



Placement Description

The Community Mediation Center DBA FairField Center was established in 1982 as a nonprofit service organization whose mission is to train and certify mediators and to provide mediation, conflict resolution and transformation, restorative justice services and trainings to individuals, families, businesses, organizations and the community.

Our interns serve as Client Service Coordinators and Assistants in our mediation services, restorative justice, civic engagement and training areas. The Center provides services to over 800 cases and over 1990 individuals, families, businesses, or groups each year.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

Responsibilities include: client interviews to obtain client concerns and conduct screenings and assessments for issues involving domestic violence, drug and alcohol concerns and abuse. Responsible for accurate notes and to make assessments and recommendations based on these interviews. Conducted comprehensive case and detail management in creating electronic and paper files, scheduling of clients and mediators, agreement writing, formatting and mailing. Coordinate and prepare reports for our seven Family and General District Courts.

Opportunity to practice engagement skills and build listening and communications skills to include the ability to use empathy, rapport building, active listening, paraphrasing and other interpersonal skills to gather required information. Prepare for interviews and screening and uses and reflect on professional communication skills. Organizes and interpret client data, and make good use of professional judgment to develop appropriate mediation strategies and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and limitations of those involved and their environment.

Participate in Mediation training and observe mediations and after completion of training have the opportunity to co-mediate. Assist the Restorative Justice Branch in their programs like the Listen and Learn juvenile program and attend community action meetings.

Assist the Center in fundraising opportunity, in preparation for community events like the International Festival, attend and engage in staff meeting and represent the FairField Center at community meetings / organizations regarding FairField services.

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Spring 2021 - Ashley Sedlazeck

The FairField Center's mission is to improve people's ability to listen, plan, understand, and communicate with others fairly to strengthen community ties. The center began as the first mediation service in Virginia and offers a multitude of services, including restorative justice, conflict resolution, business, communication training, and civic engagement. There is a goal of building communities of engagement, appreciation, and cooperation through the many services and resources provided. The center focuses on helping people who could not deal with their issues on their own and aiding them to formulate a more effective way to communicate. In communicating better, people are often able to establish an agreement and implement that agreement into their lives to alleviate future conflict.

As an intern, I had the responsibilities of managing mediation sessions, gathering client information before sessions, and answering the mediation services phone whenever needed. The center mainly received client-pay cases, Juvenile and Domestic Relations court referrals, General District Court referrals, and police referrals. I would call each client regarding their personal information, information about why they were referred or why they want to mediate, what they need help with, and what they would like to bring up in mediation. I was able to provide clients with any information about their mediation session, coping skills, and any resources they needed. Resources I would include for clients would be costs for mediation, how to file a petition at court, mental health facilities, disability services, and many more. Occasionally, I was able to sit in during mediations and observe. At the end of the day, I would prepare for mediation sessions the next day by doing confirmation calls as well as by gathering court reports and case notes that I would email to the mediator. I would send the clients their agreement to mediate and their client evaluation forms for the mediator. I was also responsible for creating the zoom links for the sessions and sending those links to the clients and the mediator.

Through my field placement experience, my workplace skills improved immensely. I was able to engage in learning outside of a classroom and apply my knowledge in psychology to the real world while helping clients. I worked with my supervisor and two other interns during my time, in which we all learned how to communicate effectively regarding case management. I improved in my communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, creativity, and time-management skills through the many tasks that were required of me. I believe that I am much more prepared after I graduate to be able to effectively intern or hold a job in the field of psychology. Something that I wish I could have done was be more involved in the restorative justice conferencing cases since it aligns more with my ultimate career objectives. I only dealt with mediation cases, since my internship was not with restorative justice.

My ultimate career goal is to become a forensic psychologist, which requires me to conduct forensic mental health assessments. During my time at the FairField Center, I was involved with helping the courts and I conducted interviews for mental health and drug issues with clients as well as any other issues that needed to be addressed during mediation. This allowed me to get some experience with dealing with the courts and interviewing defendants and/or offenders. I am happy I was able to apply what I learned as a psychology major, specifically my knowledge in abnormal psychology, to the field of social work and give back to the community. I am glad I was able to give back to the community using the resources I was provided to have the ability to help those who truly needed it. Sometimes, clients in serious need of help were able to vent about their problems which indeed helped them cope. It is heartwarming knowing that I was able to do that for clients.

Through interning at the FairField Center, I learned a multitude of things. I learned how to effectively interview people, how the court process works, and what mediation exactly is. I did not know



anything about mediation before I came here, and now I know exactly what it is and how helpful it can be for people. Conflict resolution is something that can be so difficult to do, and I appreciate these trained mediators for what they do for people. They allow people to solve their issues that they could not solve on their own and allow them to voluntarily choose what they want to do rather than having a judge decide for them. I feel mediation is a great way for people to have a more positive attitude about the court system in that it allowed them to have more freedom in the outcome of their case.

For my contribution project, I decided to research restorative justice. Even though I did not deal with restorative justice cases during my time at the FairField Center, I was very interested in it and wanted to know more. The director for restorative justice, Sue Praill, helped me get general information about what exactly restorative justice is and how healing it can be for the victim, offender, and community it impacted. My main research focus was the benefits of restorative justice on the victim, offender, and community, as well as the tools to strengthen it. I created a worksheet that described exactly what restorative justice is, the benefits of it shown through empirical research studies in general and for victims and offenders, and the tools that help strengthen it. I plan on showing it to the restorative justice director to evaluate and learn anything new from. I also was interested in showing the worksheet to any client that is interested in restorative justice conferencing or anyone who wants to know more about it. I also created a creative follow-up survey that allows clients to pinpoint exactly what they liked and did not like about the process of restorative justice and how the FairField Center can improve on that for the future.

