

Field Experience Summary

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My field experience took place at Forward Stride. Forward Stride was founded about 15 years ago as a non-profit organization and has grown significantly since then as they offer such a wide variety of programs. There three main programs that they offer are riding lessons, hippotherapy, and within the last two years they formed an Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy program. I had the opportunity to primarily serve as an intern under their Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy program while also jumping in to help with their other two programs as time allowed. This program is essentially counseling sessions with a different approach and style than your typical everyday office sessions. It provides a natural environment giving clients the freedom to experience unpredictable circumstances that can guide therapy in a way that cannot be done within four walls. Another benefit with this type of therapy is that it allows a relationship to form with the horse that is built on trust. Horses are prey animals meaning that they desire to be your friend yet need to know that you will not turn your back on them. This can be formed through non-verbal communication and consistency which is often what is needed in psychotherapy clients.

During my time at Forward Stride the activities I was involved varied from hands on helping with sessions to filling out paperwork and learning how to do a lot of the behind the scenes jobs that one does not always think of when they think of being a therapist. In the hippotherapy program which involved working with clients who had been diagnosed with special needs such as cerebral palsy or spina bifida. My job involved side walking during their session aiding the therapist in their plan of care. In the riding program I was involved in being a leader which entailed helping the client get their horse, tack them up, and lead them throughout their class. These clients ranged from being fully independent to having learning impairments or mental disabilities. My role in the Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy program involved being a

part of Teen Group every Monday night and on Wednesday's I took part in a pilot mentorship program working with children with insecure attachments. I also helped with a few Equine Facilitated Learning sessions with a group from the Native American Rehabilitation Center for youth. I enjoyed being involved in all of the different programs that Forward Stride offers. I feel that it gave me a well-rounded field experience and provided me with knowledge that I will carry with me through other opportunities that may present themselves later in life.

Going into my time at Forward Stride I had developed some specific goals that I wanted to be met before my time there came to an end. In the beginning, I struggled voicing my need for these goals to be met but as I got more confident I was able to communicate with my supervisor which aided in the goals not only being heard but being accomplished. This is one of the most important parts of anyone's field experience, is learning how to advocate for yourself in any circumstance. Learning this skill has developed and instilled more confidence in myself and I have been able to take it and apply it outside of my field experience into other interactions with peers and professors. Taking the Counseling course before I entered into this experience was also a significant part of my ability to communicate and interact with clients and colleagues that surrounded me. This often helped me know the next step I should take in different situations that arose. As I continue in my academic studies I also believe that this will help me understand course material now better now that I have been able to apply it to the real world.

One of the areas that I felt most challenged in during my field experience was not being able to verbally express my faith in situations where people had no hope. When working with clients who have experienced a variety of traumatic situations I want to share that there is hope in Jesus, he has the ability heal the pain and take it away. Although I cannot verbally share this, I was able to express faith through my actions, through the way I interacted with others around

me, and the way I chose to love. As I look forward to what is to come, this field experience has confirmed my passions in life. I am going to continue pursuing the journey of becoming a therapist and working in or creating my own Equine Facilitated Therapy program. My field experience was an incredible first look into what is to come and I am excited about learning more about this field as I continue in my academic career.