to prioritize and be able to work efficiently to complete those tasks within a certain period of time. If you are someone who enjoys some degree of freedom in your work environment and are able to motivate yourself to complete tasks, this may be a good environment for you, as well.

One of the many valuable things I learned while working with Healthy Families is parents make the best teachers, which is something the employees and the organization itself believes strongly in. This was influential for my career goals because it emphasized to me the fact that the professional provides the tools for success. The parent (or client) is the one who brings those tools in her or his life to create daily change. This was important to me while working with Healthy Families and will be important in the future because it helped me to understand my role and the impact it has. Before working with Healthy Families, I felt as if there was always more I could do to help a client. Healthy Families and their belief that the parents are the ones who create the most change helped me to appreciate myself and the work I do for others. It also helped me to appreciate and validate the great amount of work that families do to make their lives better.

If I could emphasize one thing about Healthy Families that made my experience so worthwhile it would be the environment they create. From my interview until the last day I was in the office, all of the Healthy Families employees were warm, welcoming, and above all, supportive. Working in a prevention program has a lot of challenges, especially emotionally. I was able to continue to work with difficult cases and still be effective because I had the support



of the other employees. I was able to discuss at any time something that I was struggling with and process it until I found a possible solution to try or until I found acceptance.

Healthy Families is a great environment to learn how to assist others in a prevention setting and to grow as a professional and as a person through the support of those you will work with.

Spring 2015- Jennifer Moya

Healthy Families is a home-visiting organization dedicated to “empowering young families everyday”. They aim to achieve positive healthy outcomes for mothers and children, reduce the potential of child abuse and neglect, improve school readiness for children, promote optimal child development, and enhance family functioning. Healthy Families also collaborates with many community partners such as A Small Hand, RRR (Reading, Rhyming, Readiness), and the Pregnancy Center. My particular experience at Healthy Families was more community partner based. I got to co-lead a new preschool program in New Market called Born 2 Read. I assisted in a bilingual preschool program in Woodstock sponsored by Literacy Volunteers called Reading, Rhyming, Readiness in Woodstock. And I helped a daycare in Mt. Jackson called Mt. Calvary Day Care with their high-risk children.

My unique experience with Healthy Families allowed me to work with a variety of different people and build on my skills as well as develop new skills. While working in the Born 2 Read program, I created age appropriate lesson plans for children from infancy to age 5. Each week it was my responsibility to come up with a lesson plan and prep the materials for the preschool group with other interns in the program. During this program I worked with a number of non-English speaking families and helped them and their children use more English in their vocabulary as well as give them an opportunity to socialize and learn skills to prepare for Kindergarten. It was also a great opportunity to give these families tools to help educate their children at home and to bond as we always made time for the mothers and children to read together.

Similarly, at RRR, I assisted the lead teacher in her Spanish/English preschool program that aimed to accomplish similar goals in getting children ready for Kindergarten. However, RRR does not accept children younger than 2 years old. In this program, I got very close to the families and learned many new techniques I could bring to the Born 2 Read program as well as when working with the kids at Mt. Calvary Day Care. I learned a lot about Hispanic culture and the different family dynamics while I was working with this group. What was impressive was the amount of Spanish I learned in my semester and how much the children must have been learning in that short amount of time as well. The lead teacher had a lot of experience in different areas with children and she offered a lot of wisdom and advice that I was incredibly thankful for in my semester with her.



At Mt. Calvary Day Care, I got the opportunity to mentor the two-year-old teacher and model how to interact with her students and stay positive. Additionally, I was able to work with some of the special needs children, particularly a four-year old student with speech delays. When I first met the student she was speaking only one to two word sentences and was not very responsive when spoken to. Throughout the semester, I read to her, did alphabet recognition games with her, and worked on slowing down my speech so she could repeat my words. By the end of the semester, she was responding when spoken to and was up to three word sentences and could recognize many of the letters of the alphabet. She had also been receiving speech therapy but it was great to continue working on her speech while she was in a more comfortable and relaxed environment.

I also worked on getting the accreditation process started for Mt. Calvary Day Care. I read through accreditation books and made lists of materials for each classroom and researched supplies and compiled them together in a price sheet. I also wrote the first draft of a grant for the day care to the Shenandoah Community Foundation for money to refresh their old toys and get age appropriate furniture and materials for each classroom. This was particularly exciting for me to do because the center is an old religious-exempt center in a low-income area so I was happy to help them. I also have never written a grant before so it was great to learn about that process.

Also, at the Healthy Families office, I got to work on making four different brochures about the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI), which is a method for distinguishing preschools and day care centers as being high quality past the state standards. The brochures talked about the VSQI program, the importance of choosing quality early childhood education, what to look for in quality centers/how to give your child quality space to learn at home, and finally a list of centers in Shenandoah county from the Department of Social Services website for families to refer to. These brochures were given out to the families in the Healthy Families program as cheat sheets. Although I never got a chance to directly work with families in the Healthy Families programs or go on any home-visits like some of the other interns, I was really glad to help by making these brochures.

Overall, my experience working with Healthy Families and their community partners was a very unique and diverse opportunity and I have my supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, to thank for that opportunity. I got a chance to be involved in many different projects and meet many different and important people that gave me valuable advice and insight. I refined the skills I had from my experience as a preschool teacher for many years, got the opportunity to mentor another teacher, learned how to write a grant, increased my Spanish comprehension, and became more educated in the accreditation process and the importance of early education. However, what was most important was that I got the chance to continue working with children in need. My time at Healthy Families confirmed that I want to work with children in my career and make their lives better however I can. I really enjoyed the time spent at each of my sites and am so happy that I got the chance to be in the lives of all the people I met this semester.