



The Collins Center

Placement Description:

Mission: The Collins Center strives to eliminate sexual violence and its impact in our community.

The Collins Center serves the community through its programs:

- The **Sexual Assault Crisis Program** advocates for those affected by sexual violence through crisis services, support groups, and medical and legal accompaniment.
- The **Prevention Programs** work to strengthen relationships through education in order to end violence in our community.
- The **Treatment Program** strives to provide quality, accessible mental health services in our community.
- The **Child Advocacy Center** is a multidisciplinary partnership promoting the safety and well being of children through prevention, treatment, and a coordinated response to child abuse.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities:

- General office tasks such as data entry, copying, cleaning, etc.
- Assist staff with education and prevention programming
- Assist staff with fundraising events
- Shadow daily staff activities
- Provide child care during meetings with parents
- Conduct research projects under the direction of Collins Center staff
- Observe forensic interviews
- Work with designated staff members to review materials and produce a case study when required by the placement

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:

Spring 2022 - Aya Nassif

For my field placement for the 2022 spring semester, I had my placement within the Collins Center. The mission statement of the Collins center is "Promoting healing through compassionate and collaborative services to all affected by sexual harm". The services offered by the Collins Center include Sexual Assault Crisis Services including forensic interviews that is set in multiple languages. Prevention & Education services by the Collins Center include education on assault tailored to the needs of the community including the type of trauma the population is going through. Trauma-Informed Therapy is the last service offered at the child advocacy center given by the licensed counselors who work with a specialization in trauma and treatment for children, non-offending caregivers and adults who are affected by sexual violence.

During my time in the internship, I was able to be in charge of manning the office telephone. My duties with the telephone included taking any crisis calls and appointments by checking through the calendar and then speaking with my coworkers to see whether calls should be transferred to them in order to deal with crisis calls and forensic interviews. Among those responsibilities, I was in charge of printing and laminating any major sources of information that needed to be distributed in the office as well as copying important documents for record keeping. The biggest contribution I fulfilled through my duties in the office was archiving documents about each case going through the Collins Center starting from the year 2008 up until the year 2021. The process was extremely valuable in that I saw the evolution of record keeping over time and how sexual abuse was being described throughout the years. I was also able to observe several forensic interviews that were recorded and was able to watch them during any gaps in time during my work in the center. Both the advocate and the forensic interviewer of the center were graciously able to give me their time to debrief the forensic interview and the background of each client's case to help gain a better understanding of how forensic interviews are part of child sexual abuse disclosure. One of the most exciting parts of my experience at the Collins Center was the ability to fully transcribe a forensic interview so it could be presented in court for extra clarity in defense of the sexual assault victim. The Collins Center staff constantly made me feel included and invited in the workplace by being able to participate in both crisis meetings as a form of debriefing weekly cases as well as staff meetings to give me a solid understanding about the inner workings of a Child Advocacy Center.

Being part of the Collins Center was an extremely positive experience in that the whole staff and group of people working at the Collins Center made a direct point of showing kindness and openness to me as a new addition to the center. The center is always abundant with sweets and chatter about the cases occurring at the center. There is always room for observation at the center as the counselors and advocates speak about some of the issues they are facing within the center on a regular basis. The clarity of the center was extremely valuable in that the advocate, Kim Meyers, was always open to showing me any forensic interviews she felt would be a



valuable form of experience. It must be said that the work being done in the center is extremely heavy and can put people in a fragile position. However, my interests were always aligning with the center's and it felt like both the center and I were on the same page about the level of exposure I should be getting. The forensic interviewer was also extremely valuable in this process in that she walked me through each step of the forensic interview process. While, I believe I received as much exposure as I could have, there is a lot of confidentiality surrounding child sexual abuse disclosure which makes it of the utmost importance that this information is protected. Therefore, there were limits to what I could hear or know about for the safety of our clients. The nature of the Collins Center is also such that the type of work dealt with is dependent on the cases being reported by Child Protective Services or the Rockingham Harrisonburg Police Department. Therefore, there are times where there are lulls in the workplace or that there is a huge wave of back to back appointments within the center.

By working at this site I learned about the actual process mental health workers go through dealing with child sexual abuse disclosure from a psychological standpoint. Above all, I learned about how burnout is an inherent part of the process and the simple fact that child sexual abuse means that it can be more emotionally exhausting for mental health workers. I had the honor of taking part in a workshop during my time at the Collins Center created by Tend Academy to discuss the different ways mental health workers could avoid burnout. This aspect of my experience gave me the awareness about how to take care of myself throughout my career. It made me cognisant of the fact that there were multiple mental health workers who I had witnessed leaving the field due to their exhaustion and secondary burnout. Therefore, I see taking breaks and reversing my work ethic to be more balanced as imperative to me continuing in my career on a long term basis.

Being part of multiple research labs in the psychology major gave me a strong foundation for dealing with transcription within the center. I was also grateful to have had a background in abnormal psychology so I could understand the possible mental illnesses the perpetrators could have in order to treat children this way. Having taken both developmental and abnormal psychology courses also let me have an awareness about the consequences children may have mentally going through the trauma of child sexual abuse. It gave me more empathy and an ability to be an active member of any conversation that my supervisor had with her coworker about the active cases going through the Collins Center.

My contribution project for the Collins Center ended up being a pamphlet that I titled "Dear Caregiver, We Care About You Too". The point of the project was to offer solutions for non offending caregivers who were possibly going through the mental health consequences of child sexual abuse disclosure. The pamphlet was also meant to be a form of information or education for caregivers to understand the type of feelings they might be experiencing as well. The pamphlet was given to the advocate of the center and set to be distributed as part of a packet that advocates gave to non offending caregivers.

I will value my time at the Collins Center for the rest of my undergraduate career due to the way it revealed my true interests to me within the field of child development. I realized my true passions for forensic psychology and child advocacy. It was an honor to be part of such a kind, efficient body of work and an experience I will remember as a true foundation for



me as I enter the workforce.

Fall 2021 - Erin Cassidy

This semester, I had the privilege of completing my field placement experience at the Collins Center, a nonprofit organization that offers a variety of services to those who have been impacted by sexual harm by offering collaborative and compassionate services. The Collins Center's mission statement is to, "strive to eliminate sexual violence and its impact in our community." They offer four primary services: sexual assault crisis services, prevention and education, mental health treatment, and a Child Advocacy Center. The first services offered are crisis support services, which includes a number of resources like the 24-hour hotline and hospital response, court advocacy and accompaniment, short-term crisis support counseling, and support groups. The second service offered is prevention & education efforts, which include a number of outreach programs that are offered throughout the community with the main goal of educating the community and preventing sexual violence from occurring in the first place. Another one of the services provided are counseling services. Mental health treatment is offered by counselors with a focus on trauma-informed therapy that is used with long-term clients. Because the Collins Center is a nonprofit organization, they are completely grant funded. This means that most of their clients are individuals who are in need of mental health services and don't have private insurance. Lastly, the final service is the Child Advocacy Center (CAC), a nationally accredited center designed to create a safe, neutral environment for children to disclose their experiences. Some features of the CAC include conducting forensic interviews—which limits the amount of time that a child has to talk about their experience to other officials—offering family advocacy and accompaniment, education for caregivers, and court preparation.