Fall 2020 – Abby Kiros

This semester, I had the opportunity to complete my field placement at The FairField Center, the oldest and first mediation center in Virginia. The FairField Center is a nonprofit mediation center that is in Harrisonburg. Their mission statement is to “help people listen, plan, and interact effectively.” They attempt to help parties resolve issues by creating a plan focused on finding solutions for the parties involved while building a deeper understanding between them, through dialogue.

The services they offer include mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice services, and training programs. Their training programs include mediation training, workplace and business training, restorative justice training, and co-parenting classes. The site primarily deals with mediation cases, and a majority of these are court-ordered, specifically regarding custody, visitation, or support of children, as well as divorce matters. The FairField Center works with the General District Court (GDC) and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts. (JDR) in Staunton, Waynesboro, Augusta, or Rockingham/Harrisonburg. Not all of the cases received are court-ordered. Some clients pay out of pocket to use mediation. The majority of these cases are related to marital problems, particularly divorce. They are an active participant in the community. They are known for helping individuals who are disadvantaged within the Harrisonburg area, such as aiding individuals to prepare for job opportunities or finding possible job opportunities for them. Lastly, they are also responsible for organizing and coordinating the Harrisonburg International Festival.



As an intern, I worked alongside Aaron Hagmaier, the Director of Mediation Services at the site. Most days, Aaron was the only one at the Center due to Covid-19. Because of this, I was unable to interact and work with many of the mediators and other staff member. Additionally, because of Covid-19, I did not have a lot of the same experiences as previous interns at this site, yet I was still able to make the most of the situation. For instance, I was unable to go to court, watch more mediations and in-person mediations, and go through mediation training prior to starting.

My day-to-day tasks primarily consisted of case management and administrative work. This included reminding clients of their mediation session for the following day, prepping cases for mediators, building cases using a database called VistaShare. Once these cases were built, I would call each of the individuals involved to conduct an intake. We would do multiple intakes a day and took up most of my time while I was there. On average, intakes would take 5 to 16 minutes, sometimes even longer. These intakes were a vital source of information that we needed to get to successfully conduct a mediation session. After clients meditated and were able to reach an agreement, we would receive a draft of the agreement from the mediator. After receiving the agreement, I would fix any issues, such as formatting. Once this step was complete, we either mailed or emailed to the clients a copy for them to sign. I was also responsible for post mediation processes, such as billing courts or clients, closing cases, and filing agreements to the courts.

It took a while to learn how the site worked and all my new responsibilities. The site can be very busy at times, but this was exacerbated by limited staff. If you like structure, then this may not be the best site to choose. One learning hurdle I faced was how to handle intakes. Sometimes, clients were not responsive to my questions, but other times I was unsure what to ask or how to ask it. Although this was stressful at the start, once I got the hang of intakes, this stopped. I began to enjoy taking intakes. It was interesting to hear about people's lives and stories. Some of the intakes were difficult because they included child sexual abuse by a parent, domestic violence, mental health issues, situations where Child Protective Services (CPS) was involved, and an array of other cases surrounding topics similar to these.

For each of our sites, we were required to develop a contribution project. The project focused on creating a new implementation based on your site, and ultimately this new idea should help your site and even the community. For my project, I was interested in how Harrisonburg schools use restorative justice practices for the students. After talking to Sue Prail, the Director of Restorative Justice, and April Howard, a member of the school board office, I learned that the schools in this area use a model known as the incident-driven approach.

While conducting more research on this approach I found an alternative approach. This new model is known as the whole-school approach, unlike the incident-driven approach, this focuses on using restorative justice principals, throughout the entire school to create a positive, holistic school environment. This model is a three-tiered system (1) universal/prevention focus and community building (2) targeted interventions (3) the intensive intervention. Schools that continue to use the incident-driven approach or punitive punishment are exacerbating the racial divide within the school system, which is extremely damaging for students of color. Black students tend to be expelled or suspended at much higher



rates, which in turn will impact their education. However, using this approach decreases disparities between students while also strengthening teacher-student relationships. After viewing the positive outcomes and effectiveness of whole-school approach, I wanted to implement this model into the Harrisonburg school system and, hopefully, other schools throughout Virginia.

For schools to successfully adopt this new approach, the first step they must take is to create an assessment, which has a series of questions based on an outline, that allows schools to develop an individualized plan based on their needs. After this assessment, the school can slowly adopt this new approach while using a general step-by-step plan that can be modified for each school. Trying to administer the whole-school approach will take four years to complete; each stage takes one year to complete and may be costly.

Later in life, I want to work with the law and the justice system. The FairField Center works alongside the criminal justice system and deals with the courts often. This experience allowed me to grasp a deeper understanding of these processes, predominantly in the JDR courts. Communication is essential for the line of work I want to go into. Many tasks that I faced helped me get out of my comfort zone and, while doing so, helped my communications skills improve significantly. I was able to learn how to talk to various types of people while also being professional. Even though this was not the experience I imagined it to be, I am glad that I did it. The FairField Center is a unique establishment that can be somewhat difficult to adjust to. But at the end of the day, I am grateful for this opportunity; I have learned skills ranging from interpersonal communication to case management and organization. The FairField Center has helped me grow as an individual in the community while having more of an open mind and understanding of people, especially those different from me.

Fall 2020 – Anna Flanagan

For my psychology capstone, I was placed at the Fairfield Mediation Center during my fall semester of 2020. The Fairfield Center's mission is to provide "a broad range of conflict resolution services and training for individuals, businesses, and organizations with one goal in mind: SOLUTIONS." As their mission statement demonstrates, the center deals with a wide range of services, some including; restorative justice, training programs, referrals from the Virginia Supreme Court, workplace and business dispute training, Staunton police referrals, and much more. The Fairfield Center also is responsible for organizing the Harrisonburg International Festival as part of their mission in civic engagement. However, with this year, and COVID19, many of these programs were cut, or put off to the side for the time being.

