



The Arc of Harrisonburg & Rockingham Day Support Services

Community & Center-Based Programs

Placement Description

Community-based program in which participants have opportunities to experience inclusion through volunteering, recreational, independent living, and job exploration activities. Our Center-based program is designed to prepare clients to interact successfully in the community through soft-skills training, social skills, independent life skills, and making informed decisions. Both programs are person-centered and focus on the wants and needs of our individuals with the goal of living “a life like yours”.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

Field Placement

- Assist participants in accessing community services, volunteering, and experiencing community enrichment activities.
- Working one-on-one and with groups both in community and in the center.
- Assist with center-based activities (e.g. communication skills, sign language, recreational, social skills, and leisure preferences)
- Assist with art and craft projects.

Contact Information

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Read more about students' experiences at this site below:

Fall 2021 - Nathan Spiers

When taking the time to select a field placement site to be spending my semester at, The Arc of Harrisonburg really jumped out to me. The Arc is an amazing organization that focuses their efforts on protecting and advocating for the rights of the developmentally and intellectually disabled. On top of this, they take the time to build a community between each of the clients and the larger Rockingham community through the community engagement program. This program takes small groups of clients to volunteer at different locations in the Rockingham area such as Elkton Area United Services, Bridgewater Retirement Community, Meals on Wheels, and many more.

This site seemed like it would be a great experience to be able to do something that I have never done before. Specifically, I was able to get involved in an organized helping profession while also working with a population of clients that I had not had a lot of experience with prior to starting this Field Placement Experience with The Arc. If the part holding you back from selecting this site is the novelty of the experience, I implore you to take the jump out of your comfort zone. My uncertainty about the experience was completely erased as soon as I met the staff. Every person who works at The Arc is incredibly unique, kind, and helpful. Because of the experience being so new to me, I had a lot of questions pertaining to how to work the most efficiently with clients, how to make the experience the best for each client, or how can I gain the most from my time interning at this site. They had an answer for every question that I threw at them.

Many days, clients were in a great mood. When we came by to pick them up, they would always get excited to hear what we were doing that day, or they were excited to go to a store that they have been wanting to go to for a while. This is when the internship was at its peak for me. Building relationships with clients and staff was deeply fulfilling for me. Each client is unique and has characteristics that are very endearing. On the other hand, clients do have off days occasionally. Though, I would not say that this is a large cause for concern. As mentioned earlier, the staff are great to lean on in situations like this. They know exactly how to help a client who may be having an off day or can help to resolve any conflict between clients that may arise. I found these situations to be a great opportunity for personal growth. Though it may be uncomfortable at times, it became much easier to get a grasp on how to handle each situation after a few encounters with it along with talking about the situations with staff.

On top of community engagement, which made up the bulk of my time interning at The Arc, I was able to play an integral role in establishing a program called "Wellness Matters." This



program seeks to place a focus on physical exercise and health while also establishing a much-needed sense of community after a long time of isolation due to the ongoing pandemic. The sense of community is an aspect of The Arc that has seemed to be lacking since the pandemic started. Thankfully, this program allows all clients to see one another again, in addition to the staff having a chance to see clients that they may not have had the chance to take out for community engagement recently.

On the physical exercise side of things, everyone meets in a gymnasium where the clients can participate in a variety of activities such as basketball, bowling, dancing, singing, or anything in between. When the program goes into full swing in February, each client will hopefully have a Fitbit to help keep track of how much exercise a client gets throughout the week, with the hopes that having a Fitbit will help to promote self-determination among each client when it comes to physical exercise and wellbeing. The future of The Arc is looking bright with this program quickly coming to fruition

During my time at The Arc, I was able to really flesh out professional skills necessary to have for a career setting. As I touched on earlier, handling uncomfortable situations with clients or between two clients became second nature towards the end of my time at The Arc. I felt comfortable asserting myself in a calm, thoughtful manner. On top of confrontation and conflict resolution skills, communication is something I got much better at. Asking questions, providing suggestions, or scheduling a meeting is something that I struggled with at times due to being a rather introverted person. Many times, I would worry about being too intrusive with suggestions and the like, but since my mantra for this internship was to break out of my comfort zone, these anxious worries of mine had to quickly be thrown out the window. Because of this, I can much better manage my sometimes-overbearing introversion which is critical in a society where extroversion is generally preferred.