My personal experience included doing a lot of different tasks around the office. I was offered a lot of opportunities to engage in each type of service offered at the Collins Center. Some of the things I did throughout the semester included taking phone calls, filing current psychotherapy notes and disposing of terminated patient files, working on mini projects for various staff, answering the window when clients and investigators would come in, and supervising children when advocates had to speak with caregivers. Doing these tasks for the staff was perceived to be very helpful and took off any extra workload that they had! A lot of tasks required me to work independently of others, which put me in a position where I had my own tasks that I was responsible for. I also got to experience interactions with clients and as well as other members of the disciplinary team, which included CPS, police investigators, and prosecutors. This allowed me to enhance my communication skills to be able to effectively communicate depending on the situation. I also got the opportunity to do research for our Outreach and Prevention Coordinator and update statistics that pertained to sexual violence for Virginia and the United States.

My most memorable experiences at the Collins Center were being able to observe forensic interviews and sit in on crisis meetings and staff meetings. As mentioned earlier, the reason why forensic interviewers are so useful is because they limit the amount of time that a



child has to talk about their encounter. Forensic interviews take place in a separate wing of the office, where there is an interview space with an adjacent observation room. In the interview room, there is a microphone and two cameras that send feedback to the observation room where members of the multidisciplinary team like investigators, child services, and our family advocates sit and observe. I liked getting the opportunity to observe forensic interviews because it showed a great integration between MDT members and the Collins Center. Interviews were also a great way to witness firsthand what forensic interviews are capable of, and they also gave me a chance to listen to the story of the client. I also had the opportunity to attend staff meetings. The executive director, Maria, makes it a very important point for everyone to talk about their weeks and what they have been feeling. She is very conscious of the work the staff have to deal with and the idea of burnout and compassion fatigue, and so I really liked that staff had the chance to be in touch with their emotions and if they felt comfortable, to share with the group. During crisis meetings, we went over hotline calls and cases that were picked up over the previous weekend and any updates over current cases the staff were working on.

A great advantage of the Collins Center is that there are several different areas of work, but everyone works together. There are a few different professionals who work at the center, primarily counselors, family advocates, and forensic interviewers, as well as outreach prevention and grant & practice coordinators. I loved this integration between the staff and how they have the opportunity to work with and help one another. For someone who may not know what they want to do with their psychology degree, the Collins Center offers a few different paths of work that may help narrow their interests. I've always known that I didn't want to pursue counseling, but with a minor in criminal justice, I did want to look into work that still incorporated something to do the justice system—and in this case, the Collins Center allowed me this opportunity to work with victims of sexual assault. Another advantage, which I think is by far the best, is the comradery of the staff. If you are looking for a warm, fun environment, I highly recommend doing your field placement at the Collins Center. From the first week, I felt comfortable being myself and asking any questions that I had about what goes on at the center. From their kindness and work ethic to their humor and helpfulness, I felt that I could fit right in. Every single person at the Collins Center brings a brightness and calmness that is especially needed for the subject matter that is seen every day. Though the subject matter that is dealt with at this site may be seen as a disadvantage, I think of it more as an advantage to see if you're able to work in that environment and whether this subject of work is something that you can handle.

I learned a lot of important information from my field placement site. One of the most valuable pieces of information that I have learned, is the importance of these services to survivors, especially because of the prominence of sexual violence in the community. As a female college student, I feel like I made myself more aware of the danger of sexual assault occurring and consciously thought about that threat, but I really did not think about danger and just how common it is for those who are younger. It is a different experience knowing you are working with survivors and seeing them with your own eyes, not just hearing about it. I really couldn't have asked for a better placement site, as the Collins Center confirmed my wanting to work in this field and desire to be in a helping position for survivors. I also have become interested in the idea of pursuing forensic interviewing or some sort of advocacy work, a path



that I would have never thought about without being able to observe interviews and see the work that staff members do. It was really helpful knowing about mental disorders and the primary disorders that victims of sexual assault tend to have. I learned about different disorders in abnormal psychology, and this experience allowed me to better understand symptoms that our clients were going through, and what goals they were working towards in their therapy sessions.

Like I've mentioned earlier, it is truly disheartening to realize how often sexual violence occurs. At the beginning of my placement, I became really invested in the idea of how kids from all age groups are not properly educated on the important topics surrounding sex education, such as consent, boundaries, healthy relationships, etc. So, for my contribution project, I worked on a resource binder called the Education Library, which has an abundance of resources, programs, and activities surrounding these topics that are divided by age/grade level. The library was made so that resources could be looked at easily and quickly grabbed by any staff members to use. The binder is to be utilized by any staff member or community member who is looking to incorporate more comprehensive education programs surrounding sex and consent.

On a last note, I am extremely grateful to have completed my field placement at the Collins Center. I have never felt more welcomed and am so grateful for the opportunities that I was given and the friendships that I left the site with. My placement solidified the work I that wanted to do, and I really appreciated the passion the staff has about their work; it really showed me how I can work in a field that I feel passionate about.

Spring 2021 – Katie Shiflett

This past semester I had the opportunity to complete my field placement experience at the Collins Center. The Collins Center is a nonprofit organization that provides a variety of services to survivors of sexual violence. These services can be grouped into four categories and all work in service of the Collins Center's mission, which is to strive to end sexual violence and its impact in our community. The first category of services offered by the Collins Center are crisis support services. Crisis support encompasses a broad range of services, including access to a 24-hour hotline number, hospital accompaniment, and short-term crisis support counseling. The Collins Center also provides education and prevention services. These services strive to stop sexual violence before it begins by offering age-appropriate presentations to various community groups. The Collins Center also provides counseling services to survivors of sexual violence. Trained professionals deliver trauma-informed counseling using a variety of therapeutic techniques. The final category of services that the Collins Center offers is the Child Advocacy Center (CAC). The Child Advocacy Center is a child-friendly setting where children who have experienced abuse can safely talk about their experiences. Conducting forensic interviews, providing family advocacy, and coordination with a multidisciplinary team are all components of the CAC.

My personal experience at the Collins Center involved lots of different tasks. During my first week, I was required to complete a number of training including the Office for Civil Rights training and mandated reporter training. The early stages of my internship also involved reading through the intern binder, which included information about the sexual assault response team (SART) and some additional resources about domestic and sexual violence. I also frequently engaged in administrative tasks like answering phone calls and the doorbell when clients or local



law enforcement would come into the office. This gave me the opportunity to interact directly with many individuals and allowed me to practice my professional communication skills. In addition to this, I was able to engage in the process of disposing patient files. I was also able to practice my research skills as part of my field placement experience. On days where there were no meetings scheduled or forensic interviews taking place, I would research various topics related to child advocacy centers and sexual violence. One of the mini-projects I worked on was finding different psychological assessments that CAC's use and compiling them together for clinicians to consider using. This involved finding and detailing measures, compiling general and psychometric information for them, finding whether they required trainings, and what the cost would be to implement them. I also researched other physical and mental health resources in both Harrisonburg and in surrounding communities, so that individuals at the Collins Center would have a comprehensive resource to reference when they need to make referrals.