During my semester interning at the Fairfield center, although it was in the midst of COVID19, I was still able to engage in a wide variety of new learning experiences and handle many responsibilities. My site manager at the center was Aaron Hagmaier, who helped introduce me to mediation and guided me to success throughout my semester. As an intern, I started off learning the ropes of the database our mediation center uses called VistaShare. This is essentially the nucleus of information for our entire center. This was the first and most important responsibility to learn to navigate. Any person the center has ever had a case with, and any person we have ever had a phone conversation with goes into VistaShare.



As an intern, Mr. Hagmaier also taught us how to have an intake interview with clients before mediation. An intake interview is when you call a client who is referred to our services to ask them a long list of personal information as well as ask them to explain the situation that led them to mediation. Oftentimes these clients are very understanding and want to help you as much as you want to help them. However, some clients are very vulnerable and do not want to talk to an intern who might not have all the answers. As an intern, these calls took the longest for me to learn and do correctly. Even towards the end of my site experience, I was learning new ways to better handle talking to clients and find ways to get information without saying the wrong thing. During my time at the center, my site manager really wanted to see us grow and let us explore our own way of taking these calls by giving us minimal direction. He really pushed us to think outside the box, ask the hard questions, and after the call was over, we would talk about how we could have done things differently. This was crucial in the development of my skills at the center.

The most interesting part of my time at The Fairfield Center was the mediations that we got to watch. Many of the mediations I got to watch during my time had to do with divorced parents who had to sit down and create a parenting plan for their children. These often were regarding custody, visitation, or support of their children. It was interesting to see the mediators at the center really working as an unbiased third party to help mend and solve disagreements firsthand. The mediations always start off with an orientation to help guide clients into the understandings of how mediations work. After an agreement is met, or sometimes not, the mediators have a debrief on the parts of the mediation that could have gone better as well as parts that went well. Since this was during COVID, most of our mediations were over Zoom. Towards the end of the internship, we began to have a few in person, with a majority of them over virtual platforms. This was new territory for the center, but fortunately, with everything moving online, the center was able to have more of an outreach to clients. Now that mediations were online, we had fewer cancelations, and we could talk to people all over the world to settle disputes.

The remaining part of my time at the site had to do with paperwork, billings to the courts, and more behind the scene work. This at first seemed less interesting, but once I understood and got the hang of the process, it became more interesting and was one of the more enjoyable parts of my experience. The phone calls and all that goes on at the site can seem quite hectic, but when I was doing paperwork, and paying attention to fine details, the work became relaxing. I can almost compare it to completing a puzzle. Mr. Hagmaier often asked us to read into a story or into a case. We often had to take what information we had and do more digging and research on top of this to understand a case more than the papers showed. This was quite arguably the most valuable part of my experience at the center as well. This taught me to have attention to detail and to not scan or look over information but to really delve into it deeply and get the most information I could. I felt like the work I was doing at the center was really important, and you could see our effort making a viable impact when mediations made it to an agreement.

Toward the end of my internship, and through the Field Placement class itself, I was able to put forth a contribution project that I was really passionate about at my site. At my site, I decided to focus on the topic of mediator burnout and compassion fatigue as well as how to retain facilitators. At the Fairfield Center, mediators deal with a lot of emotionally charged cases and are constantly working in a hectic environment with little to no breaks. I saw firsthand how they affected my site manager and other facilitators. My contribution project aimed to create a biweekly workshop, where mediators could come together and talk about methods for combating burnout as well as learning mindfulness techniques to cope with stressful situations. With the mediators doing so much for the community, I wanted to see what I could do to make them feel appreciated, and to help them overcome the worst of their burnout symptoms.



In the end, I put forth a plan for a mediation workshop, a list of topics for mindfulness techniques to teach, and flyers for the mediators so they can continue their journey to burnout recovery outside of the workplace.

Overall, this experience has dramatically developed my ability to act professionally under pressure, and to hold an incredible amount of responsibility when it comes to case management. The valuable skills that I gained from The Fairfield Center are immeasurable and I am beyond grateful to my site supervisor for pushing me beyond my limits of what I thought I was capable of as an undergraduate intern.

Spring 2020 – Sarah Ketchum

At the Fairfield Center where I was given the opportunity to intern for part of this semester, I was able to learn many new things that I will be able to apply to my future schooling and career path. The Fairfield Center is a mediation center that has the mission of “offering a broad range of conflict resolution services and training for individuals, businesses, and organizations with one goal in mind: SOLUTIONS.” The center provides services to assist in divorce/separation disputes, custody and visitation battles, property disputes, as well as offering team building assistance to businesses who want to grow as a whole.

There was a wide range of opportunities that I was able to do at the Fairfield Center. When I first began, I was able to become familiar with all of the services offered by the Fairfield Center, so I would move around quite often. I was able to go to court and witness a trial regarding a property dispute. I then got to go to the different levels of the courthouse and collect paperwork in the juvenile portion of the court. I was given an opportunity to meet a judge which was very neat. I then was able to sit in on a mediation regarding separation and child visitation. This experience really opened my eyes because I got to firsthand experience one of the main things at the Fairfield Center does. Both parties were very heated, so it was an interesting first mediation session. I took notes throughout the session, and was eager to discuss them with my supervisor. Unfortunately, the opportunity never came where I was able to discuss this due to the busyness of the center. Once I became familiar with the way the Fairfield Center operated, my tasks shifted to completing lots of paperwork. This involved completing intake calls to clients to get a general understanding of what they wanted from mediation, and what they hoped to take away. I would then enter this information in the system, print it out, and build their files. After, I would schedule them for a mediation session.

Some advantages of my site were that I was able to be exposed to multiple situations, such as court hearings, mediations, training sessions, and so on. From this, I was able to acquire knowledge in these different fields and aspects, to which I did not have before. I am definitely exiting this having more knowledge than I once did, which was a large part of what I wanted to get out of intro to fieldwork. However, there were some disadvantages to the site. The first thing I struggled with was the organization. The whole center was under construction, which was understandable, but things often seemed overcrowded and busy due to the other interns and employees confined to a small space. Finally, there was a lot of paperwork, and I would have liked to have a bit of a more hands on experience throughout.

