



# Summit House

## Placement Description

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A day program that assists people with mental illnesses to work on recovery goals. Provides a setting to enhance mental and physical well-being and social supports.

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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- Involvement in daily work units (clerical, kitchen, and maintenance)
- Individual work with participants (supportive counseling, assistance with vocational goals)
- Orientation of new members
- Assisting with social programs
- Leading or co-leading afternoon educational programs
- Attending program planning meetings

## Contact Information

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*Fall 2021 - Katie Angle*

Summit House is a psychosocial rehabilitation center (PSR) that focuses on aiding clients in their recovery from mental illness through psychoeducation groups, daily chores/jobs, and social support. They are a non-residential PSR run through the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community Services Board (HRCBS). Clients can come to Summit House on Monday-Friday from 9am-3pm and are served lunch and a snack. Throughout the day, individuals have the opportunity to attend fitness breaks, attend psychoeducation groups, and assist staff with meals and cleaning around the house. The remainder of the day can then be used to socialize with other clients and talk to staff. Staff work with clients to create treatment plans which entail goals that the client would like to meet over a certain period of time. Staff also monitor new developments with the clients and provide support as needed. Summit House's model asserts that everyone has something valuable to add, and the set-up of the facility reflects that belief. Many clients at Summit House have other services outside of this PSR, therefore, they are receiving other forms of care and assistance.

As an intern, I provided proximal support to clients. I spent a majority of my time engaging clients in conversation, helping them with chores, and attending psychoeducation groups with them. Some clients shared their experiences living with mental illness with me and discussed the ways that they cope with it now. I attended staff meetings with the staff at Summit House when they discuss updates on clients or tasks that need to be completed each day. These staff meetings were informative and taught me about terminology in clinical settings. The staff at Summit House are kind, and they spent time describing unfamiliar terms to me and briefing me on anything different for that day. I would sometimes help in the kitchen, preparing lunch or assisting clients with serving meals. Clients do most of the serving, but sometimes I would fill-in if a client became tired or needed to attend to something else. If I saw changes in a client's mood or behavior, I would report that to staff, and they would discuss why that may be or keep an eye on the behavior. Interning at Summit House has provided room for observation, coping skills, and setting healthy boundaries with clients. It provided me with the opportunity to learn about confidentiality, stigma of mental illness, and an insight into how different mental health facilities are connected in the Harrisonburg community.

As someone who is interested in clinical psychology, Summit House was a perfect placement for me. It allows interns the chance to talk to people who are living with more severe forms of mental illness and see how PSR can help them. Going into this experience, I had never been in a setting where I had to work with this type population and was a bit nervous. There is a great deal of stigma around disorders like schizophrenia, bipolar, and personality disorders, therefore I did not know what to expect. I did not know how to interact with clients and was worried that I might say something wrong. Through this experience, my supervisor and the staff at Summit House helped prepare me for issues that may arise and what to say in those situations. There weren't many situations where I did not feel prepared or at a loss for words. One major advantage of Summit House is that the clients want to attend, and they want to interact with everyone there. Clients often speak of their experiences and what has helped or what has hindered their progress. From a clinical perspective, it has been beneficial to see what factors



clients discuss as either aiding or harming their mental health and how that fits in with knowledge from classes. I learned how to set important boundaries and create professional relationships throughout this experience. If there was something I was uncomfortable discussing, I would be able to say that it was not something appropriate to discuss at Summit House and that would be the end of that question. Setting those boundaries and learning how to affirm positive behaviors has been of value. Also, interacting with staff members who are trained and know the clients has been a major advantage of Summit House and has created a space for education outside of the classroom. I did not find many limitations through my time at Summit House. My only major limitation was not knowing some of the technicalities in terms used at the site and some of the processes that the HRCBS goes through for clients. There were some times when I did not understand what staff were talking about because it was information that I had not learned yet. However, I learned so much from asking questions about terms and processes that it proved to be a minor limitation.

Before being an intern at Summit House, I did not think I would want to work with adults in the mental health field because it was intimidating, and I enjoy working with children. However, I found that I enjoyed working with this population and would definitely work with adults in the future. I also loved the PSR model of recovery. It puts responsibility into the client's actions and decisions, while also providing the support that they need to be successful. My experience at Summit House has made me more open to different career avenues and made me realize that many mental healthcare professionals get experience with a variety of populations. It has also taught me how different mental disorders are presented in individuals. Two people with the same diagnosis sometimes have entirely different characteristics and presentations of it, which is interesting to observe. It also pushed me outside my comfort zone, because I didn't always know what to do when I was there and had to sometimes take initiative to find something of value to do at Summit House.