One of the experiences I valued most during my field placement was observing forensic interviews and attending staff meetings. Observing forensic interviews entailed sitting in the observation room adjacent to the interview room and watching a trained interviewer ask children specific questions about their disclosure of abuse. Members of the multidisciplinary team would also observe these interviews. Attending staff meetings entailed either observing weekly crisis meetings, where new hotline calls and forensic interviews were discussed so that next steps for each client could be determined or sitting in on biweekly staff meetings that touched more on the daily functioning of the office. During my time at the Collins Center, I was also able to watch children who were in the office for forensic interviews. Staff would often meet with caregivers before and after the interview took place; while these meetings were occurring, I would sit with the child and either play or talk to them.

One of the biggest advantages to interning at this site is the wide range of experiences they offer. As a person who entered field placement feeling uncertain as to the direction they wanted to move in with their psychology degree, this site helped me narrow my interests down significantly. The Collins Center allows you to dip your toe into many different worlds, including the world of nonprofits, legal, and counseling. Another huge advantage to this site is the work environment. The environment the Collins Center has constructed is one based on community and respect for one another, as well as friendship and lots of laughter. The people at the Collins Center are incredibly friendly and welcoming; they easily make you feel like part of the team and bring copious amounts of joy to the workplace. One would not imagine such a happy environment for the work that they do, but every individual who steps into that office brings such a positive light with them. I truly cannot think of any disadvantages of interning at this site, but I think the work the site deals with is something that should be considered. It is difficult to hear some of the experiences of clients, but self-care is prioritized at this site. Therefore, while I think the difficulty of subject matter should be considered, I would not consider it a disadvantage.

I learned a lot of useful information during my time at the Collins Center. I think the most important piece of information that I learned was just how commonplace sexual violence is and how the legal system we have often works against survivors of sexual violence. Sometimes this working against comes from red tape within the system prohibiting movement forward and sometimes it occurs because of a lack of awareness of trauma and its impact from the general



public. For me, this demonstrated the importance of the work the Collins Center does and highlighted the value of counseling in helping individuals who have experienced sexual violence. This learning influenced my career goals in that it has pushed me towards pursuing counseling as my future vocation. In connection with these interests, I chose to focus my contribution project on factors influencing the efficacy of trauma therapy. After some research, I specifically examined the impact of connection and empowerment on treatment efficacy. To put these factors in play at the Collins Center, I helped create a list of materials that could be used to send therapy bags to child clients unable to come into the office because of COVID. I also created a comprehensive list of resources for the head clinician to use during group therapy services, which involved identifying themes common to survivors of sexual assault and finding resources (like media clips and different activities) that touched on these topics.

In closing, I am extremely glad that I completed my field placement experience at the Collins Center. Not only did it help me in narrowing my professional interests, but it also gave me a deeper appreciation for the field of psychology and the good that can come from it. The Collins Center itself feels welcoming and the staff help make it that way. Those working at the Collins Center care genuinely and deeply about those they serve. Their passion and dedication to their work is inspiring and makes this experience incredibly meaningful. I would not trade this experience for anything and am so appreciative for the opportunity to intern at the Collins Center.

Spring 2021 - Abby Colyer

The Collins Center's mission statement is "striving to eliminate sexual violence and its impact in our community." In an attempt to meet their goals stated in their mission statement they have four main groups of services they offer. Their first service is that they offer sexual assault crisis counseling and have a hotline service that anyone can use at any time. Anyone can call to talk about their trauma or get answers as to what they should do next. Their second service is prevention and education services. This includes programs in schools talking about consent, good vs. bad touches, and how to talk about your body. It also includes awareness of the prevalence of sexual assault. Their third service is that their therapists can provide trauma-informed counseling sessions which includes trauma informed cognitive behavioral therapy. They have been trained in how to serve clients who have dealt with trauma in their lives. Their fourth, and most used service, is their child advocacy center. The child advocacy center is where children who are alleged victims will visit for a forensic interview. The interview is held here because it is child friendly, neutral, and allows the child to only be interviewed once since it is recorded. After the interview, the caregiver will be spoken to, given resources, and told about next steps in the process.

At The Collins Center I was able to do a few things. I was there to do clerical duties such as emails, answer the phone, disinfect the office, and organize when needed. I performed research for my supervisor and other staff members in the office. Whenever they needed to find information on something, like a voice recording device, I would research different sites and compile a summary of all the ones I found. This helped them focus on their duties as therapists, advocates, or forensic interviewers. I was able to observe forensic interviews and weekly crisis



meetings during my time. For forensic interviews, I would sit in the observation room with advocates, CPS, and/or law enforcement. After the interview I would ask questions as to why certain questions were asked and some were not. Crisis meetings were weekly to discuss past hotline calls and forensic interviews and to plan for upcoming forensic interviews that week. One of the main reasons I was there was to help start the process of expanding their services to Page County. I initiated contact with many hopefully future partners of the Collins Center. I also compiled a list of resources of mental health resources in Page County and basic information about the area itself.

An advantage of working at the Collins Center is how small the office is. I was able to form genuine connections with staff members because we worked closely with one another. Everyone was encouraging of projects I was pursuing, and I felt good walking into and out of the office every time. Another advantage is since the Collins Center works in with a multidisciplinary team, interns get to meet a lot of different people. It was neat hearing different perspectives from prosecutors, law enforcement, or child protective services workers. The only possible disadvantage is that you hear a lot of negativity that you have to push aside since you are the professional helping a client. The staff does an amazing job of addressing negativity and will have constant meetings to make sure their interns mental health is good.

One aspect of the Collins Center I learned about was how victims and caregivers actually act during an interview and their time at the center. There are a lot of stereotypes of how someone who has been sexually assaulted will act and they are usually not correct. Many victims I've seen aren't crying or screaming like how they might be portrayed in the media. They are composed, they tell their story, and they leave. They also act like this before and after therapy sessions.

I am attending law school next year and wanted to pick a field placement site based on the type of law that I would possibly want to pursue. I took criminal law with the prosecuting attorney for Harrisonburg who deals with sex crimes and internet crimes against children. After taking that class I knew that it could be the path that I could pursue. I wanted to make sure that it was something I could mentally handle since the topic is very dark. After my semester at the Collins Center, I'm sure that I would be able to work these types of cases because I want to stand up for the victim and show that the justice system can be on their side. I want to be a voice for them when they feel silenced.

My contribution project was based around getting music incorporated in therapy sessions at the Collins Center. It helped that one therapist loved to play guitar and write songs and another therapist almost had a completed minor in music during her undergraduate years. To begin I researched the benefits of music therapy with individuals who have experienced trauma. I shared my ideas with my supervisor, and he strongly encouraged me to pursue this idea. I found instruments that would be best used for children, as well as adults, and got them donated through friends and family. After obtaining the instruments I made each therapist a binder with resources on their instruments, research on music therapy, and how to write songs in a therapeutic way. I also had friends come over and created a video of myself performing a drum circle. I created an online file which included my home video and YouTube videos of how to play some of the instruments. The therapists will begin using the instruments in the coming weeks and hopefully



will be able to use the drums in a drum circle once their support groups are back in person in the fall.

After spending a semester at the Collins Center, I know I made the right choice when applying for field placement. I have a new mindset on the topic of sexual assault that I plan on advocating for in the future. I will never forget my experience and will cherish the memories forever.