One of the things I took away most from this was involving the mediation portion. When I sat in on a mediation, I was able to learn unbiased language when communicating with both parties. This taught me how to stay neutral, even if you may resonate with one side over another. I also learned how to interact with the clients over the phone. Some were oppositional, and I got to learn how to stay calm, yet still get the information needed. Among this was learning how to almost comfort the client if they were



oppositional, and try to obtain the information without frustrating them even more. I am also a nonprofits minor, and the Fairfield Center is a nonprofit, so I enjoyed getting to see both aspects of each career path.

If you are a person who is interested in conflict resolution, this is a great site. You get to learn key strategies to overcoming conflict, which can simply help you in your day to day life, not just in your career. As I stated before, if you enjoy nonprofits, this is a great side to get the best of both worlds. Overall, I am very grateful for this experience, although it was cut short. I learned so much, and feel more educated than I did before I began.

Fall 2019 – Sun Kuppusamy (Intro Field Work)

The Fairfield Mediation Center aims to help solve any kind of interpersonal conflict in a calm and collective way. Their aim is to, “The FairField Center offers a broad range of conflict resolution services and training for individuals, businesses, and organizations with one goal in mind: SOLUTIONS”. The site mostly deals with issues of custody, visitation, support, and divorce details between parents. For the most part the Fairfield Mediation Center is a non-profit, mostly mediating court referred cases, but also offers client paying services such as training & coaching on workplace behavior and communication skills. The Fairfield center offers a broad scale of solving conflict in an effective and collaborative method. Similarly, the Fairfield Center also mediates conflicts within companies and businesses. While also dealing with a broad range of intrapersonal techniques, they also coordinate and handle the International Food Festival of Harrisonburg every year.

As an intern my responsibilities are different than those of the mediators at the Center. During my experience at the site I was able to have a variety of different opportunities at the Fairfield Center. I have been given the opportunity to watch and observe many mediations dealing with different issues. Being able to observe the mediations is what I felt was the most valuable experience, and enjoyable from the internship site. When observing the mediations, you can see the relationship between the two people, and bring reality to the fact that these are real people, and these are the circumstances of their lives. I have also participated in some mock mediations, where I was portraying one of the clients in a case. Being able to be involved in this conversation helped me focus on the huge amount of fine details that have to be sorted out in mediation. From participating in this mock mediation, it showed me how much really goes into mediation on both the mediator’s side and the clients’ and how collaborative the process really is. Most of the other responsibilities I had were less interacting with clients face to face, so being able to help facilitate mediations and observe was a very valuable experience. Apart from observing mediations, some other responsibilities I had at the internship include taking client intakes, completing preparation for mediation, and billing and post mediation procedures. Since the Fairfield Center is a non-profit organization, there is a lot of paperwork to be done to make sure the site gets reimbursed by the Supreme Court. These responsibilities usually require talking to clients on the phone and entering most information into the database used at the site. Some days I was also given the opportunity to deliver papers to the courthouse and was involved with setting up and organizing aspects of the International Food Festival.

My impression of the site was overall very good. I was able to learn so much about interpersonal relationships and the dynamics of relationships. The biggest takeaway from the site was just knowing how to sense the environment and mood the clients are in, and how to ask questions to create a solution in a unique way. My supervisor and I spent a great deal of time talking about and analyzing each case that we came across. My overall experience was a lot different than I expected, because it was a lot less direct personal interaction and more behind the scenes. I was not the most excited to complete the internship



because of this, but later realized how tricky it can be to communicate to clients face to face. Clients will say one thing just to try and give the mediators bias in their own direction, and there is a fine line to how much advice a mediator can truly give. It is the job of the mediator and intern to find the real issues without seemingly being nosy and confrontational. Another benefit that I had experienced at the site is easy it was to ask for help and guidance when doing work at the site. Most cases deal with custody, visitation, and/or support of children, but every family is very unique in their circumstances. When entering the cases or doing the post mediation checks, it can difficult to know what exactly to do or not because of the level of individuality of each case. In the office the site is placed in is quite small as well, so asking for assistance is really easy. Similarly, all the employees of the Fairfield Center are really friendly and are always willing to help. The one limitation I noticed throughout the duration at my internship, was the lack of organization. Aaron, the supervisor, definitely has a method to his madness. Most of the times the office is filled with files and can frequently be confusing on how to locate a specific file, but it takes a little while to learn and adapt. After I realized how things were done, it was much easier to adjust.

During my time at this site, I was able to learn lots of information about the legal system, reading people, and how to communicate more effectively. I think the amount I have learned in terms about how to communicate with other clients or just communicating in a more professional manner. Due to nature of referrals to the Fairfield Center, when on the phone with clients there can be a number of emotions expressed. It is my job to help get the real issues for the clients without also being too direct about asking questions. Overall, when interacting with clients I also learned how to be more professional in conversations, making sure they had all the relevant information and how to relay information in a professional manner. The use of this skill is basically endless for me. I plan to go to graduate school and knowing how to communicate professionally in upper academics is very important. Looking into the future, I would like to go to graduate school for industrial organizational psychology. When doing research about the field, I found that many people in this field are also certified mediators. After realizing this, I understood profoundly how these mediations and this field of psychology overlap. My fascination and enjoyment in the actual observation session also help me solidify that this is a good area for me to go into for graduate school.

Spring 2019 – Jenna Czerwinski (Intro Field Work)

For my Introductory Field Work experience in the Spring of 2019, I was placed at the Fairfield Center. The Fairfield Center is a mediation center in downtown Harrisonburg. The Fairfield Center focuses on conflict resolution and restorative justice and handles mediations through the general district courts and juvenile district courts in Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Waynesboro. They also will mediate client pay cases, meaning the clients did not go through the court system to receive the Fairfield Center's services. Finally, the Fairfield Center also organizes the International Festival in downtown Harrisonburg every fall.

