



# Healthy Families: Shenandoah/Page County

## Placement Description:

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Healthy Families is a national evidence-based program that assists parents of infants and young children by providing resources, education, and encouragement through ongoing home visits and group sessions. Services are provided using the Parents As Teachers evidenced-based curriculum. The rural setting of these counties provides unique insight and engagement opportunities. Healthy Families aims to optimize positive parenting and reduce child maltreatment as well to promote family health and well-being and school readiness. The program serves teen parents, single and married parents, and Spanish-speaking families, adding to the diversity of the placement. Some research and data collection opportunities are also available. Students generally drive to New Market, VA (20 minutes from JMU) to meet up with staff to go to the Woodstock or Stanley offices to reduce student travel expense/time.

## Student Opportunities:

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- Accompany staff on home visits; work with children/parents in their home environment
- Develop skills in documentation of home visits and parent/child observation
- Planning and implementing activities with parents and children (prenatal to 5)
- Develop/lead support groups for parents
- Participate in health promotion and wellness education activities
- Work with a variety of families issues including substance use and mental health
- Observe and complete developmental and other health/mental health screenings
- Complete Parent Satisfaction Survey and Cultural Demographics/Sensitivity analyses
- Network with physicians and other community agencies
- Learn about the national standards for Healthy Families program

## Contact Information

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

***Fall 2022 - Helene Nguyen***

Amongst many different opportunities that students at JMU can be a part of, this semester I had the opportunity to grow within the program, Healthy Families, mainly at one of their community partners, the Community Care and Learning Center. During the semester, I learned that Healthy Families is an organization that strives to help families feel healthy and stable. Healthy Families provides services and resources to support families in need of any service which includes in-home services, educational resources, and services that allow family members to return to employment. Healthy Families overall aims to promote and improve positive family functions, healthy child development, and decrease aspects of child neglect and abuse.

As mentioned earlier, I worked at the Community Care and Learning Center (CCLC) throughout the semester. The center displays what Healthy Families main objectives are as they allow parents to drop off their children and return to work, as their children receive care both developmentally and academically. The center serves children ages infants to age five. CCLC has rooms that serve each of the age groups: infants, waddlers (one-year-olds), twos, threes, and preschoolers which includes children ages four and five. Their mission is to provide childcare that is within a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment to help support parents and their return to work.

As an intern, my responsibilities at the center included observing the children's behavior, helping my supervisors as a "floater", and implementing my contribution project. Throughout my days at the center, I was able to study and observe why children behaved a certain way as I learned their background stories. These observations became apparent as I was taking a course that taught me how to figure out the antecedents, the behaviors, and the consequences of those behaviors. At the beginning of my internship time, I was a "floater" which is when an employee or intern, would go wherever my service is necessary. Helping wherever it was necessary was very exciting to me because it allowed me to see all the different services that the center offers to help parents return to work. But as the semester progressed, I mainly focused my time on the preschoolers for my contribution project. Another opportunity that the center provided to me was learning how to manage classrooms. This helped me grow my skills to be more confident and to maintain the student's attention within my sign language lessons. Being able to facilitate the classroom allowed me to form trusting bonds not only with the children but with the other workers as well.

As I spent more time at the center, I created trusting bonds with the children, the workers, and my supervisors very quickly. The whole center welcomed me as an intern with open arms as they were able to trust and support me in any way possible for me to reach my goals. I immediately jumped in to provide my assistance wherever it was needed and found that all the



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staff members in any building were very willing to support me by any means. As for the children, they were very excited to see me as I began to build a bond with each of them. When helping at the center, I was able to bond by reading them books, engaging in conversations during snack time, supporting the children if they were to have an “off” day, and being a “teacher” in their eyes, as I taught them to sign language two times a week. While the semester progressed, the children slowly learning my name was what reassured me that the bond was being built and it was meaningful to them since I became a “teacher” in their time at the center.

Many advantages that came with the center included endless opportunities to help support staff and become more confident in communication skills. Other advantages that came along with this experience included learning the importance of healthy socio-emotional development within children and providing a sense of supportive care when some children may not experience it at home. It became clear to me that some children may feel a sense of neglect within their home life, so as they come to school, they may misbehave while the staff attempt to display that there are people who do care for them. Being part of a team that promotes positive care to these children made me happy because of knowing that these children could go home with the excitement of coming back the next day due to the care they receive at the center. I liked how open-minded the staff was, they always wanted suggestions from the interns based on our observations. Knowing that they are open-minded and willing to do anything to improve childcare reassured me that this center truly holds the truth in its mission and vision statement. Although this was a very positive experience, the disadvantages/dislikes/limitations only came from the health concerns due to sickness increasing throughout the semester due to the cold and viruses affecting many. It was not a huge concern for me because it was out of our control and the center took all precautions to keep everyone safe.

I felt that this experience was extremely beneficial to my career/vocational goals, especially within the psychology route. It has taught me how to become more patient with children, learn how to facilitate a classroom, and effectively support a child without reinforcing misbehavior. Much of the psychology aspect that helped me become more successful within this site was through the child development lens. Throughout the semester, I have seen children grow from day one to the current day and they have learned so much academically. Witnessing their growth through the sign language lessons reassured that they were understanding what they were learning. As for my career goals, it has pushed me more to become a resource to children who may go through negative experiences at home. It has reassured me that I want to provide my services to the school-age population as a counselor to help be an “ear” to those that need it. Also, I have gained more knowledge not only about childcare but the process within preschool and how they prepare children for kindergarten.

During my time there, I had the opportunity to take on the role of an “unofficial teacher” as I promoted the importance of communication among the children by teaching them sign language as part of my contribution project. Being able to teach them the alphabet, numbers, and simple phrases allowed peer relationships to be built with children who have speech delays or have difficulties with speech due to medical reasons. The other part of my project included creating an American Sign Language booklet that the teachers could utilize as they teach the



children more sign language. I wanted all the resources they had to be in one organized book for usage.

Overall, my experience with the center and my supervisors have been very positive and knowledgeable. Both the staff and children were very welcoming and open-minded as I went through the learning process as an intern. I have learned skills from this experience that I am able to take with me throughout my journey to become a school counselor!

### ***Fall 2022 - Vanessa Hindle***

For my Field Placement during the Fall 2022 semester, I had the opportunity interning with community partners associated with Healthy Families of Shenandoah and Page County. Healthy Families is a program that aspires to achieve healthy outcomes for families by aiming to reduce the potential for child abuse and neglect, improve children's school readiness, promote optimal child development, and enhance family functioning. Various resources are provided for members within the community, including the implementation of the Parents as Teachers based curriculum, where specialists attend home visitations for families. Community partners of Healthy Families provide varying services such as providing support groups for parents, meal delivery services, and education opportunities for young children.

Appreciative of the mission for improving family outcomes and reducing child maltreatment, I was aware from the start of my internship I would be spending all my time working with infants and young children at the Community Care Learning Center (CCLC). CCLC is an education center servicing accessible, quality childcare that supports the ability of parents to maintain stable employment, offering care for children from infancy to the age of five years old. The Learning Center accepts children facing a diverse range of backgrounds, for full-time or part-time care, while also providing additional services for students who need extra developmental support. Teachers at the CCLC maintain routine schedules consisting of different learning and sensory activities, seeking to enhance children's school readiness and social-emotional development. During my time at the center, I would plan activities to enhance children's emotional regulation techniques, interact one-on-one with struggling students, model appropriate classroom behavior, and provide emotional support. Throughout the semester, I was able to develop interpersonal relationships with the students, learning more about their family context and educational development.

Already having a few experiences working with children, I was more comfortable in my interactions with them from the beginning of my internship. My first impression walking into the CCLC was that the environment was a structured and hopeful for positive development. My heart filled with joy and excitement for having the opportunity to make an influence on the children's development and meant so much to my personal goals and aspirations. The advantage of working closely with children in an educational setting provided deeper understanding of behavior in context. I was able to engage with nearly every student attending the center and develop a level of trust with the children. I noticed that through demonstrating attentive behaviors, and warm empathetic responses, children became comfortable expressing their emotions to me. I also found it easier to confront challenges and behavioral issues once I had an



understanding for the children's intentions and purpose behind the specific behavior. It was so pleasing to observe the excitement and pride children held after participating in a sensory activity, demonstrating their creative expressions motivated them towards testing other creative strategies. Working with the preschool children was always the highlight of my week, especially because of my amazement with the student's level of knowledge possession, including the educational questions they would ask me. I thoroughly enjoyed joining in the educational activities that the center and I planned for the day, gaining perspective on the children's ideas, and thought processes. The only disadvantage to my experience working with the children at the CCLC was that I did not have much opportunity for engaging with parents and the family functioning as a whole. Though I was not able to participate with home visitations, it did not take away from my overall experience at the CCLC.

