



# The Arc of Harrisonburg & Rockingham Day Support Services

## Community & Center-Based Programs

### Placement Description

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

### Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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#### Field Placement

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

### Contact Information

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- Contact Person: Terri Gibbs
- Title: Director of Support Services
- Address: 620 Simms Avenue Harrisonburg, VA 22802
- Telephone: 540/437-9214 ex 134
- Fax: 540/437-9217
- E-mail: [opshopharc@gmail.com](mailto:opshopharc@gmail.com)



- Website: <http://www.hrarc.org>

**Read more about students' experiences at this site below:**

*Fall 2022 - Samantha Heebner*

The Arc of Harrisonburg is one of many country-wide and “promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes”. They aim to serve clients with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and provide daily community excursions, social support, in-home visits, holistic living coaching, and family coaching.

An intern at the site could shadow a Direct Support Professional as they pick clients up from their home in the morning and engage in a volunteer activity during the first part of the day, have lunch together, and then engage in a recreational activity within the community during the last part of the day. A full day would be from 8am (pick-up clients) through 3pm (client drop-off). The Arc has various community relationships with different volunteer sites across the region, thus there is a daily switch up, along with recreational community relationships. For example, one of the recreational activities we all did together was gathering at Horizons downtown Harrisonburg, where we did arts and crafts inside the store. One of the duties as an intern could include securing more volunteer and recreational community relationships. This would include outreaching to various organizations, groups, businesses, and community events with the goal of supplying diverse, interactive, and fruitful experiences for the clients of The Arc. Within the formation of communal relationships, the availability to create and implement integrative community events is possible, as well. For example, an intern could connect the clients with a community business and coordinate a public event, in which the clients and the community could engage in fun activities together. The possibilities are extensive within community outreach. The wide variety of possibilities to provide a fruitful impact was one of the reasons why I loved interning for The Arc so much and it's partly due to their very wholesome goal and value system of helping to create rich experiences for the clients so that they can learn new skills, engage neuroplasticity, form & deepen connective social interactions/relationships, and be celebrated in the glorious gifts that they offer to their communities. The entire administrative staff is extremely receptive and excited about ideas, action-plans, and implementations! They are not only receptive and excited, but they are helpful too! For example, Terri Gibbs and Penny Fong showed obvious desire for the helpfulness I wanted to bring to The Arc and they helped me implement the helpful visions I had the entire way. I felt so seen, validated, uplifted by the entire staff. Another involvement possibility would be providing activities for just the clients. For example, creating movement and/or singing activity that all the clients could easily understand and participate in together. I'd recommend sorting this out early on so The Arc can fit it into the weekly client schedule. Another involvement possibility would



be working with Heather Denman, the current Executive Director of The Arc on the fundraiser side of things. For example, finding ways to raise money for The Arc and securing relationships with sponsors/donors for The Arc.

As I mentioned above, the advantage of The Arc was how immensely uplifting and helpful the staff and clients are of each other. They all hold each other as family. A disadvantage would be that The Arc has so much potential to hold more inclusive and integrative events with the community and the IDD community, however, the administrative staff is so over-worked as it is. Thus, the creative availability to brain-storm projects and implement these projects was limited. During my time at The Arc, if I didn't provide enough horsepower to implement ideas, then the ideas had a hard time taking off. Thus, dedication to implementing and following through with projects is essential.

At the site, I learned the absolute beauty and power of a community that works together within a highly upheld value system. The Arc stayed so immensely true to their values of helping to create rich experiences for the clients so that they can learn new skills, engage neuroplasticity, form & deepen connective social interactions/relationships, and be celebrated in the glorious gifts that they offer to the community. It inspired me to show up to the internship with immense gratitude, respect, and devotion. This translates to how I now show up to my own personal goals of growing a stronger mindfulness presence at JMU with the newly opened Serenity Center of Meditation and Contemplation.

My Psych and Culture class with Vesna Hart helped me a lot with my internship. In the class, we explored about how American societal structures, stereotypes, and prejudices marginalize peoples. We explored how harmful this is on the health of marginalized peoples. The IDD-community historically has experienced and presently experiences marginalization and structural prejudice. They experience it through how buildings are structured to not include physical and intellectual accommodations (wheel-chair access and low-stimulation zones). They experience it in how mainstream teaching styles and activities aren't geared towards IDD accessibility. They experience it in how they aren't represented in mainstream media. They experience it in social exclusion. All of these lessons taught me to show up to my internship as an ally. I advocated for their social inclusion during community engagement. For example, I would facilitate consensual conversations between the clients with IDD and community members/strangers without IDD. When clients would confide in me that they were having a hard time finding a job that would accommodate their disabilities, I would actively and presently listen, show and feel empathy/support with them, and offer sound/detailed community resources that could potentially offer accommodations. In conversations outside of employment, I would be actively engaged in the conversations. For example, I would inquire with questions, show/feel interest, and invite connection.