As an intern, I worked in the mediation services office under Aaron Hagmaier and Nancy Munoz. At the beginning of the semester, I participated in the 20-hour mediation certification class. Although I had to take three days of school off to attend the certification class, I found it really beneficial and enlightening to what exactly mediation is and why mediation is so important. After the class, I participated in practice mediation sessions to put the skills I learned in the class into action. Once again,



those practice sessions gave me an inside look as to what mediators do and how mediation works. My typical work, however, was helping out in the mediation services office. There is definitely a learning curve when it comes to working in the mediation office, but I learned so much and gained so many new skills. The office is fast paced and busy, so you really have to be on the ball. My duties included scheduling sessions with clients, performing intake interview calls, building new cases within VistaShare, prepping folders for mediation, doing post-mediation duties, and closing out finished cases. Since I had never performed duties such as these before, it took some getting used to. I also had to learn how to speak on the phone in a professional manner and communicate clearly with clients. At first, this was intimidating because they would ask questions I did not know the answer to. Soon enough, I learned that it was okay to say that you do not know and need to ask someone who does. Eventually I started picking up on what answers were appropriate for certain questions.

Intake interviews also took a while to learn. Aaron really pushed me to think deeply and ask questions that would get more than a shallow response. Most of the clients I worked with were involved in juvenile district court cases, which means they were looking for mediation services involving custody, visitation, and support issues. These kinds of cases can be very complex and there is a lot that goes on below the surface. A lot of deep emotions are involved in cases with children, so doing intake interviews can be a bit overwhelming sometimes. Mostly, I did not want to upset the person I was talking to or force them to talk about a difficult subject. However, these interviews are important background information for the mediator to have so they can know what issues are involved in the case. I found that people often did not mind sharing about their difficulties and even seemed a bit relieved to have someone to talk about it with. I want to be a clinical psychologist one day and doing these intake calls helped me think deeply about how to approach a person during a difficult time and what questions may be good to ask.

I spent a lot of time doing court paperwork, entering data into VistaShare, and fixing agreement formatting. This is very detailed work and needs to be near perfect in order for the Fairfield Center to run smoothly and for the court to receive information correctly. I am not the most detailed person, so this was definitely a struggle for me. However, I knew if I messed anything up, I could always do it again. Aaron and Nancy are very good about helping you fix your mistakes and correcting you where you need to be better. I certainly received a lot of constructive feedback and it was much needed. I would say an intern at the Fairfield Center must have good understanding that it will take some time to learn how the Fairfield Center functions and they must be okay with being told that they messed or to do tasks over again. You will fail at first, you will have so awkward phone calls with clients where you do not know how to answer questions, you will fill out paperwork wrong, and that is okay. I learned to realize that it is all a part of the learning process and I actually benefited from seeing what not to do!

The Fairfield Center also gave me a better understanding of the community around me. JMU is known for being a bit of a bubble and I came to value breaking outside of that bubble a couple times a week to intern in the community. A lot of the clients I work with were from Harrisonburg or from surrounding areas. Working with the people gave me a better idea of the people that make up Harrisonburg and what struggles they face.

Overall, the Fairfield Center is a wonderful and challenging place to be an intern. You will be stretched and pushed to be better and pick up so many new and useful skills. I now feel much more confident in my professional abilities as well as more confident in handling conflict and stress. Despite the challenging "learning" moments, I am so grateful for the time I had here and would not change it for the world. Placed anywhere else, I would have not acquired so many useful skills and be as prepared as I am for future jobs and internships. The Fairfield Center gave me a unique perspective of Harrisonburg



and of the world around me in general. I view divorce issues and custody, visitation, and support much differently now and have also grown vastly in my understanding of the court systems and how they handle cases involving children.

Fall 2018 – Kezziah Wilgus

Operating as the first mediation center in the state of Virginia, the Fairfield Center strives to help all people listen, plan, and interact effectively. Additionally, Fairfield Center hopes to achieve communities of engagement, appreciation, and cooperation through differences. Having been placed at the Fairfield Center for this past semester, I can honestly say this experience was one of the most enriching opportunities I've had throughout my education. By working at this site, I have made numerous friends and professional contacts, while also learning and improving upon a multitude of skills.

The division of services at the center has been distributed across its five branches, with each branch working to improve a different aspect of community or client engagement. These branches include business services, civic engagement, training, restorative justice, and conflict resolution. Business services, headed by the executive director of the site, is in charge of meeting with investors/sponsors, grant providers, and significant members in the community, ensuring relationships with courts and service providers is smooth, and maintaining the financials and billing services for the entire center. Civic engagement focuses on interacting with the local and international community in Harrisonburg, this branch also works to plan and execute annual International Festival held in the fall season. Training offers classes for improved parenting techniques in split households, as well as training future mediators in general and specialty areas. The restorative justice branch works with communities impacted by crime or wrongdoing to establish justice and acknowledge injustice openly in order to best heal parties and communities. Lastly, the branch of conflict resolution provides direct partnership with surrounding courts to provide mediation services, as well as providing services to local clients for agreements and parenting plans. While my placement took place in the branch of conflict resolution, working within mediation services, all interns were given the opportunity to work or engage with the other four branches to some extent. Opportunities such as sitting in on, assisting with, or completing mediator training and working as a volunteer assistant for restorative justice programs are just a few examples.

This experience can be divided up into a few different categories. The first, and most prominent, of the responsibilities as an intern has to do with client interaction. Client interaction, or client service coordination, involves intake interviews with all involved parties in a dispute or court case, follow-up calls on any issues or appointments specific to a case, scheduling for future appointments, and preparing for mediation sessions.

