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PSYC 475

Field Experience Summary Paper

Coffee Creek Correctional Facility Spring 2018

Overview

My field experience for this Spring, which began in May 2017, has been as the Counseling Intern for the Horizons Program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF), in the Minimum unit. The Horizons Program is a six-month program that was started a little over three years ago with the help of Dr. Kays and a former George Fox student, in conjunction with Scott Calvert, a Release Counselor at CCCF. The program was based on the ground work done by a former CCCF employee and a George Fox student who became the first intern for the program. In this program, participants are selected by Scott based on their scores from a general assessment all inmates take, that estimates their need for intensive treatment and the likelihood of recidivism (whether they will re-offend and be re-incarcerated). Horizons provides a program for women whose scores are too low to join the higher need programs at the prison for drug and alcohol abuse, but who would still benefit from focused treatment on self-improvement and decision-making strategies. The women participate in daily group meetings, attend weekly counseling sessions with the intern (me), complete guided self-treatment journals from the Change Company Organization, watch movies and read books to write reflective reports on, and take turns teaching a topic to the group each week. At the end of the six-month period the participants graduate and are released. For many of the women, this means they shorten their

sentences by anywhere from a few months to a couple of years. The women are always highly motivated and dedicated to achieving their personal goals over the course of the 6 months.

Activities

My responsibilities as the Counseling Intern include weekly meetings with each participant, keeping their paperwork, files and hours logs up to date, checking in with Scott on a regular basis to discuss the progress and needs of each participant as well as to plan for guest speakers and new members to be added. The weekly meetings are structured like a typical counseling session and also serve as a time to gather paperwork and check on participants' progress in their program work. My role in those meetings is that of a counselor and resource, and I work to create a safe space where they can share whatever they need to process through and be open and honest without fear. I also use that time to make sure they are on track to complete the required activities, and that they are benefiting from the program overall so that adjustments can be made, and any problems addressed. The amount of paperwork I take care of each week is substantial but uncomplicated, and helps me assess their growth in the program, understand them more personally, and learn more about their goals. This includes filing weekly activity logs, daily logs, and reading book and movie reports on a semi-regular basis. Additionally, I am responsible for contacting and organizing guest speakers, which we aim to have every couple of months or so.

Reaction to Experience

This semester at Coffee Creek has been more difficult than the last two, but for deeper reasons. In the past, my main challenges have been learning the system, growing my skills of working with the women and becoming accustomed to the environment as a whole. While those

have still been present challenges this semester, the bigger challenges have come in the form of sitting with and processing through the really hard life experiences many of the women have had. However, even when it is difficult to hear a story of pain, grief, and loss from another person, I have been able to see how meaningful it is for them to have a place to be vulnerable and be heard, and I'm honored to have been a part of that. It has also been so meaningful to see the progress and growth of the women during their time in the program, and it's truly amazing how their hard work really shows through in the personal growth and monumental changes they make. It's beautiful.

Goals

My goals for the duration of my field experience are and have been to continue developing client-centered therapy skills, learn to independently manage paperwork and conduct client meetings, gain organizational skills centered around therapy practice, and gain a greater understanding of what it means to work as a professional counselor and specifically to work as a counselor in the Oregon Department of Corrections. I feel confident that I have gone above and beyond these goals and grown in ways that I had not foreseen or planned. I now feel very comfortable in the one-on-one client setting, though I also recognize moments when I need improvement and do not have all the learning necessary. I also have been able to manage paperwork efficiently, even when I get a bit behind.

Course Work Influences

The Counseling course taught by Dr. Kays is of course the primary influence on my work at Coffee Creek, and every day I draw on the skills I learned last semester in that class, such as reflective listening, paraphrasing, summary, focusing on affective or cognitive experiences, and

appropriate use of silence during meetings. This semester, I've been taking the Addictions and Abnormal Psychology courses with Dr. Kays, which have offered a lot of applicable learning for my work at Coffee Creek. Many of the women in the Horizons program, both currently and in the past, have been incarcerated due to drug-related crimes. One woman who recently graduated had been addicted to methamphetamine, and so much of our discussion toward her release focused on her plans to attend NA meetings, build her support system, and avoid situations or people that would tempt her to relapse. My learning from Addictions helped me more clearly understand the difficulty of getting clean and staying clean and has given me insight into the importance of knowing one's triggers for relapse. Abnormal Psyc has been helpful for further understanding the experience of anxiety and depression, and also learning about certain ways that physical pain can influence mental health – all of which the women in Horizons experience and specifically focus on in their work in the program.

Faith Integration

How much I openly integrate faith with my work with each woman in the program depends on their personal faith background and beliefs. There are currently several Christian women in Horizons, but also a couple of non-Christian women. In my initial meeting with each woman, their faith and beliefs usually come up in the conversation and I let them share how and if they would like to incorporate it into our work. It's crucial to me that the women feel comfortable and accepted for who they are, and that the program is open to everyone of every belief system. We do have some Christian based books and resources, but the women get to choose whether to read those or not. Personally, this semester has been a particular challenge for my faith. One of the hardest things to reconcile as a Christian is the darkness, pain, and suffering in the world. I see a lot of that in the pasts of the women I work with, and it is soul-wrenching. However, I

believe the challenge and struggle, and the fact that I am asking questions and digging into the hard parts of faith is a good outcome – I don't want to be comfortable with the darkness we live in.

Future Plans

My future plans have remained mostly the same through this process, with my goal being to go to graduate school for a degree in some psychological field (likely for counseling or therapy) and to become a licensed practitioner. I'm still interested in pursuing Drama Therapy, a fusion of both of my passions and majors (Theatre and Psychology), but that will likely be further down the line after I've attended graduate school for a different focus. My ideal career would be one in which I have a private practice that supports me enough so that I can do volunteer or low pay counseling work in areas that need it, whether that be in shelters, hospitals, prisons, small towns, or rural or impoverished areas in the United States and other countries around the world. I have a new job starting this summer with Rise Inc. as a Direct Support Professional, working with adults and children with disabilities and special needs, and I believe my experience at Coffee Creek will really help in my work there and is a big reason I was hired. I would also love to be able to teach at some point in the future, ideally at the college level. Advancing the field of mental health care and bringing more empathy into that practice remains my overall goal.