My experience at Summit House has confirmed that I am studying to be in the right field and that the mental health field is a one that needs individuals who care. For anyone seeking experience in a clinical setting, Summit House provides a glimpse of what that looks like and ways to work with individuals who have mental illness. The staff have been kind and welcoming, so it has been a wonderful experience for me. The clients have been kind, as well, and have taught me about their lives and the relationships that they have built with each other at Summit House. This experience has also shown me how this profession is always evolving. There is always talk of something being improved or changed with a goal of improvement. It has taught me how to conduct myself in a professional manner and how to listen empathetically to people. It has been an experience that I will forever be grateful for, and I encourage future interns to apply to intern at Summit House.

### ***Spring 2020 – Dani Diaz***

This semester I completed my field placement at Summit House, which is located on Pear Street in Harrisonburg. Summit House is a community based self-rehabilitation program designed to help members recover from mental illness. Using the clubhouse model, participation



within the program is completely voluntary. Members can participate through engagement in different activities with others and jobs around the facility. Summit House's mission statement is as follows: to provide a self-help rehabilitation setting where persons who experienced mental illness can work on recovery goals and give and receive support from peers. A key component to the mission statement is the mention of support from peers. Summit House's program is a center for social rehabilitation, meaning that a focus of the program is for members to work on their social skills. As human beings, it is in our makeup to be social creatures. Some of the experiences that someone with mental illness can go through—discharge from a psychiatric hospital, isolation, possible trauma—can inhibit peer interaction. Knowing this, Summit House provides a safe environment for members to come and work on those skills so they can apply them in the community and establish healthy relationships.

On top of providing social support to members, Summit House also provides educational groups for members to attend every day. These groups can range from meditation to substance abuse or even acupuncture therapy. Each group provides a unique lesson to educate members about, with tools and knowledge that they can apply to their daily life outside of Summit House. During these groups, there is also a discussion component where members and staff can talk about different points made or their opinions on the topic of the specific group. Everything is geared to helping members with social skills and educating them so they can have success in recovering from their mental illness. Unfortunately because of Covid-19, the weekly social programs, where members were able to go out into the community together, is not available. However, other social activities, such as playing games, are still available to continue to exercise those skills and provide support when appropriate.

My experience at Summit House was extremely positive. While certain parts of the schedule were relatively fixed with check in at 9AM, group at 10:30, and lunch at noon, there was still a lot of variation of what could take place during the day. I started the day by checking members in, which initially helped me learn their names. Once I was there for a significant amount of time, check in served as a nice way to be one of the first faces they saw. If I was not checking members in, I was helping brew and serve coffee. Because of Covid-19, members were not free to help in the kitchen like before, so it was our job as staff to serve any food or drinks to avoid possible contamination. Serving coffee was another way to socialize with members and check in to see how they were doing. As mentioned before, groups took place around 10:30, so I would attend those and participate when appropriate. I normally observed when I attended, but I would participate and give my feedback when appropriate. I wanted to make sure I did not take away from the lesson or discussion. Between group and lunch I would walk around the facility and socialize with different members, playing games if members were up for it. Because Summit House's schedule was pretty relaxed, I had to assert myself into jobs or conversations with members, but when I made it known I wanted to help out in some way there was always something to do.

As part of my field placement, I was required to come up with a contribution project. This project needed to be something that could be implemented at the site now or in the future. Many members at Summit House suffer from severe mental illness, so I wanted to come up with something that would help and benefit them. Knowing I want to go into clinical psychology and



specialize in trauma, and knowing that trauma is comorbid with many mental disorders, I decided to come up with a psychoeducational group centered around posttraumatic stress disorder. The plan was for the group to discuss the basics—what PTSD is, what are its symptoms, possible triggers, and treatments—before moving on to discussion on different tools that can help with PTSD symptomology. Two topics I chose to research were coping strategies—what coping strategies are, the difference between healthy and unhealthy coping strategies, and examples of healthy coping strategies—and breathing exercises. I found this part of the group important because these were tools that they could apply to their life outside Summit House should they need to. These tools are also helpful in other scenarios not just related to PTSD, so I thought educating them in these areas was vital. The group was scheduled to meet once a month or so, and would be announced in advance so members could plan accordingly. Handouts were found to be helpful for members so they had something to hold onto from group, so I found summaries online of each topic that could be handed out at the end of my psychoeducational group. This way they could have all the information discussed and would not risk forgetting the main points.