This site, while it is an amazing experience, definitely has an adjustment curve. As someone who is naturally independent and meticulously neat, I struggled to adapt to the busy environment of the Fairfield Center. In the first two or three weeks, I was overwhelmed by the amount of papers and rules and scripts and formatting we had to follow seemingly as soon as I stepped into the office on my first day. Aaron, an excellent supervisor, strongly believes in the educational powers of osmosis and experiential learning, something for which I had very little experience and limited patience. Looking back now, from the end of the semester, I can honestly say I have learned nearly everything possible for me to learn by



watching others do it first, and by experiencing it first hand with only instinct and intuition (and Aaron) to guide me. By sticking it out and adapting to the environment, you are better able to get a sense of the inner workings of a mediation center. As a team, after the initial awkwardness, the other interns and I were able to band together to create a system of organization that made sense for each of us, thus changing our environment to our needs, while keeping with the system we had learned was in place.

In the end, what I initially disliked about the site, became what I loved most. While I didn't like working with and as a team, I came to be extremely appreciative of what each of my cohorts brought to the table, and their individual styles for handling all aspects of case managements. We bonded well and all have plans to keep in touch once our internships have ended. Even the general hectic-ness and independence demanded by the site, I would inevitably come to appreciate. I think this site enhanced my confidence in performing tasks and client interviews, I no longer feel the need to double check with a supervisor when I move on to the next task, I simply inform someone of what I have already done.

Over the course of this semester, I have worked on designing screening procedure prototypes to be implemented into the intake interview process. Through extensive comparative research, I decided to integrate the following screening tools into possible intakes scripts: Woman Abuse Screening Tool (WAST), Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), Drug Use Questionnaire (DAST-10), Simple Screening Instrument for Alcohol and Other Disorders (SSI-AOD), and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). These screenings are designed to more thoroughly review characteristics and habits of our clients, and to balance out the abysmal self-reported screening questionnaire that is filled out by the petitioner at a courthouse. It has happened many times, despite the court having a screening questionnaire, that a case will be referred to the office, only for us to learn that the case is no longer eligible for mediation due to accusations of child abuse, domestic violence, illegal drug use, severe mental health, and alcoholism.

Quite frankly, I cannot recommend this site enough. Going into my senior year at JMU I knew I wanted to work with children as a clinical psychologist, with a focus on interpersonal relationships and environments experienced throughout adolescence. I already had experience working directly with children, having been a Big Sister at the local Big Brothers Big Sisters branch for two years, as well as volunteering for various camps and programs that focused on child outreach. Working at the Fairfield Center allowed me to look behind the curtain, and analyze the incredible impact parents can have on their child's well-being. By working to create the best situation for a child with separating or divorcing parents, I got a much closer look at what can cause the most grief and tension. I found this to be incredibly interesting and I will value the various discussions on psychological relevance that Aaron and I had throughout the rest of my academic and professional career.

Spring 2017 – Sarah Kline

Fairfield Center strives to help people communicate and interact in a more efficient way. They offer several services towards this goal including mediation, restorative justice, and training for people wanting to be a mediator and continuing education classes for certified mediators. They also provide services to the business community on how to communicate within the organization or workshop. These services include but are not limited to how to conduct a productive meeting, sensitivity training, and how to deal with conflict in the workplace. They are also very active in the community and are often involved in community activities such as the international festival.



I worked in mediation services and we as interns were offered many experiences that are unique to this site. I attended several mediator trainings that were focused on training people to become certified mediators. I attended basic mediator training, family mediation training, domestic abuse and mediation, and finally a training on Virginia law all for no cost to me. They offer all their interns these trainings free of charge which normally can be hundreds of dollars. We were allowed to participate in the same way that any of the other people were and at the end we received official completion papers. At the end of the semester, I had all the required trainings that are needed to begin the process of being certified. The next step in the certification process is to observe a certified mediator and we were also allowed to do this. We were allowed to sit in on real mediations and observe the mediation. I was allowed to sit in on three mediations that were from the juvenile court. They were all based around the issues of custody, visitation, and child support. The final unique experience that we were allowed to participate in was we went to general district court and observed the cases as they were presented in court. We would go with a certified mediator to see if the judge would refer any cases to mediation, and if they did I would take all of their information and have them write down anything that was relevant for the case. I would also have to determine if they could mediate at that time and if so I would walk them back to the mediation center and if not I would determine a time when they could mediate and schedule that. We never had a case referred to us while I sat in court, but it was very interesting to watch the court proceeding and identify what might be referred to us from the docket.

The everyday activities that I performed really depended on the day and what times I was at the site. The main tasks all involved case management. Every day in the morning we would make reminder calls and prepare the folders for the following day's mediations. As we received new cases, we would build them in the database and do intakes with each individual. After clients had mediated, if they had come to an agreement we would proofread and format the agreements, send them to the clients, and make calls in reference to them once they had received them. We would also input the client evaluations and the information provided by the clients into the database. When they signed and returned the agreements we would do the court report, bill the case, and close the case. Also on Wednesdays, we had a staff meeting where we discussed what each part of the center was doing and any updates.

I really enjoyed working there because the day was always different. We were always doing different things with different people. Each case was different and had its own issues. I did not want to do the same thing every day and at this site you might do the same activities, but it's always different because the cases are all different. There were also several interns that were there when I was there, so I was rarely alone to answer phones or to do the work. It also helped because you had someone to help you if you didn't know how to do something or if you needed help with a case. I also really liked that I learned a lot about case management because I feel that in the Psychology major that is something that we do not really learn about, and I think it is really useful to have experience with it because it is a critical part of a lot of jobs that are in this field.

