BEHIND THE SCENES OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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You know you chose the right internship when the vice president of your department mandates doodling during a staff meeting.

This summer, I’m one of four human resources interns at Riverside Community Care (RCC); specifically, I’m a training and recruitment intern. RCC is a large organization that provides mental health care and addiction recovery services to Massachusetts’ residents. My responsibilities are to contribute to RCC’s workforce by developing training materials and reviewing the resumes of prospective RCC staff. I found the internship on www.internships.com. I searched for health care-related internships in the Boston area, which is where I knew I wanted to be. My supervisor, Karen Duhamel (Director of Recruitment and Retention at RCC), called me for an interview and I started the following Monday. Isn’t the internet wonderful?

What specifically drew me to RCC was that it focused on mental health. I had taken Profs. Merrick’s and Reif’s class Perspectives on Behavioral Health: Alcohol, Drugs, and Mental Illness this past spring. Besides the fact that I felt the topic was incredibly interesting and complex, and drew on several different streams of knowledge within the HSSP major, I thought that mental health was something that was often overlooked and neglected. Though mood, personality, behavior, and substance use disorders are too often shunted to the side, they’re clearly issues that impact a large number of people in ways far more insidious than physical injuries and disabilities. Moreover, mental health disorders are heavily stigmatized and often blamed on individuals’ shortcomings. I can’t express adequately in words how passionate I am about mental health and health care.

To address the myriad and particular mental health needs of their clients, RCC provides a wide variety of services: speech therapy for children up to age three; schools for adolescents with mood and behavior disorders; residential programs for adults who can’t live on their own; assistance for those who have suffered brain injuries; and much, much more. RCC’s mission is to help people to function in society as well as they possibly can, and their impressive menu of services and the dedicated professionals who provide them underscore RCC’s devotion to their mission.

In my “behind the scenes” internship, I get to look at the requirements necessary for a variety of mental health care careers. At any given point, RCC has more than 100 job openings across Massachusetts. By working in recruitment, I get firsthand exposure to what types of people a successful mental health care organization such as RCC is looking for. Though it’s only been a month, I’ve taken a deep dive into the world of mental health care. One of my favorite experiences has been going on site visits to different locations in Eastern Massachusetts during which we get to meet with RCC staff to see the organization’s services in action. Not only do
these site visits help me get a much better feel of what RCC expects of its staff, but also they allow me to see the lives this organization touches. These site visits have been very helpful in giving me a sense of what type of work I would like to do after I graduate from Brandeis.

Beyond my day-to-day responsibilities (adventures?), RCC strikes me as an incredibly supportive and friendly place to work. One of the biggest impressions I got when I first started at RCC was the strong sense of community within the Human Resources Department. There hasn’t been a week where I haven’t received an email saying it’s someone’s birthday, or that there’s a wedding coming up and that we should all surprise so-and-so with cake. Every other staff meeting, we have a group lunch and talk about our lives outside of RCC. We play games at some staff meetings and the other interns and I frequently take walks with our supervisor just to loosen up. It’s an office of people who truly care about each other, instead of people who just have to work together.

Additionally, the Human Resources Department seemed especially excited to have interns. That said, my supervisor has clear expectations for each of us and we are expected to pull our own weight. So far, I’ve completed two training programs that will be sent out to the entire organization - over 1,400 staff members! One was a healthy eating training guide to be used in programs that provide meals to patients and residents; the other was an infection control training program mandated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Given my role, responsibilities, and my supervisor’s expectations for me, some expectations I have are: to better understand the terminology of mental health care; to learn what mental health careers entail; and to better understand the social implications of mental health care issues. For the majority of my HSSP “career”, I’ve learned a great deal about mental health issues and how to address them. Still, I’m sure I don’t know nearly as much as I should, so my work with RCC will complement the knowledge I have gained as an HSSP major. Additionally, I believe the solid foundation in mental health and health care provided by the HSSP major gives me a leg up in understanding RCC’s services and its recruitment objectives.

Overall, I’ve had a phenomenal start with RCC. It’s weird to think I’ve been here for such a short amount of time – perhaps because it didn’t take long for any of us to be welcomed into the RCC family. I’m really excited to see what comes next.