



# Sunshine House

## Placement Description

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Sunshine House is a Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR) Program for adults with severe mental illness and we are affiliated with Northwestern Community Services Board. Our program has four advocates who maintain a caseload of no more than 13 or 14 members at one time, with approximately 25-30 members present at SSH daily. These advocates also supervise either the clerical unit, kitchen unit, maintenance unit or the business unit. Members attend the program generally at least two days a week from 9-1:30 Monday-Friday. Staff are present in the building from 8:30 to 4 pm Monday-Friday and some Saturdays depending on community integration activities. We also have evening and weekend activities such as bowling, shopping trips, dessert clubs, movie/brunch, game days, etc. We have daily psychoeducational groups, generally from 9:50 am to 10:15 am, which provide education about maintaining physical and mental health, independent living skills and social skills. The purpose of our program is to help members gain greater insight into their mental illness, gain social skills, increase one's independent living skills, maintain activities of daily living, reduce isolation, and maintain one's recovery. We are located in New Market, Va, about 25 minutes North of JMU.

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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For a student interested in this placement his or her responsibilities would be to maintain boundaries, socialize appropriately with the members, participate within the units alongside members and staff, participate and assist with leading the daily groups, participate in staff meetings, and encouraged participation in community integration activities. If we were to have someone in the Spring we also ask that our interns spearhead (if comfortable doing so) our Annual Rolling for Recovery Fundraiser (with guidance from SSH staff) which would include leading groups about the fundraiser, encouraging members to form bowling teams, decorating the bowling alley for the event, handing out door prizes during the event, and encouraging members to raise money for the event from community members. This event also would include creating flyers and advertising for other NWCSB staff and community members to form their league and attend the activity in April.



## Contact Information

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- Contact Person: Danette Kesner
- Address: 500 Dixie Lane, New Market, Virginia 22844
- Telephone: (540) 740-3169
- Email Address: Danette.Kesner@nwcsb.com
- Website: <http://www.nwcsb.com/>

### *Fall 2021 - Amber Fultineer*

This semester, I was an intern at Sunshine House, which is a psychosocial rehabilitation facility for adults with severe mental illness. Sunshine House (SSH) is a branch of the Northwestern Community Services Board (NWCSB), an agency that provides behavioral health services to individuals residing in Northwest Virginia. The mission of the NWCSB is “to help people through life’s challenges with quality behavioral health services guided by principles of respect, recovery, and self-determination.” Sunshine House adheres to this mission by providing rehabilitative services to individuals who are unable to function independently in society as a result of their diagnosis. The overarching goal of Sunshine House is to prepare its members to function as adaptively and independently in society as possible.

Sunshine House is a psychosocial rehabilitation facility that is structured as a clubhouse model. Clubhouse-based programs can be described as an organized environment that promotes social interactions, community involvement, activity engagement, and peer support. In addition to the clubhouse structure of Sunshine House, the facility also functions as a work-ordered clubhouse. A work-ordered structure consists of daily tasks that members and staff work together to complete to provide members with a sense of purpose, responsibility, and independence. The majority of SSH members reside in long-term care facilities, however, during weekdays they come to Sunshine House around nine o’clock in the morning, until about two o’clock in the afternoon. An average day at Sunshine House involves peer and staff socialization, task duties, psychosocial educational lessons, and free time.

Within Sunshine House, a variety of services are implemented, such as psychosocial educational groups, vocational training, advocacy and support, and community integration. Psychosocial educational groups are taught by staff members and focus on important topics such as social skills, coping mechanisms, vocational-based abilities, and independent living. Psychosocial education provides clients with the tools and knowledge that is necessary to manage their mental illness, communicate effectively with others, and function more independently. Vocational training stems from the work-ordered structure of Sunshine House. Members participate in daily tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and completing office duties like printing and copying. Clients are given the choice as to which tasks they would like to complete during clubhouse hours, thus promoting independence and the development of skills surrounding



their interests. Sunshine House provides each member with an assigned advocate who provides them with emotional support and guidance throughout their journey. Advocates build rehabilitation plans specific to their members to ensure they meet their personal recovery goals, while also providing access to additional resources such as transportation, individual therapy, and a safe living environment.

