



# Intensive Community Treatment

## Placement Description

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The Intensive Community Treatment (ICT) team was launched in January 2018 to provide services in the community to adults with serious mental illness who have been unsuccessful with traditional outpatient therapy for one reason or another. We are especially focusing on people with psychosis and some with co-occurring substance use disorders. The team follows the Assertive Community Treatment evidence based practice and is similar to the larger PACT teams in Virginia. The ICT team consists of a prescriber (currently an NP by telepsych), a nurse, a peer, a vocational specialist (masters level), a substance use specialist (also masters), and me, the team leader and also a therapist. (I'll just also mention that all 3 of the masters level therapists on the team are JMU graduates. Go DUKES!) We are able to serve up to 50 clients for a ratio of 10 clients to 1 staff and currently have about 30 clients. I anticipate that we will be at full capacity by the end of 2019 if not sooner. On a daily basis, we travel to see these clients in Shenandoah and Page counties. Sometimes we assist them with transport to the store, appointments, go for walks, help organize medications, provide psychoeducation on medications or diagnosis and/or meet for psychotherapy in their home or other location. Our goal is to be in contact with clients an average of 3 times per week. Some we see more and some less depending on their needs and goals.

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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Interns would be welcome to ride along with the team to see what each person does and how they approach various clients and their problems. They could certainly help with some of the case management kind of work such as making appointments for clients and helping to organize various parts of the program as need arises. We have regular psychosocial groups that often require a good bit of leg work to arrange. We will soon be starting a substance use group in Page county and subsequently one in Shenandoah county as the need indicates.

## Contact Information

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- Contact Person: Aaron Boggs

**Read about student experiences at this site below:**



*Spring 2020 – Alyssa Rovder*

This semester I had the opportunity to intern at PACT South, formally known as Intensive Community Treatment which operates under Northwestern Community Services. They serve individualized treatment to adults with severe mental illnesses that focus on psychosis such as schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder and some clients have co-occurring substance abuse as well. PACT South follows the ACT model which is a multidisciplinary team of staff members that provide individualized community-based treatment, rehabilitation, and support services to assist adults with severe mental illnesses. Some of the services PACT South offers is medicine management, transportation to grocery store food pantry or doctor appointments, mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, employment counseling, and weekly psychosocial groups. This service helps individuals with severe mental illnesses avoid psychiatric hospitalization so they can live as independently as they can in a natural community environment. Northwestern Community Services mission is “it is the mission of Northwestern Community Services to help people through life’s challenges with quality behavioral health services guided by principles of respect, recovery and self-determination.”

At PACT South, I would either shadow the mental health counselor, registered nurse, peer support specialist or my main supervisor, Aaron, who is a mental health counselor and Team Lead. Each week, I shadowed a different staff member to see what their role was PACT South but also how they interacted with the clients differently. I spent the most time shadowing the mental health counselors and the registered nurse on staff. During a client visit, I got to observe staff counsel clients, assist with case management tasks like helping the client clean up, manage/administer medications, or take clients to doctor appointments, grocery store or food pantry. Client visits take place at the clients home and the services provided depends on their needs for that visit. For many clients, they are dependent on staff to live on their own. This creates an unique relationship between staff and clients especially if the client is seen every day. The clients at PACT South were very welcoming and kind to me. I really got to know clients from talking with them in the car ride to their appointments, visiting with them in their home visits or participating in group weekly.

I also had the opportunity to attend and participate in group sessions that occurred every Wednesday. The main purpose of the group at PACT South was to provide clients with an opportunity to socialize with others who are going through the same thing as them. During the group, clients got to eat lunch together, play games, make crafts and listen to guest speakers. This was a time for clients to have fun and build relationships with others who are like them with no pressure. The group setting created a more relaxed environment which made it easy to build relationships with clients especially when clients came every week.

The highlight of this experience is getting to observe counseling sessions with clients and get hands on experience working with adults with severe mental illness. Prior to this experience, I had no experience working with individuals with severe mental illness. I have learned so much about the ACT model, Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective disorder, substance abuse, mental health system, case management, counseling, and even myself. This experience confirmed for me that I am pursuing the right career. It also helped me realize what population I want to work with in the future. This is truly an experience I will take with me throughout my psychology career.