Fall 2020 - Casie Marra

This semester I was given the opportunity to complete my field placement at the Collins Center & Child Advocacy Center. At the CC, the staff work towards fulfilling their mission of promoting the safety and well-being of individuals by striving to eliminate sexual violence and its impact on the community. The Center is a private, non-profit organization that works with clients that have been sexually assaulted in Harrisonburg and the Rockingham county area. They offer sexual assault crisis services and trauma-informed therapy for these individuals as well as advocacy. Their Child Advocacy Center is a safe, neutral, child-friendly environment where victims of child abuse can talk about their experience with a trained staff member. They offer trauma therapy, court advocacy, and have a specially designed forensic interview room. Representatives from their Multidisciplinary Team consist of staff members, law enforcement, Child Protective Services (CPS), and advocates that come together to provide a thorough and efficient investigative process. In addition to crisis services, the Collins Center provides prevention and treatment programs that aim to strengthen the community through education and mental health services.

The majority of my time at the Collins Center was spent handling and performing administrative duties. As an intern, I had my own desk and cubicle area where I would complete most of my tasks. My administrative tasks included answering the phone, responding to emails, filing, copying, and scanning documents, and answering the door for clients. I had prior experience with office duties and menial tasks, which made these responsibilities easier and more manageable. If I was ever confused on a task, I would often ask the appropriate staff member for assistance or clarification, in which they were always willing to assist me and answer my questions. Other administrative tasks I fulfilled included creating and conducting surveys for clients and working with Microsoft excel. These assignments were typically very minimal and self-explanatory, but staff members would make their expectations clear and direct.

Another opportunity I had while completing my field placement at the Collins Center included observing forensic interviews. I was able to sit in the observation room with a staff advocate as well as the detective and CPS worker that were assigned to the case. In the



observation room, we would watch the forensic interview on a large screen and discuss the client's responses to the interviewer's questions. Typically, these interviews would last about an hour and I was able to debrief with staff members afterwards and ask questions about the case. This specific opportunity provided me with great learning experiences and allowed me to fully understand the significance of conducting forensic interviews. Unfortunately, this was a limited opportunity due to COVID-19, but I was still able to observe at least 3 interviews in my time at the Collins Center.

Another opportunity I had at the Collins Center was sitting in on weekly crisis meetings with the staff. The staff would meet via Zoom to discuss ongoing cases, forensic interviews, and any recent on-call responses. The meetings were facilitated by the associate director at the Center and all staff members would participate in discussion. As an intern, I would mainly just observe and listen to the cases being discussed. If I ever had any questions relevant to crisis and crisis management I was always encouraged to hop in on discussion and ask any questions that I had.

My overall impression of the site was incredibly positive and provided me with beneficial learning experiences. The staff at the Collins Center were always welcoming and were willing to educate me on various topics, which contributed greatly to my overall learning experience. There were many advantages to interning at my site, which outweighed the few disadvantages I experienced. In the beginning of the semester, I was able to create my own schedule and hours that allowed me to efficiently manage time between field placement and other courses I was taking. This semester was very different compared to others due to COVID-19 and was challenging for me in other aspects as well. The Collins Center was always willing to cooperate and be flexible with me if or when I needed to make any adjustments to my schedule. Another advantage of this site was the hands-on experience with the services the Collins Center offers. Being able to observe forensic interviews was incredibly eye-opening and informative. It helped me understand the significance of the Child Advocacy Center and how its services positively impact children and families who have experienced trauma. Furthermore, having three therapists in the office was advantageous because our discussions further educated me on therapy and counseling. Although my responsibilities were often administrative, I had experiences that helped me develop my role as an intern and allowed me to fulfill all my tasks efficiently.

There weren't many disadvantages to interning at my field placement site. One disadvantage I experienced at my site was having to be self-reliant in terms of some administrative duties. There wasn't specific training provided, but I was given an intern binder where I could refer to my responsibilities and expectations. However, there were a few times throughout the semester where someone would call in panic or distress and I was unsure of what to do. When this would occur, I would try and keep the phone call as brief and to the point as possible, asking for the individual's contact information and taking down their message.



Oftentimes though, I was able to put the individual on hold and figure out who the appropriate staff member would be to take the call.

I learned a lot about myself and the professional work environment during my time at the Collins Center. Prior to beginning my internship, I wasn't sure if counseling was the career path I wanted to take, but my experience at the Center has increased my interest in the field. I also learned a lot through my contribution project, in which I focused on art therapy and its benefits in treating survivors of trauma. Non-expressive therapy has been proven to help and be beneficial in situations involving trauma. Therefore, I decided to take my research further and create a mandala binder for the site that allows clients to engage in mandala activities, utilize anxiety reducing coloring pages, and take control of the creative process.

Overall, I am incredibly appreciative of my opportunity to work with the staff at the Collins Center and am thankful for the various learning experiences I was able to be a part of. All the staff members were encouraging and supportive towards my willingness to learn and take on an active role at the Center. Although this semester presented unique challenges, my supervisor was reassuring and provided me with a variety of learning opportunities that contributed to my experience in a positive way.

Fall 2019 – Natalie Poole

This semester I had the opportunity to complete my field placement at the Collins Center and Child Advocacy Center located in downtown Harrisonburg. The mission of the Collins Center is to eliminate sexual violence and its impact on our community. The Collins Center staff provides counseling and advocacy services to individuals and families effected by sexual violence regardless of age, gender, or sexuality within Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. The center is a non-profit organization that is funded by grants and community donations. Services offered at the Collins Center include counseling, forensic interviews, support sessions, prevention presentations, hospital accompaniment, support groups, court advocacy and a 24/7 hotline. While some services at the Collins Center are provided to clients free of charge, counseling services are funded by Medicare or individuals are asked to pay out of pocket based on a sliding scale.

At the Center I performed a wide variety of tasks and was able to learn about the many populations that the center serves. When I first began my internship with the Collins Center I was asked to complete 10+ hours of training. This required me to become a mandatory reporter for child abuse, become trained in data entry, read employee manuals and hotline protocol, and study other relevant literature on sexual assault response centers and their community partners. In addition to these trainings I was tasked with managing the front window and answering the phones. This allowed me an opportunity to get to know many of the clients by name and provide a warm and welcoming face when clients arrived at the center. This also enabled the other staff members to complete their work and counseling sessions without being interrupted by addressing



phone calls or answering the doorbell. I was also able to greet and get to know our community partners from child protective services and Harrisonburg Police Department.

Another portion of my time at the Collins Center was spent assisting with fundraising and data entry. Each year the Collins Center hosts a fundraising event called the Autumn Soiree. This event invites community members to purchase tickets to experience live music, enjoy food, and participate in both silent and live auctions. To prepare for this event I was tasked with hanging flyers, following up on auction items, and obtaining supplies. On the day of the event I assisted in set up, check in, auction events, and break down. This was valuable as it gave me the opportunity to interact with community members and learn about their passion for ending sexual violence. Following this event, I was asked to enter in donations and purchases so that all financial information could be tracked for auditing.

I was also given the opportunity to organize and file client information. Throughout this process my supervisor took time to walk me through some of her client's progress and the therapeutic techniques that she used. Specifically, my supervisor shared information about play therapy, sandbox therapy, and EDMR therapy. When organizing client files throughout the semester, I was able to read about the experiences that clients were having when dealing with their trauma and the progress they were making over the course of many months. While I was unable to be directly involved in client therapy, I was able to learn valuable skills about therapeutic processes.