Overall, this Field Placement site is highly recommended for anyone looking for experience in a helping profession. From the incredible staff and endearing clients to the chances I got to put myself in a new situation and grow into a more well-rounded individual, this site has it all. I would highly suggest giving this site a serious consideration. My experience and time spent at The Arc will always be looked back upon fondly.



Spring 2021 - Nathaniel Gautier

For my Field Placement in Psychology experience, I decided to work as an intern at The Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham. The Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham's mission statement is that they promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while actively supporting their full inclusion and participation within the community throughout the course of their lives. Through SpArc Community Engagement services, they provide clients the opportunity to engage and involve themselves in the community life through volunteerism, developing useful skills for paid employment along the way. They also offer in-home care and respite care to provide relief for families, guardians, and caregivers of individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as skill-building and socialization-focused day support at the Simon-Edmonson Center as well as over Zoom Meeting technology. The current quarantine only permitted The Arc to continue its day support over Zoom Meeting technology, which I was tasked with participating in regularly, according to my weekly schedule of availability.

Every weekday, there were two Zoom sessions, one taking place from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm with a scheduled thirty-minute lunch break following. In the afternoons, sessions would resume at 1:00 pm until roughly 3:30 pm, but sometimes the sessions extended well beyond that time to fit in a scheduled program. These sessions were typically comprised of lectures, video sessions, and topic discussions that various site staff would present on and try and facilitate client engagement with. My tasks during these sessions included socially engaging with the staff and client, encouraging client participation and attention, reinforcing rules, and providing a comfortable and judgement-free place of work. During moments when client engagement was low or staff content was covered earlier than anticipated, I also worked to keep a fun and exciting but also civil atmosphere for the clients, utilizing the Zoom technology to keep their interest levels, while also providing technical methods to improve their ability to communicate effectively. In addition to these tasks, I was assigned to design and lead the implementation of a fitness program using Fitbit technology, while also designing a contribution project utilizing said technology. Every Thursday, which would typically contain mornings focused on music therapy followed by instructed yoga, I elected to research, design, and conduct lectures on health, fitness, and nutrition during the afternoon session to facilitate the Fitbit fitness program. This opportunity allowed me to utilize and improve my leadership, presentation, research, and



communication skills as well as to work on my time management and project completion work ethic.

The site was a wonderful site to intern at, with caring and considerate employees, as well as kind and sometimes even enthusiastic clients. The level of care and responsibility that the staff at the site display is clearly reflected in the clients' regular, high interest levels and the positive atmosphere that did not once diminish during the time I worked at the site. That said, the limitations of my participation at the site as well as the site's own ability to function were significant due to the restrictions of the current quarantine for the COVID-19 virus. I believe the inability to meet the clients in person and develop a face-to-face dynamic and an in-person work ethic significantly affected my experience at the site, and may well have limited the skills I would have learned otherwise.

One thing I learned from working at The Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham, working with such a diverse and unique client base, is that I genuinely enjoy serving particularly underserved and underrepresented populations. When I first attended the site, I was apprehensive as to whether or not I would enjoy working for individuals with intellectual disabilities, but I quickly found that the experience was incredibly enjoyable. Each client was unique and had interesting lives and experiences, and it was quite a privilege when they would share details of such. I believe this opportunity has influenced my career path as an aspiring clinical psychologist, and I wish would expand my population of interest to service more those who are particularly underserved. I look forward to keeping in touch with The Arc, as well as with their fitness program.

Spring 2020 – Kara Norman

The Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes. They offer a wide variety of programs including their community engagement program, day support at The Simon-Edmonson Center, along with in-home care and respite care. The Arc also provides information on services and resources that are available across Virginia and in the local community. They provide a resource library, education such as seminars and workshops, along with referrals, personal assistance, and advocacy in many different areas.

