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Fall 2022 - Olivia Neddermeyer

The Augusta County Pathways Program provides an alternative to criminal prosecution that is more rehabilitative towards the substance use or mental health challenges individuals might face that could lead to criminal activity. Pathways strives to provide an opportunity of a new path for those who are motivated to avoid criminal charges and create a better life for themselves that fosters longevity of independence, empowerment, and motivation for staying clean or successfully managing mental health. If successful, all charges are dropped, and the client walks away from the program feeling a greater sense of fulfillment in that their challenges were addressed in a rehabilitative manner.

My responsibilities were incredibly well-rounded, and I was met with nothing but enthusiasm and support from my supervisor and other members of the program when I voiced what I wanted to achieve or try in my work here. These responsibilities included observing intake assessments for potential clients, observing case management meetings between the client and case manager as they progressed through the program, setting up graduations for clients who successfully completed the program, learning more about the justice system and court procedures by observing preliminary hearings, bond hearings, and jury trials, and creating a contribution project focused on outreach and strengthening community ties with our program to better benefit the clients with various needs throughout their treatment. I got to interact with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, the Augusta County Sheriff's Department, and I learned more about the work of other healthcare and supplemental providers. This broad network of organizations supporting our program allowed me to see the positive impact that strong community ties can have in providing more effective solutions towards challenges of public safety and personal wellbeing, and it allowed me to see the care of mental health and substance use from many different angles and careers.

Although I had not heard or seen this type of diversion/deflection program before, my impression upon interviewing and joining the program was exceptionally positive because it allowed me to challenge myself and develop a deeper understanding of an area of psychology I had not previously had much experience with. A huge advantage of this site is the highly skilled professionals who truly care about their mission towards restoring the health of clients on an individualized level. The attorneys, case managers, the program manager, and the sheriffs I interacted with all shared the same trust and care towards this program and potential clients. They each showed me how they efficiently incorporate psychological care into their unique career or specialization and were empathetic towards all challenges and successes of addiction recovery. Another advantage was that I had a nice balance of guidance and autonomy throughout the semester. No matter what project or task I was doing, I felt comfortable to form my own opinions on what a client would need to best thrive in treatment or form my own decisions on how to approach my contribution project. The environment they fostered also made me feel confident to ask for and be provided help in a constructive way when needed. Every task I contributed to felt manageable and meaningful.

My work at Pathways tied together more subjects and content I have learned in the Psychology program than I originally expected it to from the interview. For example, using assessments such as RANT or the ACE questionnaire during client intake really supported concepts such as the implications nature and nurture have on mental health and potential for

addiction, as well as how often criminal activity is resulting from a lack of treatment of mental health issues or lack of basic needs. I also noticed how our program strived to provide not only treatment for mental health challenges and/or addiction, but also provided resources for other categories of need that might not involve treatment but can negatively impact addiction or mental health further if clients lack that need. This included food, housing, employment, education, social/recreational enrichment, and more. I found that this extension of treatment models Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A traditional sentence, such as incarceration, can fail to address or improve social and familial belonging, self-esteem, achievement through education or vocation, or financial security during and after the sentence is served. Pathways ensures that not only is the client finding treatment for their addiction or mental health, but they also have the opportunity to make the most of their time in the program to find other resources that they might not have realized they needed or struggled to find on their own beforehand.

My contribution project included three visual tools for organizing every community partner we had. I created a concept map with every category of need and each organization that fit those categories, which will be displayed on the wall of the project manager's office for clients to customize their treatment throughout the program to best fit what support they might need. Additionally, I drafted a quick reference guide that looked similar to the concept map for ease of use and reference, as well as a draft of a full resource directory with a description and the contact information of every organization we partnered with. Once these materials are fully incorporated into the client's unique experience in Pathways, I hope that it can be utilized to reduce recidivism in the community overall and continue to be a helpful resource for the clients we have even after they graduate from the Pathways Program.

Looking back on my semester, I am extremely grateful to have been given the opportunity to work there because it contributed greatly to narrowing down the type of career I want to pursue, while also giving me a wealth of new knowledge as I stepped outside of my comfort zone to develop new skills. The clients I interacted with were interesting and engaging, and I learned so much just from their own stories and motivations that pushed them to begin recovery in this way. The staff were just as engaging, and I learned so much from them on how to communicate and identify strengths, challenges, and growth in the client's journey to restoration. I could not be more appreciative towards the confidence, growth, and fulfillment I experienced throughout this semester with the Pathways Program. For students interested in criminal justice and psychology, or simply looking for something new and pivotal in the world of psychology, this site is for you!