My contribution project had a lot to do with what I mentioned above and in the importance of creating IDD-informed and accommodating experiences, spaces, activities, and conversations. In research, I noticed that the IDD-informed mindfulness, meditation, and yoga



offerings are very few. Thus, I researched what IDD-informed mindfulness and meditation practices would look like and why it would be beneficial. I found various studies that had the same initial problem I had found and provided tangible IDD-informed mindfulness/meditation data. Within a resources document that The Arc provides for clients and their families, I included IDD-informed mindfulness, meditation, and yoga resources. Along with, partnering with Th Arc Spring 2023 to provide IDD-informed mindfulness practices at Serenity Center of Meditation and Contemplation Warren Hall 419.

### ***Fall 2022 - Madelynn Braun***

For my Introductory Field Work experience, I decided to intern at The Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham. The Arc's mission is "promoting and protecting the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes." The Arc offers a variety of services that consist of community engagement, community coaching, In-home support, respite services, and virtual programming. One of the reasons I chose this site was to have the opportunity to work one on one with individuals in community engagement and center based activities. Community engagement consists of helping clients become more involved in the community through volunteer work and taking clients to a multiple locations within their community. We would frequently spend time in Harrisonburg, Elkton, Bridgewater, and other surrounding areas. This was to ensure that each client was able to spend time in the area in which they reside. Some of the staff members also provide In-home and respite services to clients, and in addition to this, community coaching is offered to clients who need preparation for engaging in the community.

The majority of my time at The Arc was spent doing community engagement activities and helping around the office. On the days I was to attend at my site, I would arrive at 8:15 am and then I would usually be assigned to go out with a certain staff member, or I was asked to stay at the center to help in the office. When I would go on community engagement outings, I would leave with another staff member and then we would usually go pick up around 2 to 4 clients. After this, we would head to our assigned volunteer site. These sites include Meals on Wheels, Hope Distributed, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, and other local organizations. During this time, I would assist clients in volunteer work, such as handing out meals during Meals on Wheels, or folding laundry at VMRC. After our volunteer work was finished, we would often take clients to the store or park, depending on where they wanted or needed to go. I would normally leave The Arc before the clients had lunch, due to class conflicts.

When I stayed to help with office work, I would be assigned tasks such as making phone calls, helping insert data into excel for grant purposes, putting together binders for staff and clients, and I assisted with organizational tasks around the office. One of my favorite experiences at The Arc was attending a client meeting with my supervisor. For this meeting, we went to the



client's house and met with the client, his parents, and his case manager to discuss the client's individualized service plan and determine if anything needed to be changed or updated. I really enjoyed observing the meeting and learning about everything that is involved in an individualized service plan.

One of the wonderful advantages to working at The Arc, is being able to work with very compassionate and caring staff members. On my first day, I was very nervous, but all of the staff welcomed me with open arms and quickly taught me everything I needed to learn. They were very open to answering any questions I had and worked with me to make sure I was getting the best experience out of my internship. It is also very apparent that each staff member cares about every client and takes the time to get to know them and assist the clients in anything they need during their time together. I also really liked how flexible my supervisor and the staff members were with my schedule. Since I could only work half days because of class, all of the staff made sure I was back from community engagement outings at the right time. When I wanted to work longer days during fall break, my supervisor was very flexible and they made sure I was able to get in the hours I needed. My supervisor and the staff were very supportive and they helped me to have a wonderful experience. The only disadvantage is that sometimes, when I helped with office work, I typically finished the work in a short amount of time and didn't get as many hours in that day as I wanted to, however, the work I was doing seemed to be a big help to the staff, and I was always able to make up the hours another day.

Overall, I really enjoyed interning at The Arc and I don't think I could have asked for a better experience. Before this internship, I really did not have any experience working with individuals with disabilities. Before I started, I did online training that taught me the importance of helping clients protect their human rights and how to ensure that clients were getting the best experience out of the program. During my internship, I learned a lot from the staff about how to support clients and communicate with them. Some of the clients were not as verbal as others, and the staff members would help guide me on how to communicate with these clients and assisted me with what questions I should ask. I also learned a lot about individualized service plans and how every client is different and has different needs.

For my future career, I am interested in the field of mental health and becoming a counselor, however, the communication and interpersonal skills I gained during my internship will benefit me a lot since counseling requires strong communication skills and the ability to understand and empathize with each individual's needs. I would highly recommend this site to anyone who is interested in having a career working with people with disabilities or anyone who enjoys volunteering and being involved in the community. This was a great opportunity for me to learn more and become involved in a psychology related field. Interning at The Arc was very eye opening and rewarding and it gave me skills that I will be able to carry with me into graduate school and my future career.