To say I enjoyed interning at The Arc would be an understatement. The clients and staff members became family to me, and the opportunities I got to experience have helped me gain



confidence in my career path. One of my favorite experiences during my time at The Arc was my participation in the community engagement program. Every Wednesday, I would go out into the community with a staff member and a small group of clients. Each group had a different place to go volunteer at in the Harrisonburg community each day. A few places I got to go to with clients were local churches to clean and organize pamphlets, food pantries, along with participating in Meals On Wheels where we delivered meals to families in need. Sometimes, the clients would have free days, where we would go to their place of choice which often included shopping at Dollar General and Goodwill. Being a part of the community engagement program was my favorite part of my internship because I got to see how much joy volunteering brought to the clients.

One of my other experiences during my internship was editing and formatting The Arc's Life Span Manuals, which is a resource filled with information for parents who have a child with an intellectual or developmental disability. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn about resources in the community for families that I was not aware of previously. I also participated in The Arc's music therapy program every Friday, where I helped clients engage and participate. I had never been involved in a music therapy program before, and I felt I gained a lot of experience by helping facilitate singing and using instruments. To see how positive of an impact the music therapy program had on the clients is something I will never forget.

There are countless advantages I found while interning at The Arc. My communication skills improved greatly from being able to interact one on one with clients. Experience is the best way to learn when it comes to working with individuals with disabilities, and The Arc provides a lot of hands-on opportunities to socialize and make connections with their clients. I became more confident interacting with individuals with disabilities because I was able to learn about each client more in-depth. Each morning before I went out into the community I would sit with several clients and get to know them more. My professional skills continued to develop during this internship because I constantly had to interact with those around me. These connections that I made enhanced my overall experience.

One difficult aspect of working at The Arc was not knowing how each client's behavior would be that day. Some days were harder than others for clients to interact and want to engage in the community. I learned to go in each day with an open mind and be ready to handle any behavioral challenges that came my way. Although many days are filled with a lot of positivity and joy, some days are filled with tears and anger. A lot of clients cannot control mood swings and are not sure how to react to them. Although this was a challenge and could be difficult to watch some days, I felt it was an important part of my learning experience. These emotions were important for me to work with because it allowed me to understand and learn more about each client.

The valuable experiences I was exposed to brought me more excitement towards my future career. Before I interned at The Arc, I was only exposed to children with disabilities. I had never worked with adults before, and I was extremely nervous if I would like it or not. I learned



through this internship how much I love working with adults with disabilities. It made me realize that I want to work with adults with disabilities one day because I truly believe there is not enough support for this age range. I also learned to always have a backup plan in mind. Not every day went as expected, and not every client liked every activity as much as I expected them to. I often felt myself thinking ahead and always trying to be adaptable. I also learned how to react better to behavioral challenges. Before, I felt like I always worried about the right thing to say and the perfect way to react when someone was having a hard day. I know now from my internship that sometimes, you don't always have to know the right thing to say, you just have to let the clients know you are there to support them and be there for them.

I have always known I wanted to work with individuals with disabilities, however, The Arc validated that I am called to work with this population. A lot of days when I left The Arc, my face would hurt from smiling. I realized this is what I want to feel every day as I leave my future job. The clients and staff members were truly a blessing to work with, and I feel so grateful I was able to be a part of this journey, even if it was just for a short amount of time. I would highly recommend interning at The Arc if you are interested in working with the disability population or just want to learn more about it. I hope one day, I can be a part of a wonderful organization like The Arc so I can continue to support and provide advocacy for individuals with disabilities.

Spring 2019 – Rebecca Miller

The Arc of Harrisonburg aims to promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as actively support their full inclusion and participation in the community. The Arc offers many programs, one of which is an in-center program that helps client's work on individual goals. They also provide community engagement to better the client's social skills within the community and their interactions with other society members. Both programs not only promote greater independence for individuals with disabilities, but also teach them daily life skills that are needed to grow to their fullest potential.