Though I have taken a few human developmental psychology courses at JMU, nothing will compare to the experience, knowledge, and skills I gained from the CCLC. I was constantly surprised by the level of intelligence many of the children at the center comprised. Working with children of many age groups (infants, toddlers, preschoolers), I was able to notice the developmental growth between the different ages, pertaining to social interactions, emotional regulation, and creative expression. I also gained observational skills for accessing behavior, considering where the child ought to be in development. Socioemotional competence related to much of my research, through exploring strategies for promoting emotion regulation in early childhood, I could apply these techniques in real-life situations and adjust towards the child's level of need.

Courses within the psychology major have helped guide me through becoming successful during my time at the center. Counseling psychology has increased my knowledge and skills when working with individuals, such as in validating the children's emotional experiences and for using language that highlights an individual's strengths that they can build on. I have also applied knowledge from my Developmental psychology course, which helped my assessment of the stages in development children should be with regarding their age. Through this information I was able to judge how I could progress the child's growth with optimal support and guidance.

For my contribution project, I wanted to explore variables that influence children's emotional regulation. These variables consisted of the family context and parental role, adverse childhood experiences, and strategies for caregivers to use that encourage effective emotion regulation techniques. I decided to focus on this topic because many of the children at the center express inappropriate behaviors during emotionally stimulating events. Though the center practices strategies found to help develop socio-emotional competence, many of the parents are not aware of how the family context has a role of influence, or of techniques used to enhance emotional development. In an attempt to provide resources guiding parents through the importance of emotion regulation, I created a pamphlet for the parents with children attending the center, providing information on what emotion regulation is, the parental influence, and examples of various techniques they could apply for effective child emotional management. I hope the CCLC continues to refer to the pamphlet when implementing strategies and recommend the information to new parents with children attending the center.



Pursuing my vocational career goal as a Couples/ Family counselor, I can apply the strategies I researched and found effective through real-life situations at the center for enhancing an individual's emotion management for stimulating events. I hope to continue my knowledge and skill growth for working with children and families. Overall, I have had a great experience working with the CCLC as a partner of Healthy Families. I will take away much of what I've learned at the center relating to developing a trusting and supportive relationship with children I work and interact with.

### *Spring 2022 - Amanda Good*

This semester, I had the pleasure of working under Healthy Families and their community partners. Healthy Families is an organization that operates in Shenandoah County and Page County. Their main goal is to provide support to new parents and families in the area by offering them with resources and in-home services. Some of these resources include things like parenting help, early childhood education lessons, helping to create a safe and fun learning environment for children, assistance in meeting goals of parents returning to work, and so many more. Healthy Families aims to be extremely flexible in order to meet the specific needs of families. Overall, Healthy Families aims to provide that initial support early on that translates into confident parents and healthy developing children.

Healthy Families has a variety of community partners in the area, one of them being the Community Care and Learning Center (CCLC). At CCLC, their mission is to provide childcare that is both accessible and of high quality in a safe and nurturing environment. They provide anywhere from parttime to fulltime care during the week for children between the ages of 6 weeks-5 years old. Healthy Families and CCLC are community partners because of the childcare that can be provided after new parents reach their goal of returning to work.

Due to reasons pertaining to COVID-19, I was not able to go on home visits under Healthy Families. My responsibilities were redirected to use my background in psychology and pre-occupational therapy as a tool in the classrooms at CCLC. More specifically, I observed the classroom as a whole and sought out kids who may benefit from more individualized attention to work on skills pertaining to social-emotional development. I was given ample time and freedom to observe in the classroom, help run class activities, and facilitate lesson plans specifically created for certain kids. The time I spent in the classroom allowed me to really connect with the students and form a trusting bond with them. I was also given the opportunity to use the Healthy Families office, where I had the space to do my own independent research and plan lessons using their extensive collection of supplies, toys, and games.

I found early on at my site that not only my supervisor, but the employees I was working with at CCLC trusted me and wanted to support me in any way possible to help me reach my goals this semester. In return, I was expected to jump right in with helping in the classroom and forming initial impressions on kids that I wanted to work with, which I was excited to do. I found the staff to be very flexible, supportive, and happy to answer my questions at any given time. Additionally, I noticed the kids were excited to have a new person around and quickly welcomed



me into their classroom. Many of them expressed interest in doing the one-on-one activities that they saw me doing with other kids, which reassured me that I was being effective, but also fun.

Going into my field placement, I knew early on that I could be spending most of my time at CCLC and other community partners of Healthy Families. My supervisor informed me that she wanted me to use my background in psychology and pre-occupational therapy to help certain kids. I kept an open mind about what types of things I would be working with these kids on, but my goals solidified not long after starting at my site. Both my supervisor and I decided it would be most beneficial to focus my activities on healthy social-emotional development. This was apparent after learning about the adversities some of these children face at home within their families and living situations. It also became clear that some of the kids attending CCLC showed forms of behavioral issues such as aggression, emotional expression, and socialization. I found myself really enjoying learning about social-emotional development for this age group as well as implementing activities and lessons that target it. Within my career aspirations to become an occupational therapist, I knew I wanted to work with children, but this experience taught me how much I value the social-emotional aspect of development. With that being said, I hope to carry with me what I learned into my future career and be attentive to social-emotional development just as much as other aspects of development.

One of the things that I found myself referring to from my background in psychology was anything regarding early childhood development. I found this to be useful when thinking about what stage of development the age group I was working with was in. This helped me understand and see first-hand how kids at certain ages process information, learn new things, and express themselves through play. This helped me be patient at my site, as I reminded myself how much new information and how many new experiences these kids are taking in all at once. I feel as if knowing this information helped me be a better teacher as well, as I was able to lead kids to their zone of proximal development while simultaneously pushing them to learn and try new things. Not only was I able to do this within the activities I had planned for them, but also while helping them navigate everyday situations with their peers in the classroom.

For my contribution project this semester, I really wanted to stay on theme by making it about social-emotional development. I decided to put together a binder to donate to the classrooms with an abundance of social-emotional activities that can be done with the whole class, small groups, and individual students. The reason I opted for idea is because I wanted the contribution project to be as seamless and easy to implement as possible. My hope for the binder is that the teachers can refer to it on a day when they are having a tough time with a certain student or when they want to do an additional activity as a class. Additionally, the teachers could use some of the activities targeted for small groups during their daily circle time. As for implementation of the project, I wanted to make sure the teachers had a clear understanding of the directions and targeted goal of each activity, so I made sure to explain that in the binder as well. I was able to walk the teachers through the binder and answer any questions they may have. I have already gotten some feedback that the binder is being used which is very encouraging to hear!

Overall, I had a very positive experience with Healthy Families and their community partners. Their staff was welcoming and supportive towards me and my goals and the children



were playful and eager to learn. I couldn't have asked for a better experience or group of people to be working with during my field placement experience.

*Fall 2021- Jackie Durham*

Healthy Families is an organization that strives to support families in need of stability and improvement with family functioning both in and outside of the household. They provide a multitude of resources that help with financial planning, parental roles, meals, child development, and trauma that has been inflicted on any of the family members. Some objectives are to support these families in ways that benefit the children to their best ability. Educational programs get involved and are used as another resource to give the children a step towards cognitive growth and social-emotional understanding. After discovering that a large population of children were not in an educational program, they have been able to connect with families and provide that pathway for them.

One of the team's primary forms of engagement with these families is by performing home visits and assisting the parents by talking about the progression of their familial-related issues that were discussed from previous visits. By setting goals, and having one-on-one conversations, they can prevent poor parenting outcomes and decision making. Building connections and relationships is another significant goal within the program, because sometimes the relationships built are what provides motivation and strength to the family's desire to be healthy. By getting the family to create their own solutions and nurturing environment for their children, they can let the families establish a more knowledgeable approach to taking care of a family.

As an intern at the site, I was able to do a variety of things when it came to getting involved with the families in the area and the child-care learning center. My main role was to provide support and assistance in the child-care learning center and to interact with the children who were placed there. I was able to connect with them through conversations and activities that taught me a lot about them personally. I helped out with classroom activities involving teaching, crafts, and playtime. Being able to engage with the children and the teachers was great experience, as I also was able to see the perspectives of the staff as well.