*Spring 2022 - Alyssa Smith*

The mission that the Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham, and all the chapter of the Arc of the United States, embodies is to “promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.” Since COVID hit the Arc has been forced to limit the activities that they offer to their clients; at the moment the Arc is offering community engagement opportunities and in-home services. Community Engagement revolves around the idea of introducing the clients to the community through volunteering opportunities in Harrisonburg, Elkton, Bridgewater, and other areas of Rockingham County. The In-Home services involves one of the Arc’s Direct Service Providers going to spend one on one time with a client and helping them with any services that they may need. Each client is given a book at the Arc’s office that holds information that helps the staff at the Arc understand what to expect from the said client when taking them out into the community. Each of the clients is special in their own way and none of them can or should be treated as if they are one person; they all deserve to be treated fairly and according to who they are as people.

While I was at the Arc, I unfortunately did not have a full day that I could spend out with the clients due to scheduling conflicts with classes. I was able to go in Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for the three hours in the morning before my first class and work on small projects for the staff members in the office. Those small projects ranged from creating spread sheets that cleaned up previous data sheets that the Arc had already, cleaning out the client books and refreshing them for the new period, creating new spread sheets for information that wasn’t pulled together yet, and just assisting any of the staff members who needed help with assignments. It was a wonderful experience to learn how everything is planned out behind the scenes rather than just seeing the smooth and beneficial experiences that they clients get. Thankfully, I did get the chance to spend a whole week with the Arc over Spring Break, spending full days from 8:00am to 3:00 or 4:00pm with one of the Direct Service Providers and a group of their clients. They spend each day participating in a different volunteering activity for an hour and then get some time to eat lunch wherever they ask to, within reason, and then spend around an hour enjoying an activity that they chose. The week that I spent with them went something like this: Monday I joined a direct service provider in doing home pickups for the group that was participating in Meals on Wheels in Elkton and then we ate lunch at McDonalds before taking the clients back to their homes. Tuesday, I went with another direct service provider to pick up a different group of clients from their home and then taking them to Habitat for Humanity’s Restore in the Harrisonburg locality; there we spent our time dusting the furniture for the manager and then usually they would clean the windows, but it wasn’t needed that day. Wednesday the group and I did another Meals on Wheels run in Elkton, but for a different set of individuals before taking the clients to the mall to enjoy some time in the food court eating lunch, and shopping in Books-a-Million. Thursday I was given the opportunity to go to the Elkton at Heart thrift store to



help clean up the shelves and take out any hangers that were empty from the racks. Friday the group and I did not participate in community engagement volunteering activities and rather just went around to the places that the clients had asked to go to.

My time at the Arc was both plentiful in experiences and smiles. I enjoyed working with all of the members there and was sad to end my time there when my hours were completed and the last few weeks of classes were upon us. Terri Gibbs was my supervisor; she was extremely flexible and appreciative of my time spent at the Arc's office. I never went a day there without being told how thankful they were of my work and efforts at the office. There was no strict schedule that I was forced to uphold and I had the freedom to come up with my own ideas and decisions related to the work that I was asked to do. There were a range of activities that I was asked to do on the days that I was there outside of the typical clerical work I was doing; smaller activities that were mainly just to help out the staff when they did not have any special tasks for me to do. I would do things like restock the cabinets in the bathrooms with the necessary supplies, I helped to unload the cabinets full of office supplies when they were supposed to be getting new cabinets in, and I was tasked with sorting through and folding left-over shirts from past events that the Arc would put on. For the last few weeks that I was working in the office with the staff, I was able to assist the Director of Transportation with her heavy workload related to the volunteering activities and hours that the clients would participate in. I do wish that there may have been more for me to do that was related to the mission statement or the community engagement and in-home services provided to the clients while I worked in the office, but I wouldn't have asked for anything else to be different. I enjoyed all of my time that was spent there.

Overall, I would not say that working at the Arc or a facility like it would be something that I would like to do for a day-to-day job, rather I do enjoy the idea of volunteering there with the staff, direct service providers, and clients. I like the idea of being more hands on and more so in the community than I was by working in the office. I do however like the idea of working with people and bringing them into the community and even more so helping them to cope with their daily afflictions and disabilities.

As I am only a sophomore in the Psychology program, I have not had the pleasure of experiencing the more content-based classes that would influence my knowledge of the experience that I had at the Arc. I have however, had the pleasure of taking a Psychological Research Design and Data Analysis methodology class that assisted me in pulling together the data and understanding how to best put it into the spreadsheets. I am looking forward however to the experience of discovering what I can do to help people through my psychological resources and learning.