The final service component that SSH offers are the community integration activities. Community integration is imperative for the recovery of clients, as it provides them with exposure to society and a chance to practice applying their learned skills. Past community integration events included taking clients shopping, out to eat, and bowling; all of which were facilitated and chaperoned by staff. These events are optional and provide opportunities for hands-on practice to members who wish to partake.

While I was interning at SSH, I was able to teach a psychosocial group, partake in community integration events, form relationships with clients, learn about client intake processes, and implement a final project. Working in a closely-knit environment allowed me the chance to cultivate a better understanding of the members in terms of their mental illnesses, treatments, and recovery outcomes. I was encouraged to get to know the clients and socialize with them throughout the semester, which allowed me to learn the aspects of client-patient relationships and how to properly communicate with people diagnosed with a mental illness. Each day I was able to socialize, play games, and do crafts with members. As a result of the relationships built with staff and clients, I was allowed the chance to partake in a community integration trip. During this event, I accompanied other staff and clubhouse members on a shopping and restaurant outing. I enjoyed being included in these events because I was able to witness the personal progress of members towards their goal of becoming independently functional in society.

Furthermore, my supervisor provided me with an abundance of knowledge surrounding the mental health field. From her, I was able to learn about client intake processes that were specific to SSH as well as specifics regarding treatment and patient communication. My supervisor allowed me to sit in on various comprehensive-needs assessments, which were done to better understand new and potential members and their disorders and treatment goals. Additionally, I had the opportunity to assist my supervisor in her goal of teaching members how to utilize onsite computers. I constructed and taught a psychosocial educational group on basic computer literacy to promote client confidence and a better understanding surrounding the usage of basic technology. To reinforce the group lesson on computer literacy, I held individual sessions where I assisted members who wanted to learn specific aspects of computer usage. I taught individual lessons on topics such as setting up an email, typing, and searching the web.

At the end of the semester, I implemented a contribution project with the hopes of providing additional tools to aid in the recovery of clients. Severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, negatively impact aspects of cognitive functioning. Cognitive tasks such as memory, attention, and processing speed are all susceptible to deterioration in individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness. To combat cognitive decline, I created cognitive activity books for each client that contained various activities specifically targeting



negatively affected aspects of cognition. As a result of these books, clients were provided with an additional tool to further their recovery.

Being an intern at Sunshine House was an educational and memorable experience. From the very beginning, the staff was welcoming and encouraging, allowing me to ask questions and explore my interests freely. My supervisor was extremely flexible with my student schedule and worked extremely hard to provide me with all of the exposure and hands-on experience that I desired. Sunshine House is an optimal site for individuals who wish to explore severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder in an up-close manner. Working here provides you with the chance not only to better understand aspects of mental health but to develop your professional vocational skills for the future.

Overall, Sunshine House enabled me to explore my interests in a welcoming environment, while gaining an understanding of mental health and rehabilitation. As a result of my internship and contribution project, I have chosen to pursue a career in neuropsychology. Becoming a neuropsychologist will allow me to continue researching topics such as cognition and mental illness, while also providing me with the chance to leave positive impacts on others.

***Fall 2017 – Samantha Moseley***

Sunshine House is a clubhouse under Northwestern Community Services that is dedicated “to helping people through life's challenges with quality behavioral health services guided by principles of respect, recovery, and self-determination.” To accomplish this mission, Sunshine House provides a psychoeducational day support program in which the program invites people with mental illness to come to the clubhouse to learn vocational skills and attend psychoeducational groups. Trained staff work at the facility to help members maintain their recovery from mental illness and remain in the community. My role at Sunshine House was to assist staff in providing socialization and support for members. To accomplish this goal I led psychoeducational groups, unit meetings, inputted data, attended social activities, and created a buddy support system.