My one-on-one interactions with children didn't stop there, as I was also able to plan activities and games for the kids to do whilst I was at a home visit with my supervisors. This gave me a chance to gauge what developmental stage the child was at, while also being able to keep the child and parent engaged with sessions. Intellectual and physical growth played a significant part in the goals of these activities. I also was able to observe the sessions between the parents and my supervisor while they discussed future goals to reach by a set date and identified the ways that they could improve their child's life and their parenting skills. The focus of these meetings was on being able to support the family by providing ways for them to be able to discover how to be fully functional to benefit their children.

I was also able to deliver prepped meals and other delicious treats to families in need around the county who were enlisted in the program. These deliveries furthered my connections with clients, and I got to be updated on their progression. This opened up conversations about programs and resources that they would've been eligible for to support their needs and expand





their involvement with the program. There are a ton of families in the area that need this support, so being able provide any family with resources for receiving additional support marked a very successful visit. Experiencing and observing these environments that the families were living in gave me a wider perspective of how many people there are in the area that need our help, but can't be reached due to a lack of resources. I was very thankful to be able to expose myself to these environments, as I gained a lot of knowledge and cultural exposure as well.

Another thing that I was able to do was research topics on how to help improve children in daycare settings with their social-emotional development, as I found that this was something that needs more attention. I loved being able to analyze and dive into how we could fix and fully understand the issues that were occurring daily at my site. The amount of care and dedication that the team has for the children within the programs was very inspiring and motivational for me to be a part of. Virtual meetings with the board took place in order to talk about these issues and provide the team with an opportunity to discuss improvement and updates on the program as a whole. Sitting in on these meetings was interesting as I got to witness a professional meeting and what it is like to be aboard a humanities program.

Because I got involved with the program during COVID-19, I was unable to go on as many family visits as I desired to. However, I was able to gain a lot of connections and experiences through creating involved solutions to many other tasks that I was sent to do during the semester. I appreciated the flexibility during my time there, as they would schedule me based on my availability and how many hours I needed. There were days where I would be thrown around from one location to another multiple times a day, and it was fun to be able to explore the community and dip my toes in several places that the programs were involved with. They made sure that I got a very realistic experience so that I can truly understand how the field works and operates. By witnessing how the pandemic affected this non-profit organization, I was able to appreciate the conversations that the board would have to both resolve their status and improve the relationships that they developed with families in need.

The thing that I loved the most about working here was being able to get involved with the Childcare Learning Center that Mrs. Yvonne (my supervisor) was also involved with. I was able to really interact with the children there and develop relationships with them. They would remember who I was, and I was able to learn more and more about them every time I went back. A skill that I was able to practice through this experience was talking to children to help teach them how to reflect on themselves and situations around them. I would help them be socially and emotionally aware of the people around them and of themselves. I could never think of the right words to say in these situations, and though I still struggle with it now, being able to put these skills into action and practice made me more comfortable with it at the same time. I was also able to practice gauging how the children were doing at home when I observed them arriving at the center until they left and got picked up by family. A lot is revealed about family dynamics at the Childcare Learning Center, and being able to pick up on cues and signs that they give while interacting with you is a skill that I feel is very important, especially if someone is planning to work with social services or children in general. This was a great semester to get involved, as these were times that families and children needed this form of support especially due to the pandemic.



*Spring 2021 – Allison Acero*

This semester I had the opportunity to intern at Healthy Families of Shenandoah and Page County. This organization works with local parents to learn about development, self-sufficiency, stability, and help them be ready for school. The mission of Healthy Families is to empower families by connecting them to community resources and offering in-home services and they “believe every caretaker wants to do their best, and raising kids is the hardest, most important job anyone can ever have. Through collaboration with other community groups and agencies, Healthy Families identifies resources to meet families' needs on an individual, case-by-case basis”.

Throughout my placement, I worked primarily at the associated child care establishment known as the Community Care & Learning Center (CCLC). This center is a Non-profit child care program that opened in May 2019 located in New Market, VA and was founded by Yvonne Frazier (my supervisor) and Regina Clements. They both began this program because they saw a need within the community for quality and affordable child care. The mission of the CCLC is “to provide accessible, quality child care that supports parents’ ability to maintain stable employment while knowing their children are in a safe, nurturing, and enriching environment”.

The CCLC is open to all local families, however prices may vary and spots for children are limited. Within the center there are three separate rooms/buildings: the infant room (children up to 1-years-old), the toddler room (children aged 1 & 2-years-old), and the preschool (ages 3-5). I was placed in the preschool room on Thursdays and on Fridays I would switch back and forth between the toddler & infant rooms. Going into this experience, I was extremely worried about how to behave around and towards the children because I do not have much experience with being a child caretaker. At first, I was quite hesitant when it came to interactions and disciplining but as time went on, I became comfortable with how to behave as I quickly learned proper behaviors and actions. Something that I find of true value is that through my time spent at the CCLC, I was able to observe and examine the way that children function when it comes to certain situations. It was interesting to watch how each child reacted positively and negatively to different activities. This motivated me to create my contribution project, which was focused on the benefits of sensory play. My contribution project included a variety of sensory enhancing activities that allowed me to observe how each child interacted differently with each material. The staff at the CCLC has done a wonderful job in creating an environment that is able to enhance and stimulate all of their senses, but I hope that my project brought new ideas that they can incorporate into lesson plans.

There are not many limitations or disadvantages that I can make of note from my experience. Although I enjoyed every moment I had with the children, at times it was overwhelming. There were moments where a child would have behavioral issues and refused to listen to the staff. However, in dealing with type of situation, I was able to learn the importance of patience and the certain triggers of a child. Unfortunately, due to my busy schedule and the need for me at the CCLC, I was unable to attend any home visits or learn about case files. This was something I had hoped to be able to do, but it just was not possible because I was constantly



busy with something else. On the other hand, there are several advantages that I can note from this experience. Not only was I able to gain experience and knowledge on childhood development, I was also able to form genuine bonds with the children. While at my time at the site, I was able to enjoy all the different personalities these children bring to the center and it reminded me about how rewarding it is to make an impact in their lives. Towards the end of my placement, I noticed they enjoyed having me there and I also enjoyed being able to create memorable experiences with them. Another advantage of this experience is that I was able to complete all of it in person. With COVID-19, I was worried that my placement was going to be completely virtual, which would have hindered my ability to gain any in-person experience that I believed to be essential in my experience. Thankfully, by following several guidelines and making sure I was staying safe, I was able to complete this experience in an appropriate manner.

Overall, I am pleased with my experience with Healthy Families. This placement has made me realize that I would like to work with children in the future. Before the semester started, I knew that I wanted to work for Children Protective Services after graduation, but now I hope to further my education in hopes of working more directly with children. I have enjoyed being able to learn more about childhood development and how being of direct help can enhance this development. I had a great relationship with the staff and my supervisor. The staff was always helpful when I encountered situations in which I did not know how to properly handle. My supervisor was also responsive to any questions or concerns I had regarding my experience. Not only have I gained skills that will be of great help in whatever career choices I make in my future, I have also gained skills that will be useful in any real life situations.

### ***Spring 2021 – Erin Catillo***

This semester, I had the privilege of interning at Healthy Families of Page and Shenandoah county, based in their Page County office in Stanley, Virginia. The mission of Healthy Families is to promote child well-being and prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation's children through home visiting services. Throughout my time at this site, I have been able to attend various home visits and help complete developmental logs on a child's development, I have been able to be a part of the food delivery service where we drop off food boxes to families and assess their needs, I have also been able to learn more about grant funding for COVID-19 relief, as many people are out of work and having a difficult time catching up on bills or other payments. I really enjoyed being able to work with people long term and see improvements in their home situations as well as the direct impact our COVID-19 relief grant has had on families, such as us being able to make a direct payment to their electric company.

It has been rewarding to see how grateful people are for our help, as well as to get to know a side of Virginia that I may have never gotten to see. I also learned so much about rural poverty, and the different needs of rural families versus those of urban families. I have been able to advocate for change regarding having more resources for fresh food for families, as Page county and its surrounding towns in the Valley are all considered registered food and childcare deserts. I have learned about many passions I have for advocating and having a voice for people who are unable to have a voice themselves.



