



# Habitat for Humanity

## Placement Description

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Central Valley Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian ministry that works in partnership with God and people in the Central Shenandoah Valley by building and/or renovating houses to enable families, who otherwise would be unable to do so, to own simple decent houses in which they can live and grow into all that God intended.

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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Student will assist the support functions of the Central Valley Habitat for Humanity Family Support Committee in providing training for families who have been qualified and approved for Habitat houses. These tasks include:

- Plan, schedule, and promote a workshop for prospective Habitat homeowners on budgeting and money management. This would include contacting a trainer who has previously worked with Habitat.
- Plan, schedule, and promote a workshop for Habitat homeowners and prospective homeowners on wills and estate planning. This would include recruiting a trainer.
- Devise a plan for regular home maintenance training for every Habitat homeowner at the time they occupy their new home. This would include working with Habitat's part-time Construction Manager and perhaps other volunteers.

## Contact Information

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



*Fall 2020 – Lauren Williams*

This past semester, I had the privilege of interning at the Central Valley Habitat for Humanity for my Field Placement. The mission of Habitat for Humanity is, “seeking to put God’s love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope.” I was able to see firsthand their dedication to serving the families they work with, as well as dedication to the community and their volunteers. The Central Valley Habitat for Humanity serves low-income families residing in the Rockingham-Harrisonburg geographic locations. Families work alongside Habitat as equal partners to build safe, decent, and affordable homes. To keep the costs of the homes as a minimum, Habitat largely relies on volunteers for construction, working under the direction of professionals and skilled workers that volunteer as construction site leaders. In addition to building homes, Habitat for Humanity provides educational meetings for the partner families on topics relevant to homeownership such as budgeting and insurance to ensure that families are well-prepared for success in homeownership. Families are also designated a family sponsor, a volunteer who is a liaison between the Family Support Committee and the Habitat partner family.

With the variety of services and kinds of work that are involved with the work of Habitat, I was able to have a unique blend of experiences with volunteer services, community outreach, and some involvement with family support services. One of my responsibilities was to write devotionals, or short, encouraging messages to be shared with volunteer groups at construction sites before work day began. I was also able to lead the welcome session for some construction site days, which involved sharing a devotional and the history and mission of Habitat with the group, as well as taking pictures of the groups and working alongside the partner families and volunteers. Another aspect of this job at the construction site was to remind volunteers of safety rules, provide supervision, and answer questions when possible.

Another part of my duties at Habitat was to make outreach phone calls to local churches to update the contact information of churches and schedule in-person visits. At these meetings with church administrators and/or pastors, I would explain the mission and purpose of Habitat and go over the contents of folders I had stocked with information regarding current material needs, volunteer opportunities, and ways to financially partner with Habitat. These phone calls and meetings helped to create greater awareness of what Habitat does in and for the community, and helped generate more involvement from churches.

I also had the opportunity to meet with some Habitat families to interview them about their experiences working with Habitat. The purpose of these interviews was to identify areas that the Central Valley Habitat could improve the support for families, and see if there were ways families were in need of a greater level of involvement or communication from their family



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sponsors and Habitat in general. After meeting with families and gathering more information on the current system of communication between family sponsors and families, as well as researching the harmful effects of living in low-income housing on mental health, I decided to focus my contribution project on the well-being of Habitat's partner families. Research also suggests that having social support can mitigate the negative effects of housing instability and low-income housing. I created a pamphlet of resources and a gardening "how-to" that family sponsors will give to families at their first meeting. I also made an intake survey that will indicate to Habitat and the family sponsors the kind of resources the families may need to be directed to, and also allows for families to denote the level of social support they feel they currently have. My supervisors had also expressed the need for there to be more structure within the family sponsor program to ensure that all families receive an adequate level of communication and are equally supported. I wrote a proposal for a new guideline for family sponsors with the aim of clarifying for family sponsors what is expected for communication with families.

One of the advantages of interning at the Central Valley Habitat for Humanity was the variety of kinds of work that I was able to do. As I mentioned previously, I was able to gain experience with volunteer groups, outreach, and some experience with family support. My supervisors were extremely flexible and eager to work with me to make the internship meaningful and relevant to my interests. When I came to them and shared that I wanted to be more involved with the families, they were happy to share with me the upcoming family support events and helped me get in contact with families for interviews. There was also a very supportive work environment, and my supervisors showed that they genuinely cared about the work I was doing with them. As someone who can sometimes be reserved in sharing my ideas, I felt that in staff meetings, my ideas were always listened to and valued, despite my lack of experience in nonprofit work. Overall, I had a wonderful experience interning with the Central Valley Habitat for Humanity, and I was able to gain valuable knowledge and skills.

During my internship, I learned how to engage with others professionally and effectively through phone calls and in-person visits to churches, as well as through my interactions with Habitat's partner families, and my coworkers and supervisors. Having professional meetings and phone calls with people I had never met definitely took me outside of my comfort zone, and I am grateful to now feel more confident in professional settings. I also learned how to have professional interactions with people who were from different backgrounds than me. Additionally, I gained experience with leading groups of about 10-15 people in the welcome sessions at construction sites, which refined my public speaking skills along with effective leadership skills.

All of the skills and experiences I had while interning with the Central Valley Habitat for Humanity will be highly valuable in my future career. While I was very undecided about my career plans coming into field placement, I have recently decided to pursue becoming a school



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counselor. Working with people from diverse backgrounds, as well as being comfortable with leading and speaking with groups of people are skills that are extremely relevant to this profession, and are valuable skills to have in any helping profession.

For future interns, I would recommend being open with your supervisors about what you hope to gain from the internship, including the kinds of responsibilities you would be most interested in throughout. As I mentioned earlier, my supervisors were very willing to work with me in order for me to get the most out of the experience. This internship is a great opportunity for anyone interested in going into nonprofit work, or anyone feeling undecided about what they want to do in the future, as there are various work experiences one can have at Habitat.