The psychoeducational groups are an important aspect of the psychoeducational day support program at Sunshine House. These groups allow members to come together to discuss important topics such as living and social skills, current events, and other fun activities to get the members more involved. Some of the psychoeducational groups that I observed were bingo, how to manage holiday stress, and current events in the world to list a few. More specifically, I also got the opportunity to lead my own psychoeducational group in which I lead a question and answer session with a member about their life in recovery. This experience provided me with the opportunity to engage with the members while maintaining a therapeutic relationship. In addition, I was able to practice leading larger groups and helping members stay on topic so that the entire group could benefit. Finally, the group allowed me to listen to stories from members about their childhood, what it is like to live with a mental illness, and what personally helps them to maintain their recovery and stay in the community.

After our psychoeducational groups, members at Sunshine House would attend unit meetings. Unit meetings consisted of a kitchen, clerical, and maintenance unit the members



could choose to work in. The purpose of the unit meetings is to not only provide pride to the members for taking care of their own clubhouse but to also give them a chance to practice vocational skills such as dishes, answering phones, sweeping, and mopping. To lead the unit meetings, I needed a good relationship with the members so that I could encourage them to complete their tasks. By running unit meetings, I was also able to practice delegating tasks and time management because some of the tasks were time sensitive such as setting up the salad bar before lunch.

In between psychoeducational and unit meetings, I also worked closely with staff to help design a method to keep track of how music therapy was affecting the members. To provide evidence that the members benefitted from music therapy, surveys were handed out to the members each time they attended a music therapy session. I helped staff by developing a way to score the surveys and an excel file that could keep a quantitative track of the members emotional experience in music therapy. Every week I would then input the data into the excel file. The staff will use this data to write a new grant at the end of the year in the hopes to be able to continue music therapy as a psychoeducational group.

Outside of time spent at Sunshine House during the school week, I also had the ability to accompany members on social activities. Sunshine House provides the members opportunities to go shopping, volunteer for community service, go to the theater, and host parties at their facility in which other clubhouses can attend. I assisted staff during these social activities by going shopping with the members and attending the Halloween dance. These social activities are valuable experiences for the members so that they can actively participate in the community. In addition to the members benefitting, these social activities provided me with an excellent opportunity to socialize with members outside of the facility to help build a therapeutic relationship.

In addition to completing everyday assignments at Sunshine House, I also had the opportunity to make my own impact on the facility. To provide my own contribution to my site, I created a buddy support system in the hopes to help encourage members to use each other as a means of social support. Research has shown that people with mental illness that have a strong social support decrease their internalized stigma and increase their feelings of empowerment. By targeting stigma and empowerment, peer support can also have a positive impact on preventing depression which in turn can increase the quality of life in the members. The goal of the buddy support system was to help increase the members quality of life while providing a means to socialize with other members. To accomplish this goal, I gathered volunteers that would be willing to be supportive to other members in the community. I held meetings to discuss if anyone was able to support someone else, how the volunteers were doing themselves, and if they needed support. To conclude the meeting, we also discussed a social skill. The social skill was an important aspect of the buddy support system so that the members could continue their education on how to appropriately interact with others. Some of the skills we discussed included active listening, how to maintain boundaries, and when to know that you are talking too much. By creating this buddy support system, I was not only able to continue to build a therapeutic relationship with the members, but I was also able to provide an outlet of support for the



members. This opportunity allowed me to take an active role in the facility while demonstrating leadership and organizational skills.

The skills and experiences I gained at Sunshine House would not have been possible if it were not for the staff and members who warmly welcomed me into their clubhouse. The members actively supported my ideas and my willingness to help. They were friendly from the first day and always encouraged me to do my best. The staff was wonderful in their support of my ideas and gave me the autonomy to try and make my thoughts a reality. They provided me with the freedom to feel like a junior staff member while also providing support when I became overwhelmed. While my experiences and skills that I acquired are priceless in my continuing education, the aspect I will value most about this experience is the people I interacted with. The only limitation or disadvantage this site has is that prospective interns would need a car to travel to the facility. Otherwise, I strongly encourage new students to apply for this site. Not only did this site provide me with a nurturing environment to grow as a psychologist but it helped me to determine my career path. Because of my interactions with the members at Sunshine House and the deeper understanding I gained of what it is like to live with a mental illness, I have decided to pursue a career in research of schizophrenia. My hope is to one day be able to provide a better understanding of this disease so that people with schizophrenia may have a better quality of life in the community.