Since starting this internship my career choices have changed greatly. I originally wanted to become a school psychologist and eventually become a private practicing therapist but advocating and working directly within a community has changed my views. I have now decided to pursue my Master of Social Work and take the clinical track to obtain my LCSW (licensed clinical social worker) so I still have the option to work in private practice counseling, but I can also work long term with clients to get them involved with community resources, and work in a variety of settings. This internship overall taught me that I have a very broad variety of interests in the field of psychology, and the best way for me to explore all my options and work in a variety of settings is with a master's in social work. My long-term goal after obtaining my LCSW is to work as a medical social worker in a hospital setting so I can still get the clinical psychology aspect that I am interested in, but also advocate for patients and help them get in contact with different resources and plan for their discharge.

What I liked the most about working in my internship is seeing a population of people that I have nearly nothing in common with. While this sounds strange, my background is so different from theirs, and I really enjoyed the diversity of people I got to see. This was my first experience working in a rural setting, and while it took me out of my comfort zone it also taught me so much about the needs different populations have in different parts of the country. This experience has been invaluable, as now I have experience working in nearly every setting you could imagine. I also got to work with an age group I have never worked with which are infants-4-year-olds. My main realm of experience is with 7-18, so working with younger children and having a broad range of experience has been very helpful for me to decide which population I prefer.

One disadvantage that I also think is an advantage is this internship also taught me exactly what I do not want to do with my career, which is work in a school setting with young children. One day a week I was placed in the preschool, and I learned quickly that working in a preschool or school in general was not the right setting for me. Although the career of a school psychologist would be much different than what I was doing in the preschool, I learned that the advocacy and clinical side of social work is what I am most interested in. I am glad I learned this now and not when I was in graduate school obtaining a masters in school psychology. I am a true believer in everything happens for a reason, and I believe this placement taught me so much about myself.

As a final takeaway, I learned to never doubt myself and my intelligence. Going into the psychology major as a young freshman I was scared I was not smart enough amongst the rest of my peers who were strictly into research and statistics. I had a fear that I would go nowhere within the major since research was not my interest or strong suit, and that my passion for helping others was not enough to take me anywhere. As I persevered through college and now up to this point, I learned that I in fact am smart enough and that my passion about this field has taken me very far in life and will continue to do so. This placement has been overall extremely positive and has given me the confidence to pursue my dreams, and that is something I will carry with me for the rest of my career.



***Fall 2020 – Megan Mossburg***

This semester I had the opportunity to complete my Intro to Field Work internship with Healthy Families in Page County. Healthy Families is a national organization that provides support for parents and their young children that otherwise would not have access to important resources. According to the Healthy Families of America (HFA) website, “The mission of HFA is to promote child well-being and prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation’s children through home visiting services.” The services that Healthy Families provides are completely free, and families that participate do so voluntarily.

Families interested in the program complete an initial intake session conducted by a Family Support Specialist (FSS). This first session and all following home visits are generally conducted in the family home and are very important in establishing a relationship between the organization and the family. This visit provides the FSS with valuable information about the specific needs of the family in question and helps in the construction of an individualized plan and goals. The following home visits involve the FSS explaining important developmental knowledge pertinent to the age of the target child or children. The age range for children in the Healthy Families program ranges from prenatal to 5 years, so one of the main goals of the home visits is ensuring preschool readiness. As such, the FSS also facilitates activities targeted at specific realms of the child’s development (socioemotional, cognitive, behavioral, etc.). In addition, the FSS works with the parents or guardians of the children to identify specific goals that they may want to achieve that would improve the overall wellbeing of the family, such as working towards a driver’s license.

As an intern during COVID-19, my experiences and opportunities looked a bit different than those of past semesters. Regardless, my supervisors worked with me to ensure that I got the most out of my experience. Before the internship began, my supervisor spoke with me at length about what my interests are. I have a minor in Spanish, so my supervisor set up visits that I could attend with a Spanish-speaking family. This opportunity allowed me to draw upon many different skills I have developed while also challenging me. As I mentioned, the main service provided by Healthy Families is home visiting. The summer before I began my internship, most of the “home visiting” was being conducted virtually via Zoom. During my time, however, the FSS and I were able to actually go to the homes. Of course, we wore masks and socially distanced, often working with the families outside on a porch. After several weeks of assisting the FSS in the administration of activities, I was offered the opportunity to create plans for visits which I really enjoyed. This allowed me to deepen my understanding of the services provided by Healthy Families and gave me the opportunity to be even more involved in the process. In addition, I was able to learn about their organizational system and how to properly document what was seen during the home visits while maintaining client confidentiality.

Another unique aspect of my experience was the time I spent working at the Child Care and Community Center (CCLC) in Newmarket. My supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, was the main catalyst in the opening of the CCLC around 2 years ago. She saw a need for this type of service within the community, so she worked to create a place where parents could feel comfortable



sending their children during the day. I spent my time at the CCLC as a “floater”, meaning I worked with children from all age ranges (infant to 5 years old). I was also offered the opportunity to shadow a children’s developmental and mental health professional who came to the CCLC to assess the wellbeing of the children. I had mentioned my interest in pursuing a graduate degree in developmental psychology, so it was exciting to be able to incorporate that experience into my internship as well.

I really enjoyed my time working with Healthy Families because I was able to apply much of what I learned in the classroom to a real world setting while also forming real relationships with people. I feel that I was valued as an intern and was challenged while also being supported. I also gained a lot of professional experience and knowledge about potential career paths. In addition to the substantial time I spent at Healthy Families and the CCLC, I was also offered many opportunities outside of those experiences to join seminars and receive training. The only disadvantage to working at this site is the distance. It took me about 45 minutes to commute from my apartment in Harrisonburg to Healthy Families in Page County. I would suggest trying to schedule one full day working at Healthy Families rather than two half days for this reason.

Overall, I am so thankful to have been able to have this opportunity to work with Healthy Families. My two main supervisors, Yvonne Frazier and Becky Kipps, worked hard to ensure that I had the best possible experience. I was able to be involved in many different aspects of working at both Healthy Families and the CCLC related to my goals. I also worked on developing skills that can only come from experience in a real-world setting. This Intro to Field Work experience has taught me a lot about myself, specifically that I definitely want to work with children in the future as part of my career.

### ***Spring 2020 – Ashley Johnson***

My field placement site for the Spring 2020 semester was Healthy Families of Page and Shenandoah Counties. Healthy Families is a national organization that assists families in need. These families could be struggling financially, have members battling substance abuse or other mental illnesses, along with other situations. The mission of Healthy Families Shenandoah and Page County is to empower families by connecting them to community resources and offering in home services. These services are completely voluntary and free to these families. Healthy Families works to identify resources to meet families’ needs on an individual and case-by-case basis. Healthy Families provides home visits, parent education and support groups, and connects individuals to other outside goods and services that will benefit them and their families.

The Healthy Families of Page and Shenandoah County include 4 Family Support Workers, a Manager, and a Director. The family support workers are the individuals that are going on home visits and directly helping the families. The manager of Healthy Families is responsible for communicating with both locations, along with making sure the organizations are accredited, working with other organizations, and more. The director of Healthy Families handles most of the oversight and the communication with JMU. I worked closest with the family support worker Becky at the Page County location, along with the Manager of Healthy



Families, Yvonne. Yvonne was my supervisor and was my main contact when it came to the class itself, while Becky was the one who I talked to about the families and clients we visited.

Most of the work during my time as the Healthy Families intern involved home visits. The first few weeks of my internship, I spent a lot of time reading over case files and learning about the families that I would be working with. Many of them had been part of the Healthy Families program for years, so I was able to go back to their original, oldest files and see how much the individuals had grown from the beginning to now. After reading over the files of the patients I would see, I then went on home visits with the family support worker named Becky. Becky and I would travel 10-40 minutes away from the Healthy Families office to the homes of these families to conduct home visits. Before the visits, Becky and I would select activities for the child and parent to complete that day. These activities were based off the “Parent as Teachers”, or PAT, curriculum. These activities varied based on the children’s age and what skills they could improve on.

Although home visiting was my main responsibility during my time at Healthy Families, there were other assignments for me as well. I was given the opportunity to plan and lead one of the educational parent support groups for the month of February. I worked on this lesson with the Healthy Families Social Work intern. I also played a part in entering data into the new HF database. This was a task that was very important to complete, because it was going to have a major impact on getting their accreditation for the following year. Along with the database, I assisted the manager of Healthy Families in working on accreditation for the upcoming year. I helped by editing the past accreditation packets along with offering advice and input on what to put in the next year’s packet. I also helped in any way that I could and also spent time researching homeless shelters, important dates and events coming up, contacting organizations, and more.