Overall, my experience at Summit House was a success. The location was perfect since it was in Harrisonburg so the commute was not too bad. The staff were extremely welcoming and encouraging which was so comforting, especially with so much uncertainty with Covid-19. My only complaint about my experience was the lack of structure. Although I felt comfortable with the lack of structure by the end of the semester, it was hard to find a steady rhythm without there being much guidance of what I should be doing throughout the day. Knowing this, however, the lack of structure forced me out of my comfort zone and I learned to be more assertive with staff and members. I became more comfortable approaching others for simple conversation, to play a game, or to ask if there is anything I should be doing. Depending on the kind of student you are, this lack of structure can go either way, however, I think that it can work in everyone's favor if you're patient and willing to step out of your comfort zone! Something I learned from this experience is how to interact with people who have severe mental illness. Not having had a clinical internship before, or any prior experience working with someone with severe mental illness, this experience taught me how to treat someone with mental illness and see how living with mental illness can affect everyday life. Not only did I get a greater understanding of how it can affect someone's life, but I also saw how important the combination of different services was to recovery (i.e., self-rehabilitation, therapy, working). This successful experience continued to confirm that working in this line of work is something I am invested in doing, and it has made me more excited for my future jobs.

In summary, this experience was one of the highlights of my time here at JMU. I learned so much about the clinical field and what a career in the psychology field could look like. I had amazing support at Summit House from both staff and members which made the experience so much better! Even with the effects of Covid-19, I was able to have such a successful and positive experience and for that I'm extremely thankful. I loved that I was able to make such a positive impact in the Harrisonburg community, and hope that the next interns have just as positive of an experience.



*Spring 2020 – Sydney DeMarco*

For my field placement experience during the fall semester of 2020 I interned at Summit House. Summit House is an outpatient psycho-social rehabilitation facility where members (those who utilize Summit House's services) come during the day to practice social, emotional, coping and vocational skills as well as attend group therapy and various other programs. The mission of Summit House is to employ a "clubhouse model" of therapy in which the members are responsible for maintaining the house as well as making decisions regarding the house and the activities that take place within it. Calling the individuals who come to Summit House "members" instead of "patients" or "clients" displays the community and holistic approach to therapy that Summit House attempts to supply. The employees of Summit House lead group therapy as well as help with individual issues when members seek the individual attention. Every Summit House member is on one of the employee's caseloads and attend quarterly meetings to discuss progress at Summit House as well as progress in other aspects of their respective treatment.

My time at Summit House was one that I thoroughly enjoyed, I was exposed to opportunities that I never thought I would experience as an undergraduate student. When I first started my field placement I spent some time observing and shadowing my supervisor (who was awesome), once I felt comfortable with the environment and members I was given the freedom to do whatever I felt appropriate throughout the facility. I started by getting to know the members, who are extremely friendly and open individuals. I was a little nervous that the members would be cautious about talking to me or would feel that their routine was being interrupted by my presence, but all of the members were more than happy to have discussions with me. As my days at Summit House went on I got into a daily routine (since I was interning during the Covid pandemic my routine may not be what everyone experiences). I began my days by checking members in, I would then hang out around the facility and chat with members or help them if they had any concerns, then there would be a group therapy session that I would either attend or lead, after that I usually played games with a few members until lunch time, at lunch time I would help prepare and serve lunch and would end the day debriefing with my supervisor. This routine allowed me a lot of free time to talk to different members and learn more about their past and current situations, this was an extremely rewarding part of the field placement experience. Another extremely rewarding component of the experience was the debriefs with my supervisor. In these debriefs I learned how to preform mental status exams, practiced recognizing diagnostic material and learned how to shift to a clinical mindset. I learned an insane amount from my supervisor in these debriefs. My supervisor also allowed me to accompany her to a Daily Living Assessment (DLA) meeting where we met with one of our members as well as his case manager and housing staff. I learned the components of a DLA and got to watch the process of one of these meetings. Overall, I was exposed to countless opportunities to expand my knowledge through hands on experiences.