Another part of my internship was attending staff and community meetings. These meetings included staff and crisis meetings, Sexual Assault Response Team meetings, and Multidisciplinary Team meetings. At staff meetings I was able to stay up to date on upcoming projects, events, and check in with coworkers on their needs. At crisis meetings updates on hotline calls, hospital accompaniments and new clients were provided to ensure each client is given proper follow up care. During Sexual Assault Team meetings, I was able to participate in discussion on relevant topics alongside prosecutors, investigators, title IX coordinators from surrounding universities, hospital staff, and mental health providers in the community. Lastly, in Multidisciplinary Team meetings I participated in discussion and follow up on all ongoing sexual abuse and assault cases with prosecutors, hospital staff, investigators, and Collins Center staff.

One of the most interesting parts of my internship was observing forensic interviews. I was able to meet with Collins Center Staff about the cases prior to the interviews and discuss cases with child protective services workers and investigators. Through my observation of forensic interviews, I was able to see survivors share their stories and discuss the services that the Collins Center can provide to these individuals. I was also able to see how forensic interviews provide a safe place for survivors to disclose about their experiences and get the justice they deserve.

There are many advantages to this site. In particular the work environment is incredible. Every single person that works at the Collins Center is a joy to be around and facilitates a warm and welcoming place to work. Despite the often serious nature of this line of work, staff members managed to keep a light and laughter filled work environment. The center is very trauma informed and allows staff and interns to put their self-care before their work. My supervisor was incredibly flexible and truly wanted me to get the most out of my experience. The



center staff were always open to answering any questions I had and kept me in the loop about relevant cases. I particularly enjoyed observing forensic interviews and processing them alongside my colleagues. They were all great about providing an outlet for me and their coworkers to process particularly difficult cases.

Due to the confidentiality of the center, one downside of the experience was not being able to directly interact with clients in a clinical manner. While I would have liked to have this be a part of my experience, there were countless other opportunities that helped me develop both personally and professionally. I learned the importance of having a trauma informed workplace and how this line of work can be life changing for individuals recovering from traumatic experiences. This experience truly solidified my desire to work with survivors of sexual violence.

At this site experience I was able to implement a contribution project to address the need for more accessibility and accommodations for individuals with cognitive disabilities and need for changes to support grant funding in the center. I attempted to address this issue by creating a staff training manual and Sexual Assault Response Team meeting outline on the intersection of disability and sexual violence to be used to educate our community partners on the needs of this population.

Overall, I had an incredible time at the Collins Center and truly value the experience. I recommend this site to anyone who wants to learn more about assisting survivors of sexual violence. This experience allowed me to learn about the importance of community coordination and team communication to best serve clients and ensure that all individuals are given the services they need.

Fall 2019 – Zoe Diamond-Tapper

This semester, I worked at the Collins Center, the sexual violence crisis agency and child advocacy center in downtown Harrisonburg, VA. The Center's mission is "striving to eliminate sexual violence and its impact in our community," and they work towards this goal with four different focus areas: sexual assault crisis services, mental health treatment, prevention and education, and the Child Advocacy Center. Nine full-time staff members and one part-time staff member form an intimate team that provides a variety of services under those four focus areas to survivors and non-offending caregivers of all backgrounds.

The Center's sexual assault crisis services include a 24/7 hotline, hospital accompaniment at any time of day or night, crisis support sessions, and legal advocacy. Three full-time counselors are employed at the Collins Center, and they offer mental health treatment in the form of therapy, support groups, and trauma-informed yoga.

In addition to crisis and mental health services, the Collins Center also offers prevention and education programming including Care for Kids, Safe Dates, and the Safe Church Program to involve the community in their efforts. Care for Kids teaches young children concepts like bodily autonomy, appropriate levels of help kids may need from adults at different developmental stages, and their right to refuse touch. Safe Dates is a continuation of consent and



healthy relationship education for children in middle and high school, and Safe Church is a program that involves religious and faith-based institutions in prevention.

Finally, the Child Advocacy Center functions both as a physical space and a partnership with different local agencies involved in cases of child sexual abuse. Many specially trained Collins Center staff members conduct forensic interviews in the child-friendly, trauma-informed space provided to collect evidence from children who may have experienced sexual violence. Meanwhile, other team members observe the interview from a separate room via camera and audio feed from the interview space. This lowers the risk that the child will be retraumatized as a result of having to retell their story to many different community agencies. Partners in the observation room may include law enforcement, Social Services or Child Protective Services, other advocates, and representatives from other agencies. The Child Advocacy Center helps families through the whole investigative and healing process.

My experiences at the Collins Center involved participating in staff and case management meetings, greeting therapy and crisis clients, observing forensic interviews, supervising CAC clients in the lobby, and delivering client satisfaction surveys to therapy clients and caregivers. I also attended the Department of Justice's Underserved Domestic Violence Survivors' conference and represented the Collins Center at JMU's Day of Service. In the fall, I reached out to local businesses and community partners to promote the Center's autumn fundraiser and auction.

Overall, one of my favorite things about working at the Collins Center was the team environment. The staff is small, but they work wonderfully together. Everyone, especially my supervisor, Margaret, is extremely welcoming and willing to answer questions about the Center or their career experiences. Luckily, I already had a foundational knowledge background of sexual violence and intimate partner violence, but I learned a great deal about the dynamics of child sexual abuse and the efforts involved in community collaboration. The Collins Center sits on a sexual assault response team (SART) with local law enforcement, hospital Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, university sexual violence prevention advocates, representatives from the office of the Commonwealth Attorney, and many other partners. I participated in one of the quarterly SART meetings and found it amazing that such a large group of people with diverse professional backgrounds come together to improve the community response to sexual violence. I also participated in monthly multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings for the Child Advocacy Center and learned about case progress. I didn't have a strong background in social work before interning at the Collins Center, but now I can say that I have a better understanding of the social institutions that play a role in community mental health.

Advantages of the site include the welcoming team environment and the diversity of available experiences. Every Monday, the staff eats lunch together before the case management meeting, and it is a huge morale booster to start off a potentially difficult week. Supporting child survivors of sexual abuse, their caregivers, and other individuals affected by sexual violence is a heavy career choice, and the need for the staff's support of one another quickly became apparent. Whenever I exited observation of a particularly intense forensic interview, my supervisor or another staff member would always check in with me to see if I needed to debrief. Aside from observing forensic interviews and the emotional toll that sometimes took, the Collins Center staff also supported me in other endeavors. For a while, I struggled to find a useful contribution



project, and I started down a couple of different paths before finalizing my choice. Despite this uncertainty, my supervisor and the other staff members were happy to meet with me to discuss the history of different functions of the Center and areas of interest that I could pursue.

I learned that if I want to pursue a career in therapy with survivors of sexual violence, I will need to pay closer attention to my mental health and emotional well-being than I previously thought. I worked in victim advocacy before through the JMU organization CARE, but I was never exposed to children disclosing recent stories of sexual abuse until observing forensic interviews at the Collins Center. I wanted to work directly with survivors, and I had never been involved in any process of evidence collection, so observing the forensic interview process was of high priority to me. After my internship, however, I've realized I may be more inclined to pursue prevention and education work. I do not want to burn out or experience compassion fatigue because of the emotional challenges of working with trauma survivors, and after a semester working with the incredible staff at the Collins Center, I may want to shift my focus to community psychology, or working within the community to prevent sexual violence from occurring in the first place.