*Fall 2019 – Jenna Czerwinski*

Intensive Community Treatment is a program provided by Northwestern Community Services Board. ICT provides services to people with severe mental illness based off the Assertive Community Treatment model. The team at ICT works directly with clients who have had recurrent hospitalizations, are categorized as noncompliant, or have had multiple suicide attempts in the last year by giving them “in vivo” services. “In vivo” services mean that services are provided when and where they are needed. Counselors are available to work with clients from 9-5pm Monday-Friday, in addition to a 24 hours crisis service available. They perform duties such as taking clients to the store, food pantry, and doctors’ appointments as well as providing counseling and mental health assistance such as medication management. The team makes it a priority to see all clients at least once a week, or as much as necessary. ICT is an extremely unique and beneficial program for people with serious mental illness (SMI) in Virginia, providing a multitude of services that other programs cannot provide.

While placed at ICT, I shadowed the team leader, Aaron Boggs, as well as the other counselors. We went on daily visits to the clients’ homes to give them medicine, have a counseling session, or take them to the store or the doctor, and much more. What ICT helps clients with is based on the client’s need and changes day to day. We sat with them in their own homes and I observed as the counselors helped them with mental health specific issues as well as just general life issues that anyone may face. Taking the clients to whatever places they needed to go, whether the doctor or the store, was a wonderful way to engage with them and get to know them better individually. The clients are very dependent on the ICT team, so they build a really special relationship with the counselors. I got to know most of the clients personally and most of them were very welcoming to me. Observing the counselors while they were in the field was an experience that I will take with me into my future career. I am very grateful for the opportunity and have found the experience very beneficial to my education.

In addition to observing the counselors, I had the opportunity to attend group sessions. Group sessions provided time for me to get to know the clients on an even more personal level. We played games, made various crafts, and ate lunch together. The objective of a group session is to provide a time for certain clients to socialize with other people like them and foster a sense of community. There is usually a core group of clients who show up every week, but every now and again a client decides to come out and try group for the first time. Group is my favorite day of the week because it is chance to get to know clients in a more relaxed and less structured environment. Spending time with clients in a group context is a ton of fun and builds trust. The group setting levels the playing field and helps create a person to person relationship, rather than counselor to client.

For my contribution project, I created psychoeducational packets to go through with the clients during the first 15 minutes of group session. The purpose of the psychoeducational packets was to help educate clients on different aspects of their illnesses and work on their social skills. Psychoeducational packets can be easily integrated into ACT programs and are proven to be beneficial to people with SMI. The ICT team had been wanting to begin a psychoeducational aspect as apart of group for a while, but due to being temporarily understaffed, they did not have the proper time or resources. I decided to take on the job because it sounded interesting and fun



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to me. The project was a good challenge for me, as I had to research different mental health topics and condense necessary information into short, easy to understand packets. In addition, I had to present the packets at group and lead the clients in a discussion about the topics. Leading the clients and acting a bit as a “teacher” was a rewarding experience for me and I was very grateful for their respect and attention.

This experience has changed the way I view people with severe mental illness for the better. Going into the experience, I had a fair share of unconscious stigma towards people with severe mental illness due to other people’s opinions and social media. However, my time at ICT helped change my perspective on people with SMI. I learned how valuable they are to the community and how they are different than most people think. I had not had the opportunity to work with people with SMI before ICT, so it was a wonderful way to get hands on experience with this population and learn about what they are actually like. My time at ICT broke down a lot of stigma for me and has inspired me to help break down stigma for other people surrounding mental illness. I now realize just how important that is for certain people’s lives, especially the clients at ICT.

I would highly recommend this placement for anyone looking for hands on, clinical experience and is looking to work with people with mental illness. I will say, having a flexible and easy-going attitude is a must to be an intern at ICT because each day is a little bit different and you are never really quite sure what is going to happen. To me, that was one of the best parts of it all. Placement at ICT is never boring. Being someone who is comfortable with small talk and being with strangers is also an advantage for being placed at ICT. Not all clients feel comfortable starting a conversation but would love to be involved in one. Therefore, being capable of engaging someone you do not know is a very helpful and beneficial skill. Finally, having an open and non-judgmental attitude will make the experience more enjoyable for both you and the clients you interact with!