I really don’t think I could’ve enjoyed my time at Healthy Families more than I did, and there are many advantages to the site. First off, the staff that makes up this organization could not be better. I have genuinely never met a kinder, supportive, and selfless group of people before. Becky and Yvonne have been nothing but understanding and encouraging throughout this semester, especially with COVID-19 and all the outcomes that have come out of it. Another advantage of Healthy Families is the variety of people I got to work with. I was able to work with individuals from all different backgrounds, and understand how to create relationships with all sorts of people. I also got to see first-handedly how those in rural areas struggle. They have a lot of factors that they have to work through that those living in more urban locations do not, and I really enjoyed gaining insight on this. Lastly, a major advantage of being a Healthy Families intern was being able to genuinely see how difficult it is for struggling individuals to make their lives better. I gained an endless amount of respect for all individuals, and after my time at this site, I aim to show every person, no matter who they are and what they’ve gone through, support and kindness. Although before this experience I was accepting of all people, I have broadened my horizons more than I ever could’ve without working at Healthy Families.

I have also learned about some of the limitations that Healthy Families faces. First off, Healthy Families is a completely free and voluntary service. This means that some individuals aren’t going to take the program as seriously as they would if this was required by law or they



had to pay for it. Another limitation is its location, and the type of organization it is. Although Healthy Families is one of only 5 organizations in the nation that are federally funded, they are still very limited on funds and rely heavily on donations. Although they make this work for the families, I believe that some of the staff members are underpaid.

I honestly believe I could not have picked a better site than Healthy Families. Every day I left the office feeling pleased and accomplished. I loved my supervisor and the staff, and I plan on having a relationship with Becky and Yvonne in the future. I felt like they valued me and trusted me as an intern. Throughout the changes that Coronavirus gave us, Yvonne kept in constant contact with me and assisted me almost daily with emails and phone calls. She also set me up with the Page County Police Department to create a project for them to get hours for Field Placement. I also loved that I got to meet so many adults and children that were part of the HF program. I loved working with the children and learning how to relate to the parents!

As amazing as Healthy Families was, I had a few small complaints. It was a very long drive to the office, and since the staff didn't want me to waste more time driving than getting hours, we had difficulty scheduling days for me to come out. Another thing that affected my time and hours was the amount of families that would cancel the day of their visit, sometime as soon as an hour before. Many times, there wasn't enough work in the office for me to come in, which added to my difficulty to get hours.

I learned some valuable things from my time at Healthy Families. First, I learned about how important creating relationships with people are, and what an impact you can make in someone's life. For example, there was one case during my time at HF where the mother in a family was suffering with domestic violence. Her partner had dumped her on the side of the road with no phone, money, or any way to contact anyone in the middle of the night. The mother had to make her way to the local hospital to use a phone, and immediately called Becky. This showed me how important Becky's role is to the people she is working with. I also learned how to enter data, research other resources, edit accreditation packets, and overall work with people from all backgrounds.

My time at Healthy Families realized that I am my happiest and best self when I am helping others, and that is where my passion resides. When it comes to my career goals, this time at Healthy Families has helped me realize that I have a huge interest in social work. Eventually, I would like to get my Masters of Social Work and become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) so I could also do therapy. I would also love to specialize in helping battered woman escape toxic relationships! I am working for Amazon after graduation, but plan to go back to school in a few years after I have saved up enough money to complete my degree. Overall, I am so blessed that I picked Field Placement as my senior capstone and got to meet these amazing people and have these amazing experiences this semester!

### ***Fall 2019 – Kayla Kemp (Intro Field Work)***

I chose to complete my Fieldwork at Healthy Families in Page County this semester. Healthy Families is a free voluntary program for parents and their child who are in need of support and resources to ensure the best upbringing for their child. According to their mission,





Healthy Families “empowers families by connecting them to community resources and offering in-home services... so that parents and other caretakers can give children a safe, healthy start in life”. The main service offered to families in this program is home-visiting. These are led by a Family Support Worker (FSW) who has a background in education and social work. The FSW brings a lesson and activity to the family’s home in order to promote development of the child and improve parenting skills. Additionally, the parent and FSW work together to set goals and take steps in achieving them. The FSW provides referrals and information for community resources and support in order to better their family life as a whole. This program can begin prenatally and continue until the child reaches 5 years of age. Given the long-term investment FSWs devote to each individual family, workers develop a close relationship with families which is clearly seen in the abundant love and care they have for those they are serving.

Throughout my time at Healthy Families, I had numerous opportunities to engage with families and participate in many different areas of work. Before beginning this fieldwork, both my supervisors asked me about my future goals and personal interests and were very thoughtful in scheduling home visits on my work days that I would get the most purpose out of. For example, I mentioned I am a Pre-Occupational Therapy minor and have experience and interest in working with amputees. Because of this, my supervisor scheduled multiple home-visits with a pregnant amputee mother who was having trouble keeping up with her toddler as well as preparing for the newborn. In addition to introducing me to families in my realm of interest, my supervisor made sure I consistently saw the same family each week so I got the full experience of seeing the week to week with a family and growing a real personal connection. The thoughtfulness and personal accommodations my supervisors put into this truly made my experience memorable and allowed me to grow and learn exponentially.

In addition to going on home-visits, my supervisor allowed me to participate in the work leading up to and following each home visit. To prepare to see a family, my supervisor would pick a Parents as Teachers (PAT) lesson plan to do with the child. She also printed a copy of the plan to discuss with the parent so they understood the developmental benefits of what we brought and how to continue to engage in similar activities when we leave. After spending a few weeks with specific families, my supervisor allowed me to start picking out the toys and books to bring that were geared towards the needs and desires of that child. After home-visits, the FSW has to write a home-visit log which documents the important aspects of that visit including goal status, updates on family well-being, the lesson plan used, and how the parent and child interacted. After reading a few of these documents from case files, my supervisor gave me the opportunity to write them myself following home-visits. This allowed me to develop and grow my writing and documentation skills which will be very useful for my future documenting sessions with patients in occupational therapy.

Mid-way through my experience at Healthy Families, my supervisor brought another opportunity to my attention. The oldest daughter of a mother in the program was struggling in school. My supervisor thought of me and asked if I would be willing to tutor her for an hour each week while the mother and second child had their normally scheduled visit with the FSW. This was a perfect solution allowing the 3<sup>rd</sup> grader to get the support she needs while also allowing the



mother and newborn to have the necessary personal time with the FSW. I am so thankful that my supervisor thought of me in this situation and I was able to help this girl in need.

There are so many advantages to doing fieldwork at a nonprofit organization and interning at Healthy Families specifically only added to these benefits. One of the biggest advantages about this program is that it is free and voluntary so the families you work with truly want to be a part of this and want the help and support you have to offer. I have seen first-hand how thankful and gracious these families are when we bring them a new outfit for their baby, some extra diapers for the week, or food donations from Panera. With that being said, these families do go through a lot of hardships so they may not be as consistent or dependable as we would hope. Although having a family cancel a home-visit is always disappointing, it allowed me to grow patience and understanding. In addition to the amazing families you meet interning at this site, the workers at Healthy Families are another great advantage. They are extremely personable, attentive, generous, and kind-hearted and they have taught me so much about being in the care-taking industry. Another benefit of this experience was the variety of work I had the opportunity to engage in. I have chosen a career in occupational therapy because I like to be up and moving, consistently doing something different on the job, which is exactly what Healthy Families allowed me to do. I would spend part of each day at different family's homes, writing on the computer, doing activities with children, tutoring, or organizing donations. Because of this variety, I never felt like I outgrew my work.

Overall, my experience at Healthy Families was very well-rounded with a wide range of experiences and opportunities that helped me grow in so many areas. As previously mentioned, my writing skills grew in a way that none of my academic classes has allowed them to. Documentation writing is something that is hard to get experience in with normal academic lectures so this opportunity to write logs each week was extremely beneficial to me, especially given my career goals. Additionally, I expanded my knowledge of child development by observing my supervisor engage with the children and discussing developmental milestones with her afterwards. Spending time with children from newborn to 8 years old also allowed me to understand what is expected at each age and how children progress relative to each other. This skill was also developed through conducting Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) with children. These questionnaires are conducted at different ages in order to track the development of a child in their early stages of life. Knowing exactly what to look for was very helpful in understanding the specific needs of that child. Completing my fieldwork at Healthy Families was an amazing experience for me and allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. I am very thankful for this opportunity and all the people I had the chance to work with.