My contribution project included a reference guide to culturally affirmative advocacy with D/deaf and hard of hearing survivors. I was inspired by a breakout session with DWAVE, Deaf World Against Violence Everywhere, in the conference I attended during my internship. The visiting advocate leading the workshop guided the group through the many additional barriers to help-seeking faced by D/deaf survivors of intimate partner violence. I discovered that the Collins Center did not have many resources for working with D/deaf survivors, and unfortunately there were also no current local crisis centers or advocacy groups for the D/deaf in Harrisonburg. Through my research, I learned that D/deaf individuals are 1.5 to 4 times as likely to experience sexual or intimate partner violence as hearing individuals. yet there is a huge lack of accessible crisis and mental health resources. The guide I created outlined culturally competent support for Deaf individuals seeking help at the Collins Center in person or using long-distance communication like through the helpline. Best practices for hearing advocates include respecting client autonomy, understanding the basics of Deaf culture and ASL, and maintaining mutual direct and open communication with the client.

Spring 2019 – Gabby Rodriguez

Introduction. The Collins Center is a sexual assault resource center located in the Ice House of Downtown Harrisonburg. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Collins Centers' mission is to end sexual violence and its impact in our community. This mission is achieved through four main service domains; sexual assault crisis services, prevention and education programs, trauma-informed therapy, and child advocacy. Each domain includes a wide range of services in itself. For example, crisis services include a 24-hour hotline, hospital accompaniment, legal advocacy and therapy support sessions. Various prevention and education programs are tailored for specific groups, ranging in age and background, to ultimately serve the entire local community by reshaping norms and attitudes and reducing the occurrence of sexual violence.



Counselors at the Collins Center practice a trauma-informed therapeutic approach to support survivors of assault or abuse and their non-offending family members. Lastly, the Collins Center includes a Child Advocacy Center (CAC) that is specifically designed to support child survivors by collaborating with law enforcement, the Commonwealth Attorney, the department of social services, Sentara RMH, and several agencies in the area to provide a safe, neutral setting for children to disclose their abuse.

My Intern Experience. Since the Collins Center is a relatively small agency with nine staff members, everyone brought a wide range of skills and knowledge to the team. As an intern and part of the team, this meant that my tasks were not the same every week or even everyday. However, some of my regular responsibilities included filing client information (intake forms, behavior checklists, client art, and psychotherapy progress notes, etc), answering phones and directing calls, and playing with children in the waiting room or playroom while their parents met with staff to discuss treatment and advocacy. Throughout the semester, I also worked on long-term projects that gave me a better understanding of nonprofit administration, ranging from things like a revision of the employee handbook to promoting our annual Chocolate Walk fundraiser. While there were times in the beginning of my internship where I felt I had a fairly light load, there were also several points later in the semester where I had to put my time management skills to work by balancing multiple projects at once.

Luckily, due to the small size of the agency and the diverse array of both staff members' professional backgrounds and services provided, interns have a unique opportunity to shape their own roles to develop skills in their field of interest. As an aspiring mental health counselor, I had was able to attend a trauma-informed yoga class and several support group sessions for survivors of assault in my time at the Collins Center. Through these experiences, I was able to observe the therapist-client relationship first-hand in a way that most undergrads cannot. For example, I was able to observe the trauma-informed approach through sand tray and art therapy. While this was my specific experience, interns may also have the chance to focus more of their time on nonprofit administration (grants, management, and entrepreneurship), advocacy (legal support/social work), or prevention and education if they are interested.

Impressions. Culture is essential to a healthy work environment, and the culture at the Collins Center is warm, welcoming, and supportive. Staff members are all dedicated, hard-working professionals who are passionate about the mission to end the impact of sexual violence in the Shenandoah Valley. Since working with survivors of sexual assault can be a very emotionally draining and frustrating endeavor, everyone at the Collins Center emphasizes the importance of practicing self-care. As an intern, this is something that I was encouraged to be aware of to prevent experiencing vicarious trauma. Even with this encouragement, I still found it challenging to hear the stories of survivors of assault day after day. It's heartbreaking to hear about the trauma so many people in our community have faced and continue to face in their everyday lives. It can also be frustrating to feel the need to "rescue" clients' from a bad situation, when in reality the process is usually slow, and most situations are never completely "fixed." I learned from staff members the importance of celebrating the (not so small) victories that the Collins Center brings every day, such as clients making positive progress, greater community awareness, and a slow but steady shift in norms and attitudes in our community.



What I learned. Since my goal is to pursue a degree and a career in either counseling or clinical psychology, I sought out opportunities to learn about mental health in my time at the Collins Center. Through observing support group sessions, I was not only able to see this approach, but also the client-therapist relationship in a group setting. This was an incredible experience that I'm very grateful to have been included in. I was also able to attend part of a crisis hotline training session, where I learned about issues that specific populations (college students, immigrants, and prisoners) face in regard to sexual assault.

In addition to learning about counseling and mental health, I gained many other skills in my time at the Collins Center. For example, I developed skills in childcare by supervising and playing with children, ranging in age from 2.5 - 10 years old when needed. I was also able to improve my communication skills through answering phones and greeting clients. Though filing client forms and paperwork, I learned about topics like HIPAA and confidentiality, Medicaid and private insurance, and requirement for grant reporting. Since the Collins Center is a collaborative agency, I was also able to learn about the relationship between law enforcement, the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, the department of social services, and sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs.

I am fortunate in that I had a very meaningful experience with the Collins Center that I feel has given me more confidence in my decision to pursue a career in counseling. I know without a doubt that I will bring the skills and the knowledge I gained from this experience with me into my future endeavors.

Fall 2018 – Rachel Brown

This semester I had the privilege of interning at the Collins Center located in the Ice House in downtown Harrisonburg. At the Collins Center (CC) the small but diverse staff utilize their varying areas of expertise to collectively strive and fulfill the center's mission of *"preventing sexual assault and its impact on our community."* The Collins Center is a 501(c) non-profit, private organization funded by generous community donations alongside state, federal, and private grants. The Collins Center is a mental-health-oriented organization offering four main levels of assistance in line with their mission to end sexual violence. To help in times of crisis the CC offers **Sexual Assault Crisis Services**, to help stop sexual violence before it starts the CC implements measures of **Prevention and Education**, through **Trauma-Informed Counseling** the CC provides affordable and quality care to those who need it, and by maintaining up to date trainings and the highest quality standards the CC's **Child Advocacy Center** brings community members together in a partnership focused on keeping kids safe. Offering support groups for survivors, a 24-hour hotline service, counseling and education, and advocacy/accompaniment throughout any step of the healing process, there is no limit on the type of task or kind of clientele you could potentially be asked to work on/with as an intern for the Collins Center.