One of the most exciting opportunities that I had during the semester was implementing my contribution project. For my contribution project I decided to research the effect that negative



illness identity (the way an individual defines themselves and their role in society after receiving a mental illness diagnosis, a negative illness identity is self-deprecating) has on treatment outcomes. I found that societal stigmas often lead to individuals adopting a negative illness identity upon diagnosis which may lead to decreased self-esteem which in turn reduces treatment seeking and treatment adherence by said individual. As an intervention for my project I decided to lead daily positive affirmation groups, which have been shown to increase self-esteem, in an attempt to raise member's self-concept and in turn lead to better treatment outcomes. I was able to do the group a handful of times, I started the group by posing an uplifting question such a "what is your favorite thing about yourself?" or "what is one obstacle you have overcome recently?" we would then go around and share answers and often end the group with a discussion about the importance of self-love. The members seemed to enjoy the group and I learned a lot doing it. I was unable to collect data or do it as regularly as I would have liked because of my schedule but I think it was helpful to the members. I felt that I actually made a difference for those attending the group and I learned that I am capable of leading group therapy.

My overall impressions of Summit House are great ones. The advantages of doing a field placement at Summit House are: freedom to grow and learn, direct exposure to an array of mental illnesses as well as some intellectual disabilities and the ability to devise and implement practices that can make a difference. The freedom to grow and learn at Summit House is one of the biggest advantages I experienced this semester. At Summit House the structure is very relaxed and creativity and idea sharing are encouraged. While some people may not operate well in an environment that is self-driven and supplies a large amount of freedom I personally really enjoy it. There is always room to implement new activities or groups at Summit House and being an intern does not exclude you from that ability. As an intern I was encouraged to share ideas and allowed to try out any theories or concepts that my supervisors signed off on. The freedom to talk to the members is also another great advantage, having open and honest conversation with individuals struggling with mental illness is probably one of the best ways to expand your knowledge in the field of psychology. I learned so much from talking with the members. The direct exposure that I got to a diverse list of mental illnesses was extremely helpful in my education. Before Summit House I had only ever been exposed to serious mental illnesses through textbooks or classes, being able to put what I had learned on paper to real faces and real stories taught me an overwhelming amount of information that I will likely be able to remember forever, as information learned with people first hand is much easier to recall and relate to than information learned in a textbook. Lastly being able to implement my own ideas and lead group therapy was extremely rewarding. I was able to feel like I was making a real difference while trying out my role as a leader, in a situation where I had never led before. I personally found no disadvantages to working at Summit House and really enjoyed my experience.

All of these experiences and opportunities to learn have taught me a huge amount of information. One of the most important things I learned this semester was the real-life display of a mental illness. Over the course of the last few months I have gotten to know the members at Summit House extremely well and the relationships I have built with them was by far the most rewarding part of this experience. Getting a first-hand glimpse into the lives that the members had before coming to Summit House and learning the life circumstances that brought them to us



was extremely eye opening, it taught me that mental illness can affect anyone, and that mental illness does not define a person, it is merely a small part of their experience. I was able to see that mental illness presents itself in many different ways for many different people. This experience has solidified that post-graduation I want to go into a job that allows me to work with individuals struggling with mental illness, I have learned that I can handle the job and that the deep interest that I have for what I am doing makes going to work every day an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

I absolutely loved my time at Summit House and definitely recommend it, I would suggest that anyone who puts it on their list enjoys a self-directed, free environment.

### ***Fall 2019 – Katie Witt***

My field placement site this fall was at Summit House, located in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The mission of Summit House is “to provide a self-help rehabilitation setting where members living with mental health concerns can work on recovery goals while giving and receiving support from peers”. Summit House is a community-based psychosocial rehabilitation program that assists individuals who have experienced the long-term impact of mental illness with their recovery. The program gives members the opportunity to have meaningful social interactions, engage in purposeful work, and be educated on skills and tools to help them cope with their mental illness. Through these experiences, members learn valuable skills and engage in mutual support, which has been shown to significantly enhance the recovery process. On a daily basis, members have a place where they can develop supportive relationships, be involved in meaningful work opportunities, improve physical health through wellness activities, and attend educational classes and groups. In addition to these daily experiences, social programs are offered each week that allows members to feel involved in the community. Typical social programs might include going to a park, going to the mall, and going to the movie theater. Twice a month, an Employed Members Dinner takes place. On these days, the house stays open late for members who are employed or volunteer in the community. The goal is to help members to regain and maintain stability and to work toward achieving goals that are relevant to each individual’s recovery.