### ***Fall 2017 – Martina Samoel***

I chose the Healthy Families program in Page County for my field placement. The mission of Healthy Families is to “provide consistent and ongoing support to families so that they can give their children a healthy and safe start in life.” To achieve that, Healthy Families works with parents who are at risk of providing a healthy environment for their children. Parents



who are qualified to enroll in the program have usually struggled with a history of substance abuse, poverty, cognitive impairments and mental issues. The main service that Healthy Families provides is home visits, which is done by a Family Support Worker (FSW). During home visits, the Family Support Worker educates the parent mainly on child development and how to raise and discipline a child. In addition, the FSW addresses any issues or concerns the family might have and provides the family with appropriate resources. The Family Support Workers at Healthy Families truly invest in the lives of the families they work with, and they deeply care about each of the families.

Throughout my placement at Healthy Families I had the advantage of participating in a wide variety of opportunities. First of all, I was able to accompany the Family Support Worker on several home visits. A few weeks after I started with Healthy Families both my supervisor and the FSW ensured to schedule home visits with the families that I had connections with on the days I was on site, so I could consistently work closely with those families. This enriched my experience and allowed me to see some growth in certain families throughout my time at Healthy Families. During my initial home visits, I used to just observe the interaction between the FSW with both the parent and the child and learn how the FSW manages each visit to meet the specific needs of each family. Later, I was able to participate and contribute more to each home visit by asking questions and helping the parents reflect on their life and their struggles. I also helped incorporate the activity we brought for the families to help with their child's development. After each visit, I got to write a report highlighting strengths we observed, any goal updates, the interaction between the parent and the child, reflective strategies that were used, and any issues discussed during the visit.

Another experience that I had at Healthy families and I very much enjoyed was developing and leading Parents Social Support groups. After getting familiarized with the community at Page County and observing the lack of social support, especially within the families enrolled in the Healthy Families program, I felt the necessity to help parents establish a healthy social support system. Because one of Healthy families' strengths in Page County is the freedom and independence they give to their interns, I had the opportunity to be creative when planning and structuring groups. I was responsible for the majority of the planning from advertising and creating flyers, reservations, funding, and purchasing all the essential material. Researching the topics discussed during each group was educating and enlightening to me. During the actual group meetings, I was given the opportunity to prepare and lead group discussions, which has helped me gain a lot of confidence and helped me connect better with families. It has been thrilling to see families come to groups and learn about related material, and I am excited to continue to lead groups next semester as well.

One other opportunity that I was grateful to get involved in is the Lunch Buddies program. Healthy Families cooperates with the Stanley Elementary school to pair interns with students with behavioral difficulties. I had lunch with two students once a week during their lunch time at school. During that time, I got to know them well and gain a good understanding of their needs and struggles and how to provide for them. The goals of the program are to present good models to the students who would work with the students on modifying their behavior, and to enhance their attendance at school as the students look forward to having lunch with their



buddies every week. I have truly enjoyed my time with the students and my conversations with them. Because of how much I have enjoyed being involved in Lunch Buddies and observing the little progress those students made throughout the semester, I have decided to continue to participate in the program in the following semester as well.

Working on surveys was a valuable opportunity that I had not had experience with before joining Healthy Families. I got to create a new Parent Satisfaction Survey to replace the old one that both programs in Page County and Shenandoah County used to use. That was after I developed a good understanding of the nature of the program to be able to include the important points on the survey to help the staff get a comprehensive feedback from parents to then make adjustments as needed. I also started three different surveys to be used by future JMU students to track the changes in academics and behaviors in the elementary school students to be able to observe the effectiveness of the Lunch Buddies program. The data collected will then be utilized to conduct research and run data analyses in hope to draw more JMU students to participate in the program.

I am grateful for my time at Healthy Families and for all the skills and knowledge that I have acquired. Through leading groups, my confidence level has certainly increased as well as my ability to create a balance in making groups beneficial yet fun to parents. Because I was usually giving little instructions, that allowed me to become more creative and work independently while still getting sufficient feedback on the content of my work. Having to implement a new project to the program helped me become more aware and observant of the needs of the work place, which allowed me to take more initiative. Although my time at Healthy Families has proven that working with families and low-income population is not what I want to pursue in the future, it has affirmed my passion toward counseling and working with patients with mental health problems.

Healthy Families is a great program for students who would like to gain some experience working with families, low-income population, and individuals with cognitive and mental issues. The Healthy Families staff helps students get the best out of their experience. The supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, really works with students to personalize the experience they get at healthy families to align with their interests. Mrs. Frazier would sometimes challenge interns and push them out of their comfort zone, which expands room for growth and personally and professionally. Healthy Families is a program where students are allowed to add their input to the program as they gain a rich experience and expand their knowledge.

### ***Fall 2017 – Jessie Johnson***

Healthy Families in Page and Shenandoah counties has been a great organization to work with. Their mission statement is, "We provide consistent and ongoing support to families, so they can give their children a healthy and safe start in life." Healthy Families provides home visiting services for families in need. Many of the families Healthy Families works with are low income, single mother households. At the beginning of my placement I was skeptical about how well this program works. Over time I discovered that Health Families is very beneficial for many mothers who do not have a large support system or one at all. I was able to enter homes and see where



people live. This allowed me to have a better understanding of how to help these mothers. I was also taught how to use Parents as Teachers curriculum to help mothers understand their child's development. I learned that parent understanding of their child's development is very important for attachment and bonding between parent and child.

Healthy Families is a primarily volunteer program, though the Department of Social Services can require families to participate in this program. This is one aspect of the program I did not like. Mothers who were required to participate did not want to stay with the program after the required period was up and I do not feel like they took much from the program. However, I love that I was able to see progress in some of the families I worked with over my time with Healthy Families. I mentioned that I was a little skeptical about whether Healthy Families helped at first, being able to see progress made me appreciate the program a lot more.

During my time at Healthy Families I learned a lot about social work and about myself. I learned this semester that this type of work will be a lot more work mentally than I had originally expected. This is important when thinking about my future career because I want to make sure I will be able to handle the stress of this career field. There were a couple rough days when I wanted to give up because a case was particularly hard to cope with, but it really helped to talk with my supervisors and other family support workers at Healthy Families. I learned that forming a support system for yourself is a very important part of working in a human services field. I am very thankful that I had so much support this semester and am positive it enabled me to do well this semester. I also learned this semester from my supervisor that I let a lot of my past come out during my work. I would like to continue to work on how I let this part of me come through next semester when I return to Healthy Families as a volunteer.

Another aspect of Healthy Families that I have enjoyed is their lunch buddy program. The lunch buddy program also made me feel like I was making a difference. I learned that students depend a lot on adult interaction and certain students need a lot more interaction than others. This program is a great asset to Healthy Families because it allows greater outreach to giving children a healthy and safe start in life. This was a great learning opportunity for my future career as well. During this time, I got to work with a child who has behavioral problems. I want to eventually work with children who have behavioral problems and end up in juvenile detention, so I believe this was great experience. I also learned how important steady interaction with children who have behavioral problems is. The child I worked with asked about me when I missed a day. This showed me how important my having lunch with this child is.

I also got to participate in data analysis. I kind of felt overwhelmed when I first started working with Healthy Families data system PIMS and didn't feel like I got much direction. Then I asked for help and received it. This was something very important I took from this placement. It's okay to ask for help when I need it. Whether it's data entry or just needing a second to talk to my supervisor because I have had a rough day, it's always alright to ask for help. I feel like this is one of the most important things I took from Healthy Families. I am very stubborn and often think that I can do everything on my own. I realized that it's okay to ask for direction and it does not make me look any less competent to ensure I am doing the correct things asked of me.

Another great thing that Healthy Families offered this semester was support groups for families that were set up by the other intern. These groups allowed families to come together and



meet one another. This was a nice addition to the program because many of Healthy Families clients do not feel they have a support system. This allowed families to come together and potentially make friends who had similar aspirations they did. Overall, I enjoyed my time with Healthy Families a lot. I learned a lot about the human services field and myself. Most of all I enjoyed working with families who need a little extra help. It was rewarding to feel like I was able to make a difference in some of these families live. I don't currently have any suggestions for this awesome program. Though it would be nice if they had more funding to provide transportation for their clients who do not have it, I understand however that this is not a realistic idea because of the small scale of the program. My supervisor explained that they do not get as much money as some large-scale programs because those are seen to have more need. It's really amazing to me that the family support workers use their own vehicles to transport clients to their appointments sometimes.