***Fall 2021 - Nathan Spiers***

When taking the time to select a field placement site to be spending my semester at, The Arc of Harrisonburg really jumped out to me. The Arc is an amazing organization that focuses



their efforts on protecting and advocating for the rights of the developmentally and intellectually disabled. On top of this, they take the time to build a community between each of the clients and the larger Rockingham community through the community engagement program. This program takes small groups of clients to volunteer at different locations in the Rockingham area such as Elkton Area United Services, Bridgewater Retirement Community, Meals on Wheels, and many more.

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

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

On top of community engagement, which made up the bulk of my time interning at The Arc, I was able to play an integral role in establishing a program called "Wellness Matters." This program seeks to place a focus on physical exercise and health while also establishing a much-needed sense of community after a long time of isolation due to the ongoing pandemic. The sense of community is an aspect of The Arc that has seemed to be lacking since the pandemic started. Thankfully, this program allows all clients to see one another again, in addition to the staff having a chance to see clients that they may not have had the chance to take out for community engagement recently.

On the physical exercise side of things, everyone meets in a gymnasium where the clients can participate in a variety of activities such as basketball, bowling, dancing, singing, or anything in between. When the program goes into full swing in February, each client will hopefully have a



Fitbit to help keep track of how much exercise a client gets throughout the week, with the hopes that having a Fitbit will help to promote self-determination among each client when it comes to physical exercise and wellbeing. The future of The Arc is looking bright with this program quickly coming to fruition

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

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

### ***Spring 2021 - Nathaniel Gautier***

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

Every weekday, there were two Zoom sessions, one taking place from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm with a schedule thirty-minute lunch break following. In the afternoons, sessions would



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

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

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



*Spring 2020 – Kara Norman*

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

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

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

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



this internship because I constantly had to interact with those around me. These connections that I made enhanced my overall experience.

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

The valuable experiences I was exposed to brought me more excitement towards my future career. Before I interned at The Arc, I was only exposed to children with disabilities. I had never worked with adults before, and I was extremely nervous if I would like it or not. I learned through this internship how much I love working with adults with disabilities. It made me realize that I want to work with adults with disabilities one day because I truly believe there is not enough support for this age range. I also learned to always have a backup plan in mind. Not every day went as expected, and not every client liked every activity as much as I expected them to. I often felt myself thinking ahead and always trying to be adaptable. I also learned how to react better to behavioral challenges. Before, I felt like I always worried about the right thing to say and the perfect way to react when someone was having a hard day. I know now from my internship that sometimes, you don't always have to know the right thing to say, you just have to let the clients know you are there to support them and be there for them.

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

*Spring 2019 – Rebecca Miller*

The Arc of Harrisonburg aims to promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as actively support their full inclusion and participation in the community. The Arc offers many programs, one of which is an in-center



program that helps client's work on individual goals. They also provide community engagement to better the client's social skills within the community and their interactions with other society members. Both programs not only promote greater independence for individuals with disabilities, but also teach them daily life skills that are needed to grow to their fullest potential.

Interning at the Arc of Harrisonburg has opened my eyes wider to many situations that I thought I have already experienced. One of my responsibilities was to read the client's files and to become familiar with them and their disabilities. While at the Arc, I mostly participated in the community engagement program. I spent about three hours on Wednesday mornings and five hours on Friday's in the community doing various activities and participating in community service opportunities. We often went to local churches to help with clerical duties, such as putting together the bulletin boards, folding pamphlets and setting tables. I also participated in Meals On Wheels where we delivered meals to those who need them in the surrounding areas. Lastly, the clients and I spent many hours of leisure time in the community, shopping at the Dollar Store and Wal-Mart frequently. We also went bowling, went out to lunch at many restaurants, went to the local community center and played various games - a favorite game at The Arc is Uno. Through my time in the community with the clients, I was saddened to see some of the hardships that they face daily. However, I was also able to see their great capabilities and ways in which they overcome such hardships.

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

I found that there were many advantages to interning at this field placement site. I grew as an individual and enhanced many personal skills. I learned how to communicate effectively with my supervisor, appropriately with the clients and professionally with the other staff members. Although I didn't start at the Arc with exceptional communication skills and a high level of confidence when speaking to the clients, this would not be an appropriate option for someone who isn't a communicator or doesn't want to improve such skills. A large part of my



job was to interact with and talk to the clients, which involves a great sense of communication and professional skills. I also think it is important to feel comfortable working with adults with disabilities because I found the more I got to know the clients, the more valuable my experience became.

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

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

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



**JAMES MADISON**  
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