During my experience at Summit House, I was given the freedom to choose how I would spend my time each day. For this reason, every day was a little different. I frequently attended educational groups, helped cook and serve lunch and dinner, and assisted in various tasks such as cleaning up after meals; however, the majority of my time was spent interacting with members and getting to know them. I found that they greatly appreciate and enjoy having someone to talk to, whether it is related to their mental illness or not. I was also fortunate to be able to attend on Thursdays, which is the day that social programs are held. I was able to assist in a variety of outings in the community, which included the Arboretum, the Lavender Farm, and the mall. Because my field placement took place in the fall, I also got to be involved in the Halloween party and various holiday activities.

I would describe my time at Summit House as a rewarding learning experience. I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with members and connecting with them. There are pros and



cons to the flexibility and unstructured nature of my placement. Because I expected to be given instructions or assignments, I almost felt as though I was being unproductive or like I was doing what I was supposed to at first. Once I adjusted to the structure of my site, however, I enjoyed having the independence and freedom I was given because it allowed me to engage in meaningful interactions with members, which I believe is a great quality of this site. A disadvantage of this aspect is that it can make the days feel a little long and tiring. While I loved the time I spent with members, I also liked when I was given tasks and opportunities to be more involved. When I would ask if there was anything I could help with, there typically wasn't. However, I believe that my most valuable experiences were ones in which I was connecting with members and learning from their experiences.

One of the things that I appreciate most about my field placement is how much I learned from it on both a personal and professional level. As I grew close to members, I quickly learned the importance of keeping my life at Summit House separate from my personal life. When I left Summit House at the end of the day, I needed to leave everything there. As I approached the end of my placement, I started thinking about how difficult it would be to leave everyone behind. Having these feelings has made me recognize the strength that is required to be in this profession. As much as you want to help people, you also need to put up a wall, so to speak, to the extent that you are providing them with the treatment they need while not becoming emotionally involved. This experience gave me tremendous insight into the mental health field and what it might be like to have a career in this type of setting. I discovered how much I valued the interactions I had with members and realized that it is important to me to be in a career that would enable me to have those types of interactions with people.

One observation I had early on in my placement was that members often struggled with engaging in effective communication. Some interpersonal skill deficits I noticed were difficulty maintaining attention, interrupting, and being assertive when needed. This gave me the idea to develop a social skills group to be carried out at Summit House. For my contribution project, I researched evidence-based Dialectical Behavior Therapy techniques to implement an educational group with the goal of helping members to improve the quality of their social interactions and relationships. I used a variety of materials and handouts to help guide self-reflection and integrated these into group discussions. I knew from attending groups that leading one would not be easy; however, I was motivated to take on this challenge and learned a lot throughout the process. I think that the most difficult part of facilitating a group was feeling like I couldn't engage people. This is often the case for any group, and I still feel as though there were individuals who benefited from the discussions and tools that they were given. Additionally, I personally benefited from leading the group because it gave me confidence to facilitate psychoeducational groups and take on leadership roles in the future.

My field placement at Summit House has been one of the most significant learning experiences I have had during my time as an undergraduate student. Having a real-world experience taught me things that I could never learn in a classroom environment. While I will sincerely miss the individuals I met at Summit House, I am grateful for the connections I made with them and the rewarding opportunities that this site gave me.



### *Spring 2019 – Raquel Dash (Intro Field Work)*

Fortunately, I was placed at The Summit House for Introduction to Field Placement. The Summit House provides psychosocial rehabilitation through a clubhouse model. Qualifying members have daily access to the house from 9 am to 4 pm. However, some nights members can stay for dinner if they volunteer or work in the community. The house runs through three work units in which members can partake in daily tasks and each unit consists of clerical, kitchen, and maintenance. The tasks in the units include answering phones, preparing and serving lunch, and cleaning the house. Besides these units, there are group therapy sessions, social outings, and in-house social programs. The Summit House mission is to provide “a community-based self-help rehabilitation program designed to assist individuals with their recoveries from mental illness.”