### ***Spring 2017 – Denise Bozek***

For my psychology field placement, I chose to work at Healthy Families in Page County. The mission of Healthy Families is to provide consistent and ongoing support to families so that they can give their children a healthy and safe start to life. Many of the families that are served are new parents, but there are some that already have one or two children. We also mainly worked directly with the mothers in the families, but some fathers and grandparents were also involved. Healthy Families aims to achieve positive health outcomes for the families, decrease the potential of child maltreatment, help the children with their school readiness, promote healthy child development, and improve family functioning as a whole.

Throughout my time at this site I was able to try many different things that allowed me to strengthen and develop my skills. One opportunity that I had for the entirety of the semester was going on home visits. I accompanied a staff member, Becky Kipps, on home visits and observed how to incorporate the activities that we brought for the families to learn about their child's development. Each visit we would bring an activity, called a Parent As Teacher, or PAT, plan. These would differ based on the age of the child, and we taught the parents how they could do it on their own. Going on home visits is something that I really enjoyed because I was able to see many different kinds of families, each one with a unique story and background. After each home visit I would write up a home visit log based on what happened during the visit, strengths that were observed, reflective strategies that were used, goals of the parents, issues that were talked about, and what to do for the next visit.

Another experience that I had for several weeks at the beginning of the semester was multiple analyses. The main one was a cultural analysis and in doing this I saw where the needs were in the families and how this has changed from previous years. Another one that I did was a parent satisfaction survey analysis, and this analyzed the results from an anonymous survey that was provided to each parent that had been in the program for at least several months. I enjoyed this one because I saw the feedback from the parents, and I was happy to see that the majority of the parents had many kind things to say about the program as a whole. Lastly, I completed a



home visit analysis and this was to have an overview of the home visits for the families from each month for the previous year. This analysis helps make sure that each family is receiving the appropriate number of home visits and what causes some months to be busier than others. Doing all of these analyses was helpful in learning more about the site while I was there, seeing where the most crucial needs were, and some ways to improve.

Something else we were able to start at Healthy Families was a parent-child playgroup, called Together Time. We started this group because there was a need for some parenting classes, and we thought it would be beneficial for the parents to have a group where they could do activities with their children in order to strengthen their bond. Although the group did not have great attendance, it was enjoyable to put the group together and research the importance of play between a child and their parents.

One final opportunity that I was able to have at Healthy Families was getting involved with an activity called Lunch Buddies. In doing this, we went to the local elementary school and were paired with a child who came from at-risk situations at home. We had lunch with these children on average, once a week, and some of the staff even went to the classroom to help the children with their schoolwork as well. I really enjoyed going to have lunch with the student I was paired with because as the semester went on, I got to know the child better and it was something that I always looked forward to each week. The child got to know me better as well, and it was always so nice to see him yell hi to me from far away when I walked into the cafeteria. The purpose of Lunch Buddies is for the students to have something at school to look forward to and for there to be someone in the child's life at school who is making sure that their home life is safe by talking with them and asking them questions. I think this program is really valuable because the children can truly benefit from having another positive adult figure in their life, even if it is for a short amount of time.

It was an advantage for me while being at the site of Healthy Families that I was able to do many different things during the semester, so I was able to try multiple things and see what worked for me and what I liked best. My supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, allowed me to have different opportunities and do things that were suited for me and could strengthen my skills. Overall, my favorite things were going on home visits and doing Lunch Buddies. Some disadvantages and limitations about the site was that there were some days or weeks that many parents would have to cancel their home visits, so there would be some days when I was not able to go on a visit and write the logs. Unfortunately, this was out of our control most of the time because it was the parents who cancelled, but when this happened, staff members worked hard to find more opportunities for home visits and made sure I was going on enough of them.

Throughout my time at this site I learned many things that influenced my goals. Healthy Families was a good fit for me because I love working with families and learning about child development, so this was a perfect place to incorporate both of those things into one. After working at Healthy Families, it has reaffirmed my goals and desires to work with people, particularly families, in need.

***Fall 2015 - Jen Conn***



I chose Healthy Families in Page County for my Psychology field placement. The mission of Healthy Families is to promote child well-being and prevent child abuse and neglect through home visiting services. To accomplish this, Healthy Families provides support to parents who are at risk of negative parenting outcomes. Parents who qualify for services are often single, have inconsistent housing, insufficient income, mental health concerns, or a history of substance abuse. Since services are 100% voluntary, families who choose to enroll have a desire to be involved in the program. A Family Support Worker meets with the family in the home on a regular basis to provide information on how parents can support their child's development and to help parents achieve goals that they have set. Goals often include things such as graduating high school, obtaining a job or even buying a house. Ideally, Healthy Families services begin prenatally and can last until the child is five years old.

In the mornings, I drove to New Market and then carpoled to the office in Stanley with a staff member. At Healthy Families, I was able to shadow a Family Resource Specialist on intake interviews, in which we learn about the family that was referred and determine if they qualify for services. I was also able to regularly accompany a Family Support Worker on home visits. This allowed me to see growth as certain families overcame major challenges throughout the course of the semester. After attending home visits, I was responsible for writing up home visit logs which monitor the progress made towards goals, parent-child interactions, the Parents-as-Teachers curriculum introduced and the overall well-being of the family. I also helped to score parents on assessments that were administered during the visits such as the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale and KIPS.

I was able to assist with monthly playgroups that Healthy Families organizes for parents and children involved in the program. Another opportunity that I found particularly valuable was attending Inter-professional Family Reviews each month. At these meetings, substance-abuse professionals, psychiatrists, and Healthy Families staff come together to discuss specific cases and problem-solve the issues faced by families in the program. Interns are encouraged to participate in these discussions and even present cases by the end of the semester. Even while reflecting with over lunch with Healthy Families staff, my input was always valued highly.

There were a few minor projects that I completed in my spare time at the office. I worked with my supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, to develop contact information sheets that helped improve worker safety. Upon completing that, I gathered data on the multicultural factors of each client currently in the system. I ran statistics on these factors and compared them to previous years. This semester, interns also received training on how to assess for domestic violence and conduct interventions during home visits.

I am very grateful to have been placed with Healthy Families Page County. I have been able to develop close relationships with the clients and young children that I have visited each week this semester. Since Healthy Families is a strength-based program, staff members work *with* families, and treat them with respect. There is a highly positive environment at Healthy





Families that is fostered by professionals who selflessly care for the well-being of clients and one another. Every person that I encountered who works for Healthy Families truly believes that there is meaning in their work. It has been such an inspiring and educational experience for me to work alongside these individuals.

If you choose to intern at Healthy Families, Yvonne will help cater the experience to your specific interests. If you want to focus on the research aspect of the program, work on outreach or introduce a topic for playgroup, you will have the opportunity to base your experience around that aspect. I enjoyed the ability to travel each day and complete a variety of tasks. Since no two days felt the same, it was easy to constantly remain interested and engaged while at the site. Though you are likely to encounter unfamiliar and potentially uncomfortable situations while interning with Healthy Families, the staff is always available to offer support and perspective.

Working with Healthy Families has affirmed my interest in working with a low-income population. Though I have always envisioned myself working with refugees or people of low socio-economic status, I had very limited experience with either of these groups prior to my field placement. In my time with Healthy Families, I have learned about the many challenges faced by people living in poverty and how difficult it can be for someone to break out of a cycle that they were born into. I have come to more fully recognize the extent of my privilege through this experience. Additionally, I have learned how many people of low socioeconomic status are hardworking, generous and resilient. After seeing the meaningful relationships that are developed, I am positive that I want to further explore this type of work. I have also been inspired after witnessing the effective change that programs such as these can have on people's lives. My confidence that I want to pursue a similar career has also increased as a result of realizing that I would be able to work alongside the sort of compassionate and motivated people who are drawn to this work. Though I know the population that I would prefer to work with, I am still unsure of whether I want to become a counselor or social worker.

Healthy Families could be a good fit if you have ever had an interest in social work or counseling. This could be a beneficial placement for people who are interested in substance abuse. Entering the homes of clients provides a more holistic view of their situation and creates the sort of personal relationship that is not always possible when they travel to an office to receive services. If you have a desire to learn more about home-visiting services, working with parents and/or young children or grant-funded programs, then I urge to seriously consider Healthy Families for your field placement.

