

Summary Paper

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My experience at the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) has been an experience that I have thoroughly enjoyed and found very fulfilling. CARD is an organization that uses applied behavioral analysis (ABA) and early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI) therapy to treat children that are on the autism spectrum. They treat children as young as two years old, up until they are eighteen years old. My position at CARD is a behavior technician, and this means that I work directly with our clients and provide therapy for them. My supervisors write all of the behavior intervention plans, and I implement them. My center is mostly clinic based, but I do have one client which I do home sessions with. The company provided training for me when I started to make sure that I was properly equipped with the right skills and knowledge to excel in the position, and provide the best services for our clients. I know that this was the perfect placement for me because I knew that I wanted to provide therapy for youth, but I also wanted to be able to form a deeper, personal, and more impactful connection with them than I might be able to in a traditional therapy setting, and CARD has been the perfect place for me to feel like I am doing that.

Most of my activities during my time at CARD have been focused on therapy and sessions with clients. I did go through 40 hours of additional training on top of my new hire training in order to become a board certified autism technician (BCAT), and there were a few times that I did office work to create materials for clients' programs, but overall the majority of my time I was doing one-on-one therapy sessions with clients. This means that I was implanting the behavior intervention programs that our supervisors have written for our clients in order to help build up their behavioral strengths, while at the same time trying to put some of their

problem behaviors on extinction. Most of this was done in the clinic, but I recently gained a client that I have started doing home sessions with as well. I feel like the concepts that I learned in classes leading up to this field experience gave me a tremendous upper hand during my work at CARD. The classes that were the most helpful for me were learning, cognition, counseling, child, adolescent, and lifespan development. ABA therapy is based on Skinner's theories on operant conditioning, so I had a lot of background knowledge about the theories our work is based off of, and my training helped fill in the blanks about how to apply that information. I also found that the information I had learned from these classes helped me in passing my initial exam to become a state certified behavior analysis that interventionist, as well as my exam that I had to take to become a BCAT. I definitely felt like I had a bit of an upper hand in comparison to other coworkers that do not have the same educational background that I do when it came to getting these certifications.

When I first started, some of the experiences that I had were challenging for me. After completing all of my training and field overlaps, it was still intimidating to go into my first solo sessions and start to try to apply everything that I had learned over the previous weeks in the real world all on my own. I will never forget the first client that I worked with, as he certainly caused me a little bit of emotional strain. I found myself stuck in this trench of trying to apply everything that I had learned how to do, but not having success because I didn't take the time to initially build rapport with my new client, who was only about four years old and nonvocal. While this experience was very challenging for me, I am honestly very glad that it was my first session because I feel like it sort of helped prepare me for the worst in the future. I think that my faith has also influenced the way that I view challenges like this, because I know that God

wouldn't present me with a challenge that I could not overcome, and I know that through each trial that I go through I come out stronger on the other side. It also made me realize that we all have rough days, clients and therapists alike. It was very comforting for me to talk with coworkers and hear that I wasn't the only one to have days like that, and that it really does happen to the best of us. Aside from that experience though, I would say that my reaction to almost all of my other clinical experiences has been happiness and overall fulfillment. To see the changes that my clients are making on a weekly basis and how quickly they are growing, makes everything worth it to me, even on days that are tougher than others.

When I started at this position I knew that it would be a job that would extend further than just field experience. After being here for only a few months, I know that I made the right choice and I look forward to moving forward within my career at CARD. My time that I have spent here so far has completely confirmed that I am in the right field for me. My original goal when starting at CARD was to become a BCAT, and I just achieved that goal within this last month. Now, I am about to also become a registered behavior technician (RBT), and apply for an expert role within the company which would make me an assessment technician at CARD, allowing me to help in the assessment and diagnosis of our clients. This experience has certainly influenced my career planning a great deal. I did know that I wanted to be with CARD for at least a year when I started, but now I can see myself with the company for any number of years, and am even considering doing a masters program so that I can become a board certified behavior analyst (BCBA), which is the certification that our supervisors hold. I am so excited to see what my future holds and I am so happy that I had this opportunity presented to me when I did.