Each day I attended The Summit House we began with a staff meeting prior to members arriving. Once members arrived, I began to socialize and spend time with them. At 9:30 am we had a fitness break. This allotted time encouraged members to walk around the house or to use the exercise equipment in the fitness area. Each day I tried to walk with someone different and ask them how they are doing and hear more about their story. After their fitness break, it was time for unit meetings. It is highly encouraged, although not required, to participate in a unit each day. During these meetings, members signed up for specific tasks within their unit. After they sign up, the tasks begin and members are free to socialize while completing their task. I enjoyed working in the kitchen unit helping members accomplish tasks necessary for making the lunch that day. The Summit House offered one group therapy session prior to lunch and one after. I was fortunate enough to be able to facilitate two therapy sessions on my own throughout my time there.

Many of the members at The Summit House struggle with severe mental illnesses. I interacted with people who have illnesses like Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder. Most of the members were eager to educate me on their experiences with their illness as well as their personal struggles and growth. Hearing from the members allowed me to experience, first hand, what it is like the work in this field - I absolutely loved it. I discovered that this career truly requires a certain type of person that is passionate for helping others and can also deal with hearing some traumatic stories without showing a strong outward reaction to them. Not only did I learn from the members, but I also learned from the staff. I observed their interactions with members, seeing what I liked and did not like about their approach, what worked or didn't work, and how I can learn from their actions. Similarly, I established an understanding that, within this field, coworkers are there to support each other and push each other through challenges that do inevitably arise.

There were several advantages to working at this site. Each day allowed for countless opportunities to interact with members in a one on one setting since The Summit House does not always have planned activities for each hour of the day. Members and I learned more about each other every single day, strengthening our relationships and allowing for easier, more natural, and less pressured dialogue. I had full independence as an intern in the house. I was forced to take



initiative to introduce myself to members, find my comfort zone, and begin discovering ways of engaging in sensitive conversations. For some people, this might be a disadvantage, but I felt it was an advantage because I truly had to confront members if I wanted to get to know them. This advantage undoubtedly enhanced my social skills, comfort within this community, and comfort in unknown/unfamiliar environments.

With advantages come a few disadvantages. There was another intern at the site doing her Social Work field placement that consisted of her attending the house all day every day. Because of her being there for several more hours a week, I was not given as many responsibilities and opportunities to work. I felt at times I should be receiving more supervision, even though not having excessive supervision was freeing and allowed me to make my own experiences. I led two group therapy sessions during my time at the house. Unfortunately, I was not supervised at either of these sessions despite the fact that I was promised feedback. This feedback would have given me ideas on topics I had covered well and suggestions on opportunities to grow and improve in future therapy sessions. Furthermore, my supervisor and I created goals that I intended to strive for, but I encountered some barriers in this pursuit. I needed my supervisor's personal notes and personal experiences to achieve these goals, but she had other responsibilities that inhibited her from giving me this guidance/education. Even though these disadvantages were something that I had to deal with during my time at the site, I loved my experience at The Summit House and would not trade it for any other one.

My favorite part about my experience at The Summit House was unequivocally the members. We learned and grew together. Coincidentally, I happened to be taking the same Psychology class as one of the current members at the site used to take. She took the class over 20 years ago. Members would even remember a week after I was studying and taking a test to check in and see how it went. Members informed me that my small gestures of simply talking to them changed their entire day and often their whole week. This taught me that something so little can mean the world to people who at many times are overlooked by others in society. There were several laughs shared among us that added to my time at the site that I will miss and never forget.

During my time at the site, I learned tremendous amounts about myself and my future career aspirations. The members at the house brightened my day each time I walked through the front doors. My time spent at The Summit House confirmed my desires to work with those who struggle with mental illness. I discovered that within this field it is really crucial to be educated on all aspects of mental health, not just specific ones; at times members would ask me questions that I sometimes did not know the answer to. I hated that feeling. Even though I will never know all the answers, I want to strive to be there for these people and do the best I can to know as much as possible. I intend to receive a higher level of education, specifically my PsyD in clinical psychology. I have an unwavering passion for this field. I will make sure to receive as much experience and education that I can in order to excel. Field placement is essential during one's time as an undergraduate student to see firsthand if this is something one can see themselves doing for years to come. For future students interested in doing clinical psychology, I highly recommend working at this site and getting the unforgettable experience that I did.