Interning at the Arc of Harrisonburg has opened my eyes wider to many situations that I thought I have already experienced. One of my responsibilities was to read the client's files and to become familiar with them and their disabilities. While at the Arc, I mostly participated in the community engagement program. I spent about three hours on Wednesday mornings and five hours on Friday's in the community doing various activities and participating in community service opportunities. We often went to local churches to help with clerical duties, such as putting together the bulletin boards, folding pamphlets and setting tables. I also participated in Meals On Wheels where we delivered meals to those who need them in the surrounding areas. Lastly, the clients and I spent many hours of leisure time in the community, shopping at the



Dollar Store and Wal-Mart frequently. We also went bowling, went out to lunch at many restaurants, went to the local community center and played various games - a favorite game at The Arc is Uno. Through my time in the community with the clients, I was saddened to see some of the hardships that they face daily. However, I was also able to see their great capabilities and ways in which they overcome such hardships.

Although most of my time was spent with the clients outside, in the community, I also spent some time in the center with clients. I spent one-on-one time with a few clients, where I got to connect with them. There was a specific time where I helped a client learn how to spread peanut butter and make a sandwich. I also played a safety signals card game with a client to help reinforce his knowledge. Friday afternoons were spent in a music therapy circle where I helped facilitate the singing and use of instruments. One of my favorite activities I helped with in the center was baking. I went to the kitchen with three clients and a staff member and we made brownies and cookies. We first got the ingredients and materials out, and then I read the directions on the box, talked through the steps with them and had the clients actively participate in making the brownies. This activity was exciting for me, not only because I got to take lead but also because I got to see the client's faces when they learned something new and felt a sense of pride. That feeling of pride is what I hope many of the clients get to experience in the future.

I found that there were many advantages to interning at this field placement site. I grew as an individual and enhanced many personal skills. I learned how to communicate effectively with my supervisor, appropriately with the clients and professionally with the other staff members. Although I didn't start at the Arc with exceptional communication skills and a high level of confidence when speaking to the clients, this would not be an appropriate option for someone who isn't a communicator or doesn't want to improve such skills. A large part of my job was to interact with and talk to the clients, which involves a great sense of communication and professional skills. I also think it is important to feel comfortable working with adults with disabilities because I found the more I got to know the clients, the more valuable my experience became.

One of the more difficult aspects of working at The Arc was how differently days varied depending on the client's moods at that time. For example, there were days where clients were extremely happy, energetic and smiling from ear to ear, but there were also days that I came in and the same clients were upset, crying and arguing. Yet, because I became familiar with their files, I was aware of possible reasons for their frustrations and also possible options to helping them get over those hurdles. Many days were filled of singing and laughter; however, there were days where client's needed more attention and support. Because everyday was different, I didn't always know what to expect and some days were more exhausting than others. Thankfully, the staff members are incredibly welcoming and helpful. At first, I was nervous about taking



initiative and was shy, but because the staff was so approachable, I was able to break out of my shell, gain self-confidence and get more out of my internship.

During my time at The Arc, I had many valuable experiences that have promoted my career goals and further influenced my passion and excitement for my future. Before my time at The Arc, I had spent many hours working with children with disabilities and mostly in a comfortable setting with other people around me, in which I never was challenged. Yet, while interning at The Arc, my patience was tested, my values were questioned, and much of my knowledge was disputed. I learned a great deal not only about adults with disabilities, but also about myself. Before the internship, I thought I had a firm understanding on disabilities and felt a great sense of confidence working with the population, but after my time interning, I learned that I had many misconceptions and was wrong about many of the things that I thought I knew. My time at The Arc was extremely enjoyable and a valuable learning experience.

After interning at The Arc, I learned so much about the client's skills, their everyday lives, and their interactions in the community and with others. Through this experience, I've discovered that I do want to work with individuals with disabilities. Although, my career goal involves working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, I will be able to recount the various experiences I have had to help further my passion for this field. Overall, I have thoroughly enjoyed my internship at The Arc and would recommend this placement site to anyone interested in working with adults with disabilities or anyone who simply wants to learn more about the population. I think many people could benefit from spending time at The Arc because it provided me with various learning experiences.