There is a lot to learn at this site and it is a continued learning process. After being there for the 150 hours, there are still things I do not know how to do or need to ask about. It was really hard to first because I started right after they had just had the winter holiday, so the court was backed up and the center had been without interns for a month. Everything was backed up and entering into that was stressful because we were shown how to do a lot of things once and then told to try to do it on our own. It was really a crash course on how to do a lot of things because of how many cases we had to work on. We would do what we could do then ask each other and try to work it out. I actually think that helped us learn, and we still continued to do it until the end when there was something we were not sure about. At



the beginning, I never believed that I would learn how to do all of the things that were required for a case, but by the end I had.

I learned several skills that will be useful when I become a counselor. I learned case management skills that I think will be really important when I need to manage my case load and be able to do all the case notes and calls to the clients. It is not always the case that counselors have someone to do their billing and other things involved in the administrative side, so it is good to have some exposure to it before graduate school. I also learned a lot about listening, finding the important information, clarifying that information, and how to respond in a direct concise manor.

Something to consider about this placement is that it can be hectic and often there are several people talking on the phones or several phones ringing at one time. Interruptions happen often and you have to be able to multitask, often doing three or four things at once. I would be in the middle of a task then have to drop that task to answer the phone and deal with whatever that call was about. I also had to talk to a person, be looking up their information and case notes, as well as any agreements we had on them while taking notes about what they were say. Prioritizing is key at this placement, but it also offers a chance to enhance these skills.

Fall 2016 – Kat Donovan

The mission of the FairField Center is to “help people listen, plan, and interact effectively.” They are a non-profit center that offers conflict resolution, restorative justice, civic engagement, communication training, and business services. As an intern, I worked in mediation services. The vast majority of cases are court-referred and subsidized through the Juvenile and Domestic Relations and General District Courts in Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, the Augusta County/Staunton Courthouse, and Waynesboro; however, many clients come to mediation of their own volition and pay out of pocket based on a sliding scale fee structure.

My day-to-day experiences consisted mainly of case management including (but not limited to) building cases in our database with information from court petitions and motions, intake interviews with clients over the phone, preparing case files for mediators before mediation sessions, post mediation processes (billing, court bookkeeping, entering demographic data into an Excel worksheet, and processing client evaluations), editing and mailing mediation agreements, plus closing and filing cases. I also attended weekly staff meetings, sat in on a mediation, and attended General District Court and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court sessions. Occasionally, I checked our mailbox at the courthouse for referrals from judges, and I also dropped off billing forms at the courthouse.

I spent most of my time on the phone with clients talking about their cases. The vast majority of cases I handled involved custody, visitation, and/or support (mainly child support but occasionally spousal support). The purpose of these intake interviews is to get the pertinent background details of the case before mediation in order to maximize the time spent in session, as well as to screen for the appropriateness of cases for mediation. Sometimes families are referred to mediation even though there are active Child Protective Services investigations or domestic abuse, in which case it is not appropriate for the FairField Center to conduct mediation. These intake interviews are simultaneously fascinating and draining. While it is always interesting to hear the circumstances of cases, going over the minute details of



current custody and visitation arrangements plus the particulars of gross monthly income, health insurance, childcare bills, etc., is exhausting. It can also be emotionally taxing to hear the specifics of the wide range of problems people face, including single parenthood, irresponsible and potentially dangerous parenting, and instances of abuse/violence.

This site is very supportive and open to making your experience what you want it to be. The staff and other interns or volunteers are always open to suggestions and invite interns to do things such as sit in on mediations. Everyone is incredibly friendly and happy to answer questions and help in anyway. They are willing to put interns to work right away in the sense that there is immediate on-the-job training. This could be a positive or a negative for some people—it may be uncomfortable to make a phone call to a client on the very first day, but the staff and volunteers are there with you every step of the way. Learning by doing is the philosophy for learning how to complete tasks. This may be intimidating to many, but it is the best and only way to pick up skills in this work atmosphere. There is too much information to go over in one sitting, so interns are assigned tasks with some instruction the first time (or two) around and are then expected to accomplish that task again without instruction. These tasks may be made confusing by the large number of steps it takes to complete a task and the sometimes overwhelming filing and organization system. However, if you are unsure of something, it is encouraged that you ask questions.

At this site, I learned mostly about the mediation process but I learned a lot about other forms of alternative dispute resolution (such as restorative justice). This was a great site to learn about the basic forms of dispute resolution at a micro-level. I was able to build a foundational knowledge of conflict for graduate school, where I plan to study conflict resolution at the macro-level (international conflict).

I also learned a lot about the legal system (as it pertains to juveniles plus General District Court) in Virginia and various court processes. This site would be a good fit for those looking to learn about families involved in the legal system, including matters of protective orders and *guardian ad litums* (lawyers appointed to represent the best interests of the child and investigate such matters). As it was related to child support cases, I learned a lot about healthcare programs for children in Virginia such as Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS), plus federal welfare programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In this way, a field placement at the FairField Center could interest individuals who would like to work with needy families as part of their career. I also encountered cases that involved incarcerated parents, the Department of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), and the Department of Social Services. These cases could be trickier to manage compared to other cases because the typically involved more issues for interns to inquire about over the phone.

Other than in these capacities, people interested in psychology will also develop interpersonal communication skills just because of the sheer amount of client interaction that is necessary. This includes opportunity for professional communication with peers, mediators, and court officials. You may also have the opportunity to look at developmental psychology from a different perspective because custody and visitation agreements always reflect the age and developmental level of the child(ren) in question. Mediation in general would be a good field for someone with a psychology background to enter into, as the education a psychology student receives could give good insight to guiding conversations and helping people come to a compromise. However, it is important to note that while mediators are certified, it is not does not allow for them to give legal advice, nor is it the role of a mediator to offer counseling or clinical services to clients.