*Fall 2016 - Ashley Ahlers*

My fall field placement site was at Summit House, located on Pear Street in Harrisonburg. The mission statement of Summit House is to “provide a self-help rehabilitation setting where persons who have experienced mental illness can work on recovery goals and give and receive support from peers.” Summit House is a center for social rehabilitation, also called community rehabilitation and psychosocial rehabilitation. Social rehabilitation embodies the idea that people who have a mental illness can enhance their day-to-day coping through positive interactions with the environment and the community around them. When people are discharged from psychiatric hospitals they often have nowhere to go, and nowhere to practice the skills they learned in the hospital. Isolation is a huge predictor of relapse, and these people often end up back in the hospital sooner or later when their symptoms begin to reappear. Summit House and other clubhouses across America provide a variety of tools for these individuals: a place to go, a support system from staff and other members, opportunities to work and feel productive, and a variety of workshops/activities to practice coping skills. In addition to these workshops, weekly “social programs” are offered: opportunities for members to get out into the community. Examples of these social programs include going to Virginia Beach, going to the farmer’s market, going on a hike, and going to the local high school’s volleyball games. All workshops, social programs, and opportunities to work are entirely optional for members. They choose what they will and will not participate in.

My experience at Summit House was very flexible and entirely up to me to decide what I wanted to do on a daily basis. Each day I went around to each staff member and asked if there was any particular activity or assignment they wanted to help with, to lighten their caseload and work they had to do for the day. Due to this, my day-to-day experience varied: sometimes I would help set up/clean up an activity; sometimes I helped cook the lunch or answer phones; sometimes I helped a staff member with an errand; and in my downtime, I talked to members and got to know more about them and their stories. Members there suffer from a wide range of mental illnesses, and they are very open and willing to talk about them. In addition to these smaller tasks, I led group workshops twice a week. On Mondays I led a self-esteem workshop, and on Fridays I led an art therapy workshop. Each week I introduced a different topic relating to self-esteem, and allowed the members to talk and discuss from there. For art therapy I also chose a certain topic/assignment, provided the art materials, and let the members interpret my assignment in their artwork. For example, one week I had the members draw an outline of their profiles and fill in their profiles with things that they love and make up who they are. They could fill it in with magazine pictures, drawings, collages, etc. The purpose behind art therapy is to engage the mind in the present moment through creativity.

I really enjoyed my time at Summit House. The location is great because it’s right in Harrisonburg, so there wasn’t a long commute; in addition, Summit House is open on weekends, holidays, and some nights, so there are plenty of opportunities to get hours in. The less structured nature of this internship is something that can be an advantage or disadvantage, depending on



what type of student you are and how you work. At first I experienced some difficulty because I was expecting more direction and supervision. However, I quickly adjusted, and due to this I strongly grew in my ability to work independently, something that will benefit me as a future professional. So while this flexibility was something I disliked at first, it ended up being one of my favorite things about the site. My supervisor, Lisa Bange, was great. She is incredibly knowledgeable in the field, and she was never afraid to give me constructive criticism in areas she knew I could do better in. She was out often this semester due to family and health problems, but this gave me an opportunity to step up and help out around the House to make up for her absence. I was also able to get close to and work with other staff members, and they were very open and willing to let me work with them. One thing I disliked was that there was quite a bit of down time in my days, when there was no activity or group to help with. I used this time to talk to members or simply observe, but this made the days seem to go by a bit slower as I was working towards my 150 hours. But overall, I learned an incredible amount at Summit House this semester and gained great experience that will aid me in graduate school and the working world.

I learned two important things at my site this semester: how to break my own stereotypes, and how to positively interact with people who suffer from mental illness. Learning about mental illness in a textbook is so different from what the mental illness looks like in real life. I had mental pictures in my head about what each of these disorders would look like, and these pictures didn't even nearly match the people I ended up meeting. Stereotypes about a mental illness hinder being able to actually understand a person who has it, because the same mental illness looks different in everyone. In addition to this, I learned how to positively interact with the members of Summit House. Interacting with people who suffer from mental illness was something I was not used to doing, and I learned how to treat them with gentleness and compassion while also not treating them like they are children, or somehow "below" me. These two lessons were very important for me to learn, as I want to be an LPC in the future and I will have to interact with sufferers of mental illness daily. I've always wanted to be an LPC, so my experience didn't change that. But this experience did help me realize I never want to go on to get my Ph.D. and be a psychiatrist. Counseling people with depression, PTSD, anxiety, and eating disorders is more of the right profession for me.

Overall, my semester at Summit House was an incredible experience, opportunity to learn, and great chance to make connections and do my part for the Harrisonburg community. I will continue to visit Summit House long after this semester is over to maintain the connections I have made.