*Spring 2015 – Lauren Moretti*

Healthy Families is an organization whose mission can be summarized in this simple phrase: “empowering families everyday.” They have dual goals of optimizing parenting and preventing child maltreatment. A number of services fall under that mission and those goals. A



large portion of what Healthy Families family support workers (employees who work directly with families) do is providing home visits. During a home visit, the family support worker works primarily with the parent. They educate the parent on a number of different topics—child development, safety, developing a bond with the child, how to praise and how to discipline, etc.—that promote healthy, effective parenting. The family support worker introduces different resources to the parent, as well. For example, the family support worker connects the parent to different resources in the community—organizations that give food and baby supplies, health care agencies, nutrition programs, child development specialists, and so on. What sets Healthy Families apart, in my opinion, in terms of services provided, is the emotional support and empowerment they give to each member of each family. I noticed first in my interview how clearly invested the Healthy Families employees are, and as I continued to work with those employees my understanding and appreciation of their emotional and professional investment grew.

There were a wide variety of opportunities for me to participate in. To start, I was able to both view and become active in home visits. I shadowed for a few initial home visits. I was able to see the how the family support worker interacted with both the parent and the child. The family support worker, showing genuine care, would “check in” with the parent. She asked how life, in general, is going, if previous conflicts were resolved, what were possible solutions to unresolved problems, how things are going with the child, among other things. The family support worker would describe the lesson she planned that related to some aspect of parenting, demonstrate that lesson while working with the child, and finally coach and praise the parent as she worked with the child and learned.

I later had the opportunity to work directly with the family. I met with the family support worker before the visit to create a lesson plan and to talk about the goals of the visit. At the visit, the family support worker would work with the parent and I worked with the child. I did activities that were aimed to support development with the child. Some of the developmental areas we focused on were language, social, motor, and educational development.

My favorite experience was developing and working with Born to Read. Born to Read was a preschool group that introduced children to books and the English language, showed them how to socialize with other children, and prepared them for preschool. I worked with a great group of interns and a family support worker from the first day of my internship to the final group at the end of the semester. We created lesson plans that would be both educational and exciting for little kids. We brought music, movement, art, and play to each meeting, as well as had story time and educational activities. The interns and I also had the opportunities to teach our lesson plan and work directly with the children.

What was most enjoyable and most valued to me while working with Healthy Families was the amount of independence I had. I was given a task with general instructions and information about its purpose. From there, I was able to use my own creativity to complete the



project. Of course, I still had supervision with these tasks. If I ever had a question, my supervisor was always available to answer it and when the project was completed she would review it with me and discuss the next steps. To go along with the skill of independence was the skill of being self-motivated. I was able to choose how I would spend my time during the day. I had a number of tasks to do and had to prioritize and be able to work efficiently to complete those tasks within a certain period of time. If you are someone who enjoys some degree of freedom in your work environment and are able to motivate yourself to complete tasks, this may be a good environment for you, as well.

One of the many valuable things I learned while working with Healthy Families is parents make the best teachers, which is something the employees and the organization itself believes strongly in. This was influential for my career goals because it emphasized to me the fact that the professional provides the tools for success. The parent (or client) is the one who brings those tools in her or his life to create daily change. This was important to me while working with Healthy Families and will be important in the future because it helped me to understand my role and the impact it has. Before working with Healthy Families, I felt as if there was always more I could do to help a client. Healthy Families and their belief that the parents are the ones who create the most change helped me to appreciate myself and the work I do for others an also helped me to appreciate and validate the great amount of work that families do to make their lives better.

If I could emphasize one thing about Healthy Families that made my experience so worthwhile it would be the environment they create. From my interview until the last day I was in the office, all of the Healthy Families employees were warm, welcoming, and above all, supportive. Working in a prevention program has a lot of challenges, especially emotionally. I was able to continue to work with difficult cases and still be effective because I had the support of the other employees. I was able to discuss at any time something that I was struggling with and process it until I found a possible solution to try or until I found acceptance.

Healthy Families is a great environment to learn how to assist others in a prevention setting and to grow as a professional and as a person through the support of those you will work with.

### ***Spring 2015- Jennifer Moya***

Healthy Families is a home-visiting organization dedicated to “empowering young families everyday”. They aim to achieve positive healthy outcomes for mothers and children, reduce the potential of child abuse and neglect, improve school readiness for children, promote optimal child development, and enhance family functioning. Healthy Families also collaborates with many community partners such as A Small Hand, RRR (Reading, Rhyming, Readiness), and the Pregnancy Center. My particular experience at Healthy Families was more community



partner based. I got to co-lead a new preschool program in New Market called Born 2 Read. I assisted in a bilingual preschool program in Woodstock sponsored by Literacy Volunteers called Reading, Rhyming, Readiness in Woodstock. And I helped a daycare in Mt. Jackson called Mt. Calvary Day Care with their high-risk children.

My unique experience with Healthy Families allowed me to work with a variety of different people and build on my skills as well as develop new skills. While working in the Born 2 Read program, I created age appropriate lesson plans for children from infancy to age 5. Each week it was my responsibility to come up with a lesson plan and prep the materials for the preschool group with other interns in the program. During this program I worked with a number of non-English speaking families and helped them and their children use more English in their vocabulary as well as give them an opportunity to socialize and learn skills to prepare for Kindergarten. It was also a great opportunity to give these families tools to help educate their children at home and to bond as we always made time for the mothers and children to read together.

Similarly, at RRR, I assisted the lead teacher in her Spanish/English preschool program that aimed to accomplish similar goals in getting children ready for Kindergarten. However, RRR does not accept children younger than 2 years old. In this program, I got very close to the families and learned many new techniques I could bring to the Born 2 Read program as well as when working with the kids at Mt. Calvary Day Care. I learned a lot about Hispanic culture and the different family dynamics while I was working with this group. What was impressive was the amount of Spanish I learned in my semester and how much the children must have been learning in that short amount of time as well. The lead teacher had a lot of experience in different areas with children and she offered a lot of wisdom and advice that I was incredibly thankful for in my semester with her.

At Mt. Calvary Day Care, I got the opportunity to mentor the two-year-old teacher and model how to interact with her students and stay positive. Additionally, I was able to work with some of the special needs children, particularly a four-year old student with speech delays. When I first met the student she was speaking only one to two word sentences and was not very responsive when spoken to. Throughout the semester, I read to her, did alphabet recognition games with her, and worked on slowing down my speech so she could repeat my words. By the end of the semester, she was responding when spoken to and was up to three word sentences and could recognize many of the letters of the alphabet. She had also been receiving speech therapy but it was great to continue working on her speech while she was in a more comfortable and relaxed environment.

I also worked on getting the accreditation process started for Mt. Calvary Day Care. I read through accreditation books and made lists of materials for each classroom and researched supplies and compiled them together in a price sheet. I also wrote the first draft of a grant for the day care to the Shenandoah Community Foundation for money to refresh their old toys and get



age appropriate furniture and materials for each classroom. This was particularly exciting for me to do because the center is an old religious-exempt center in a low-income area so I was happy to help them. I also have never written a grant before so it was great to learn about that process.

Also, at the Healthy Families office, I got to work on making four different brochures about the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI), which is a method for distinguishing preschools and day care centers as being high quality past the state standards. The brochures talked about the VSQI program, the importance of choosing quality early childhood education, what to look for in quality centers/how to give your child quality space to learn at home, and finally a list of centers in Shenandoah county from the Department of Social Services website for families to refer to. These brochures were given out to the families in the Healthy Families program as cheat sheets. Although I never got a chance to directly work with families in the Healthy Families programs or go on any home-visits like some of the other interns, I was really glad to help by making these brochures.

Overall, my experience working with Healthy Families and their community partners was a very unique and diverse opportunity and I have my supervisor, Yvonne Frazier, to thank for that opportunity. I got a chance to be involved in many different projects and meet many different and important people that gave me valuable advice and insight. I refined the skills I had from my experience as a preschool teacher for many years, got the opportunity to mentor another teacher, learned how to write a grant, increased my Spanish comprehension, and became more educated in the accreditation process and the importance of early education. However, what was most important was that I got the chance to continue working with children in need. My time at Healthy Families confirmed that I want to work with children in my career and make their lives better however I can. I really enjoyed the time spent at each of my sites and am so happy that I got the chance to be in the lives of all the people I met this semester.