Serving all individuals regardless of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, familial status, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, language proficiency,



disability, veteran status, political affiliations or beliefs the Collins Center's doors are open to anyone who needs its services. However, due to the of the lack Child Advocacy Centers in the Shenandoah Valley, and the high prevalence of child sexual assault, the majority of both the Collins Center's efforts, and my tasks as an intern are related to the CAC. The Center's 8 full-time staff members work as part of a community-wide multidisciplinary team (MDT) comprised of law enforcement, social services, the commonwealth attorney's office, SANE nurses from Sentara RMH, various members of the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County Community Service Board, and at times representatives from local schools. The MDT collaborates to provide victims of child abuse with a team of professionals dedicated to safeguarding their rights, health, and mental well-being. In this effort, team members meet once a month to discuss case management, court proceedings, and any other relevant details related to open cases. As an intern one of the opportunities I was afforded was a seat at the table of this meeting which allowed for me to see the different specific goals of each discipline and be kept up to date in real time with the progression of each client's case. This unique experience provided a look into what it was like to handle this kind of work from a number of different view-points, and as such is one of what I would consider to be the most beneficial and interesting aspects of placement at the Collins Center.

Additionally, following the MDT meeting, the CC staff has a subsequent Crisis Meeting to discuss any hotline calls that may have been responded to, and sort of "debrief" from the MDT meeting with a more focused, CC-specific lens. Here I was able to ask a lot of questions and partake in the conversation about current cases and clients. It was information rich, interesting, and probably the time that most allowed for my integration and bonding with the staff.

Another unique, and extremely beneficial experience I had as an intern at the center was the ability to sit in the observation room with CPS, Law Enforcement and CC staff during Forensic Interviews (F.I.s) As a Child Advocacy Center one of the main services the CC provides is a safe, neutral, child-friendly setting where victims of assault can tell their stories. Observing these F.I.s was at times emotionally difficult, but by far one of the most enlightening experiences I have had, and very telling for if this field is appropriate for my long-term career goals.

While MDT meetings, Crisis Debriefs, and Forensic Interviews were opportunities I most enjoyed while at the Collins Center, a large majority of my time in the office consisted of other more clerical tasks. Answering the phones, filing client information and treatment notes, and logging data on online grant forums (i.e. VaData) were common tasks for me at the Center. It is important to mention however that while these jobs may seem rudimentary, and while they are simply required for the continuation of running a functioning and organized center, they all doubled as opportunities for me to gain access to information/develop skills I may not otherwise have obtained. For example, while my level of experience and training didn't allow for me to conduct therapy sessions, and while the sensitivity of the therapeutic relationships between client and counselor may be compromised by my physical presence during sessions, when filing client information I was not only allowed, but encouraged, to sift through the therapy notes and treatment plans for each individual allowing me a sort of proxy for actually observing therapy sessions. In filing, I was able to see completed psychological assessments, behavior checklists, progress, art-work and much more. At the Collins Center every task I was given doubled as a



learning opportunity, if it wasn't apparently one already. The dedication of the staff to cultivating a beneficial and educational experience for me was one of the most advantageous aspects of my placement there.

Though with all its advantages, no experience can be perfect and to that I will mention the part of my experience that I consider a possible disadvantage is the relaxed nature of the center. With such a small, close-knit staff, working at the Collins Center provides employment that is very autonomous. Trusting that everyone is dedicated to providing quality, top-notch services in whatever way they best see fit, schedules aren't heavily dictated. This environment supports a self-care orientation towards knowingly "heavy" work and helps combat stress/burn out. However, as an intern coming out of a regimented academic setting into a professional setting, I was apprehensive about my abilities, and at times found I was not exerting enough fortitude to get the *most* out of my day. With access to the staff's full calendars there is a sort of understanding that you take initiative to be involved, engaged, and helpful however best you can. If you are looking for an experience where there is an explicit schedule, and direct lists of tasks to complete perhaps the Collins Center is not the best fit for you. At times, I wondered if I would have been more helpful in a setting that was more structured, but eventually I realized that while I may have fallen a little short in making myself an accessible asset at all times to the CC staff, this experience was likely more indicative of what I will experience in my future professional career than any other. The lessons I have learned about myself as a future employee are invaluable. Overall, I could not have asked for a better experience. The work the Collins Center does is important, and the staff are kind, intelligent, creative, funny, professionals invested in sharing their experiences in any way that helps cultivate a thoughtful, empathetic and motivated future workforce!

Spring 2018 – Caitlyn Sullivan

This semester I completed my Psychology 495 capstone at the Collins Center, located in Downtown Harrisonburg. Collins Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing and eliminating sexual assault and its impact on the community. The Collins Center works to execute this mission through four branches of services. First, they work to eliminate sexual assault through prevention and education. In addition, they provide support and treatment for victims of sexual assault. Lastly, they work with other agencies to protect children and support child victims of sexual assault through their Child Advocacy Center. Currently, the Collins Center has eight full-time employees, who all work in these branches of service to fulfill their mission. I was incredibly honored and lucky to work with these individuals to further the Collins Center's mission.

I was lucky to experience many different areas of service at this site. I was lucky enough to be able to work with two incredible individuals to prepare for many different programs in the prevention and education section of this organization. For example, I prepared many of the packets and activities that the employees of the Collins Center would take to schools around Harrisonburg and use these packets to educate children and teenagers about relationships, their



bodies, dating violence, sexual assault, and healthy boundaries. In addition to preparing materials, I observed one of the Safe Church sessions. Safe Church is a program in which church congregations elect members who will become leaders in their church. These leaders attend sessions and become educated on what sexual assault is, what it looks like, how to protect members of their congregations from sexual assault, and how to welcome offenders into their congregations while holding them accountable and protecting their members. These leaders attend these sessions, receive education and information, and then use that knowledge to create a policy that will be implemented in their church. I was able to attend one of the education sessions for these leaders. It was very interesting and new to me, and I was very grateful for the opportunity to observe the Safe Church program.

In addition to the prevention and education branch of service, I was able to be involved in the support branch of services. I had many different experiences throughout the semester in this branch of service. For example, every Tuesday night I provided child care for the children whose mothers took part in a support group. The women who took part in this group were all Congolese Refugees. These women would come to the group and while they meet with the group and facilitators to talk about their lives and anything they would like to discuss, I provided care for their children. I worked with children of many different ages, specifically the ages ranged from newborns to teenagers, and who spoke many different languages. The first few weeks were very overwhelming and I felt very far outside of my comfort zone, however, this experience turned out to be my favorite part of this entire experience. Through working with this group for the past few months, I was able to get to know each child and learn about their lives. I built relationships with them and looked forward to hearing about their week and school. These relationships and understandings I built with the children are going to be one of the aspects I miss the most when I leave the Collins Center. In addition, I was able to research and provide other facilitators with activities and tools that they could use in their programs. For example, I was able to plan activities around self-compassion and find meditation programs that focused on self-compassion for other groups that the Collins Center worked with.

In terms of the therapy and treatment branch of services offered by the Collins Center, I was less involved, but still educated about, the different techniques, theories, and approaches used to help treat non-offenders and the victims. I was able to observe, with the consent of the parents and the child, one play therapy session conducted by my supervisor. Overall, I was educated about the use of sand-tray therapy and the theory and evidence behind it. I learned how to score and understand parent stress index forms and child behavioral checklist. I was also educated about the trauma-informed approach utilized at the Collins Center. So, although I was not able to witness a lot of the services offered in this branch, I was able to gain a better understanding and information about these services. I am very grateful that my supervisor and the rest of the staff at the Collins Center were willing and able to provide me with the information and evidence surrounding the implementation and approach of the practices in this branch.