Spring 2015 – Daniel Delcoco

FairField Center's mission is to promote understanding through dialogue. This mission is comprised of five sub-categories: conflict resolution, restorative justice, business services, civic engagement, and training. Conflict resolution is the category/goal you will be working with if you intern at FairField. This is resolving any kind of dispute through mediation, be it a property, workplace, or divorce dispute. Clients are either referred to the center through the courts when they go to the court to file a petition, or clients come to FairField on their own accord. Clients who are referred through the courts do not pay for mediation; the court covers this expense. Clients who come on their own, though, have to each pay hourly depending on their gross yearly income according to a sliding fee scale. Day-to-day activities at the FairField Center for me included building new cases, conducting intakes with clients, giving clients and mediators reminder calls for those with next-day appointments, preparing their folders for mediation, creating and sending documents to mediators, mailing draft agreement forms (the agreements drawn up by clients in their mediation sessions) to clients, and faxing signed agreements with court reports to court. I would not do all of this every single day. Mostly, I found myself preparing documents for clients with next-day appointments, reminding clients and mediators, and doing intake calls. Intake calls can easily take up the bulk of a work day at FairField, as each one can last anywhere from 5-15 minutes (going over 15 minutes is not advisable) and there are always many intake calls to be done. In all honesty, I really loved working at FairField and was sad when I had to say goodbye; I had been apprehensive at the start, though. When I first started my field placement at FairField, I was nervous that I would crack while working under pressure and not be able to get the job done. Something that could induce this would be having to deal with multiple clients at once, or having to hear other people talking on the phone while you are trying to talk to a client on the phone. One of the things I did not like about working at FairField was just how suddenly busy everything could get at one moment and how everything would calm down and then randomly get very busy again; it was extremely variable. Although, I've learned that this is to be expected at any professional job. If you get distracted easily by other people talking while you are trying to communicate via telephone with someone, this may not be the site for you. That being said, though, I learned how to effectively deal with this by just plugging my free ear with one hand, and listening to the client with my other ear. The work environment at FairField, though, is a rare one that I believe to be the best environment anyone could ask for. Everyone is extremely open, caring, and genuine. The relationships you will form at this site (if you choose to let them form) will last a lifetime. I definitely plan to keep in touch with and visit Aaron, my supervisor. Working at FairField has helped increase my competence in many areas. I am better able to navigate VistaShare, the online client/case database that is used by the FairField Center. I am also better at doing this rather quickly, when I am on the phone with a client. Being trained as a Client Service Coordinator



by Aaron helped increase my competence, as I was able to take in and learn a lot of pertinent information. Additionally, I have gotten a lot better at being independent at work. By this I just mean that I am able to work productively and effectively when Aaron is gone and is not there to answer any questions that I might have or that might arise. Because I am, for the most part, doing the same tasks every time I go to work at my site, it helps a lot to have a set schedule of things that I aim to complete by the end of my work day. Engaging in these same tasks every other day has allowed me to gain more knowledge surrounding the conflict resolution process as a whole, which has increased my competence as it enables me to do my job more effectively. Ironically, working at FairField confirmed for me that I do not enjoy the mediation process as much as I do the therapeutic process. Mediation is more about helping clients find common ground, and there are many legal issues surrounding the mediation process. Therapy, on the other hand, is more about delving into clients' emotions and why they are present. This interests me much more than mediation, which is fortunate because I am going to graduate school for marriage and family therapy.

Kaitlynn Iantosca

The Fairfield Center is a non-profit organization in downtown Harrisonburg that provides many different services. They do mediations, restorative justice, trainings and offer many other services. The Fairfield Center is also very involved in the Harrisonburg community. As an intern, however, I only worked in the mediation center part of the organization. I spent most of my time doing case management work. Most of the mediation cases that the Fairfield Center handles are court referred child custody, visitation and support cases. There is also a percentage of the cases that are client pay or General District Court cases. These might include cases in which someone has not paid for a service provided for them and the party providing the service files against them in civil court. We receive referrals from Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Staunton/Augusta County and Waynesboro.

I conducted many intake interviews over the phone to gather relevant information from the clients before they came in to mediation which could help the mediator be more prepared. This experience was very valuable for me because I plan to go into counseling. Any kind of communication skills are important for pretty much any field, but intakes are also very important for counseling and I am very grateful to have gotten the opportunity for practice here. There is also a lot of administrative work when it comes to case management. I had to keep the data for all cases up-to-date in the computer system and make sure all the tasks were completed before and after the mediation session.

I also had the opportunity to sit in on court many times. In General District Court, we screened the cases to see if they were appropriate for mediation. I was also very fortunate to sit in on Juvenile and Domestic Relations court to watch our family cases come full circle. Unlike General District Court, these proceedings are closed to the public except for representatives from the Fairfield Center. I learned so much more about the process from seeing these cases in court because I could see how the judge reacted to the clients and what the standard practice is. It also helped when clients had questions about the process.



When appropriate, the Center allows interns to observe actual mediation sessions. It is very beneficial to see mediators in action and how different mediators handle different situations. This also helps when clients have questions about what to expect. The Fairfield Center also offers many opportunities for training. They offer interns the chance to participate in these trainings for free or just the cost of the materials. Some of these opportunities include the basic mediation training, family mediation training and others on effective communicating. These are all great opportunities for professional or personal development and the Center really encourages interns to participate. The staff at the Center is small, but that made me feel more comfortable in that there is more of a sense of working together than if there were more people doing their own tasks. In this kind of organization where the community is the main focus, this is a huge advantage to their efficacy.

My experience at the Fairfield Center will no doubt be invaluable to me as a future counselor. I was able to improve my communication skills and learn how to listen for certain things while conducting intakes. I learned how to ask better reflective questions and instill a sense of confidence in the process in the clients. I was able to practice confidentiality and good ethical practices with every case. However, I think probably the most valuable lessons I will take away from my placement at the Fairfield Center are from my interactions with the clients. I was exposed to clients that were so incredibly different than anyone I have ever encountered and I have learned so much from them. Every case is different because every person is different. As a counselor, I will be interacting with people that are also different and I am so grateful to have gotten the opportunity to be exposed to this kind of diversity so early.