The final branch of services offered at the Collins Center provided opportunities and experiences I could not receive at any other site. I was able to observe many different aspects of advocacy through this branch of service. For example, I was able to observe multiple forensic



interviews. In addition to observing the interviews, I was able to sit in on the MDT and SART meetings. The Multiple Disciplinary Team meeting was a very interesting experience. This experience allowed me to connect the theoretical implementation of the MDT that I learned about in class and see what the practical implementation looked like. I was able to see directly the benefits of having a multidisciplinary team as well as some of the complications of this. I was able to learn from and observe victim advocates, crisis coordinators and other agencies in our community work with families and law to try and provide the best possible outcome for victims in our criminal justice system. I am so thankful and honored to have been able to observe the work that the child advocacy center does for the children of this community.

I was very lucky to have been able to complete my capstone at the Collins Center. There are so many advantages to working at this site. First, the staff at the Collins Center is extremely supportive and helpful. I was able to ask questions of the staff and they would take the time to explain things to me. They were always there to check-in with me. The work environment at the Collins center is one of respect and support, and I was very lucky to be able to further my education in that environment. Another advantage to working at the Collins Center is the diverse experiences who have to be a part of. The Collins Center offers so many services that you can connect with and find your passion and interest in. I was lucky to have been able to experience so aspect of every branch of service at the Collins Center and was able to align my passions with them. I am very grateful for the Collins Center and all the opportunities I was granted while completing my capstone there.

I learned a remarkable amount of knowledge and skills while at the Collins Center. I was very grateful to gain knowledge about the child advocacy center. I had not heard of child advocacy centers before and didn't have much information about them. I really enjoyed learning about being a forensic interviewer and the role they play in helping the children and the court system. After this experience, I am very interested in being trained to become a forensic interviewer one day. I think that those skills and their approach to a very difficult topic could change the way the child victims experience and perceive the justice system and the individuals associated with the justice. Prior to this experience, I would have never been able to find this passion or desire to become trained as a forensic interviewer.

Overall, I am extremely thankful for the opportunities and experiences provided by the psychology department and the Collins Center. Without either of these entities helping me get the most out of this experience, I would have never gained so many new skills or knowledge. Similarly, I would not have found a passion for this site or this field of work. I am grateful for the support and help that the staff at the Collins Center provided and for experiences I had.

Fall 2017 – Helen Rathbun

The Collins Center is a non-profit child advocacy center and rape crisis center that serves the Shenandoah valley area. The Collins Center provides services to all ages, but most clients are children who have been or are suspected to have been sexually or physically abused. These children are most often referred to the center by Child Protective Services (CPS) or law



enforcement to have a forensic interview at the center. As such, the Collins Center works closely with major members of the social and justice system such as police officers, the Commonwealth Attorney's office, and CPS. The Collins Center's mission is to strive to eliminate sexual violence and its impact in the community.

The center provides four main services: sexual assault crisis services, prevention and education programs, trauma informed therapy and treatment, and a child advocacy center (CAC). The sexual assault crisis services include services like hospital accompaniment, legal accompaniment, and a 24-hour phone hotline. The prevention and education programs are forms of outreach that aim to increase awareness and education on healthy relationships. "SafeChurch" is one such program that educates religious leaders and congregations on how to prevent and deal with cases of sexual abuse. Additionally, the Collins Center provides treatment for victims and non-offending family members. Trauma treatment offered include: sand tray and art therapy, Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), parent support, assessment, and referral. Support groups and other trauma-informed groups are also available. Lastly, the Collins Center is also a Child Advocacy Center. This means that they work with several other professionals in the community to coordinate around specific cases and ensure the community is working together to lessen further trauma on the child.

During my internship I was able to have a variety of experiences and opportunities. Approximately half of my time was spent doing more administrative work like data entry and filing. Each day I worked I was responsible for entering client data into an online government database. This data was entered for recording the clients served and services provides. It was also used to attain government funding. In addition, I refiled the center's government grants and proposals filing cabinet. While doing both tasks throughout the semester I feel I was able to get a better grasp on what sort of programs and clients get funding by the government. I also drafted several pieces of writing for the center to use. I wrote an article about the Collins Center that would be proposed to a local newspaper for publication. Furthermore, I wrote more than a dozen informational blurbs for the official Facebook page to increase online engagement.

The other half of my time was spent observing clinical work. I observed over a dozen forensic interviews. These are a special kind of interview done by trained staff members that aim to gain information about suspected abuse in a way that can be utilized in court proceedings. While the interview was taking place in one room, a team of people and myself were sitting in an adjacent room watching it live on a computer screen. The interviews were emotional, fascinating, and clinically informative. I felt I got a strong understanding of what kinds of questions are appropriate in a legal setting. Furthermore, I was able to observe a couple of court preparation meetings. These were held at the Commonwealth Attorney's office. A Collins Center advocate, an attorney, and the child would have a short meeting that covered what abuse happened and what to expect in court if the case went to trial. This experience was especially informative because I learned various court room procedures and rules regarding cases with child victims.

I also observed multidisciplinary meetings. These meetings were comprised of various professionals from CPS, law enforcement, and the attorney's office. Each month all the members would come to the Collins Center and discuss ongoing and unresolved cases. I learned what offices and agencies work with the Collins Center as well as how they all function and interact



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with each other. I realized that this monthly meeting was one of the important ways the Collins Center works towards eliminating sexual violence in the community because it gathers all the offices and agencies that have a stake in the cases. Additionally, at some points in my internship I was asked to supervise a child in the waiting room or in a play room while their parent was speaking to one of the therapist or advocates. Prior to my placement, I had very little experience with talking to children. Having a chance to speak with and build quick rapport with a child really helped me understand how to communicate with people who are on a developmentally different level. In terms of education, prevention, and outreach, I observed one program called "SafeDates" at a local high school that aimed to teach teenagers about healthy relationships and boundaries. I also helped set up and attended a fundraiser called "Disco Gala."

I really enjoyed my time at The Collins Center. In my opinion, I don't think this placement has very many disadvantages or limitations. In terms of clinical observations, it can sometimes be hard to attend all the forensic interviews that come up because they can often be spur of the moment or conflict with scheduled classes. In addition, some of the disclosures made by children can be particularly troublesome. I sometimes found it hard to process. Thankfully if I was ever troubled by something I heard or saw, I was able to debrief with my supervisor or another staff member. They made it clear that they are an open support system for that. While I felt completely supported, I think it would be important to spend some time reflecting on if this type of content is something one can "handle." This site may not be a good choice if someone suspects that hearing details of sexual assaults may trigger or deeply upset them.

An advantage of interning here are the clinical observations available. Having the opportunity to observe forensic interviews and court preparation meetings is an invaluable experience. In addition, the work that I did was split between administrative work like paper work and filing and clinical observations. This made it easy to decompress after some of the difficult clinical observations. All the staff are incredibly friendly and caring. My supervisor and other staff made expectations and responsibilities clear, and asking for help or clarification was encouraged. The Collins Center exceeded my expectations. I would encourage anyone interested in child advocacy, prevention and education, and the legal system to seriously consider applying.