



FairField Center

Placement Description

Conflict resolution and restorative justice services and training for individuals, families, groups and organizations

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Conduct telephone or face-to-face intake interviews
- Case management of mediations (case preparation, scheduling, follow-up, etc.)
- Attend court and accept referrals
- Office work/record keeping and computer case data entry
- Observe and assist in mediations
- Telephone intakes
- Attend training sessions
- Attend board meetings
- Assist with research
- Potential to observe mediation and co-mediate

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:

Spring 2024 – Andy Luong

Throughout my placement at the FairField Center, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the organization's mission of enhancing people's ability to listen, plan, and interact effectively, while fostering communities characterized by engagement, appreciation, and cooperation. The FairField Center is dedicated to providing a range of conflict resolution services, including mediation, restorative justice, communication training, and civic engagement initiatives. Their services aim to empower individuals and communities to resolve conflicts peacefully, promote understanding, and build stronger relationships, and my time there allowed me to learn more about all the different ways the non-profit functions

During my time at the FairField Center, I had the privilege of engaging in various experiences and opportunities that allowed me to contribute to the organization's mission and gain valuable skills and insights. I participated in mediation sessions, where I observed firsthand the transformative power of mediation in resolving conflicts and facilitating constructive dialogue between parties compared to typical routes of litigation in civil disputes. I was able to assist with outreach and educational initiatives, helping to develop materials and presentations to raise awareness about mediation services and promote community engagement. These experiences provided me with a deeper understanding of conflict resolution principles and strategies, as well as practical experience in working with diverse populations and stakeholders.

Overall, my impressions of the FairField Center are overwhelmingly positive, even considering the learning curves in the beginning. The organization is committed to making a positive impact in the community, and its dedicated staff and volunteers are passionate about their work. One of the key advantages of working at the FairField Center is the opportunity to directly contribute to meaningful and impactful projects that align with the organization's mission. Additionally, the supportive and collaborative work environment fosters professional growth and development, allowing individuals to leverage their strengths and talents to make a difference. While there are no significant disadvantages or limitations to working at the FairField Center, one challenge I encountered was navigating the complexities of working with diverse populations and addressing their unique needs and concerns, especially when dealing with issues as sensitive as custody, visitation and child support for people's children. However, this challenge also presented an opportunity for personal and professional growth, as I learned to adapt my communication and interpersonal skills to effectively engage with individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives, and be able to communicate with clients in a way that showed understanding and empathy, while keeping professionalism and composure.

Additionally, as a result of being a smaller non-profit with a wide variety of services, I found that it was more difficult to navigate cases for clients that spoke another language. One of our staff spoke Spanish fluently, but there was a case I remember taking much more patience and time than others because we needed to use an interpreter to help facilitate our mediation. I also found it surprising to have a lack of social media presence for an organization that does so much



in the community. The FairField Center is heavily involved in Harrisonburg's International Festival, which I have known about since the beginning of my time here as a student, but I only found the organization this past year. It seems like limitations that could be solved by funding, would be less prevalent if we leveraged the benefits of having an online presence, to make services more well-known and increase fundraising efforts. I think that being a non-profit of this size also allows for a deeper sense of community and more visible care for the organization's mission, but it comes at the cost of finding sustainable funding that could potentially make their impact more widespread. Overall, the FairField Center and its staff have an undeniable impact on the community, and I have grown immensely with my experiences as an intern under their supervision

In terms of my learning experience at the FairField Center, I gained valuable insights into the field of conflict resolution and its applications in various contexts. The knowledge and skills I acquired have influenced my career and vocational goals, inspiring me to pursue further education and training in conflict resolution and related fields. Additionally, my experience at the FairField Center has reinforced my passion for social justice and community advocacy, motivating me to seek opportunities to make a positive impact in my future career endeavors.

The interdisciplinary nature of the Psychology major has also played a significant role in shaping my success at the FairField Center. Courses in psychology provided me with a strong foundation in understanding human behavior, interpersonal dynamics, and communication skills, which were instrumental in my work at the organization. Moreover, the critical thinking and problem-solving skills honed through coursework in research methods and data analysis enabled me to approach projects at the FairField Center with a systematic and analytical mindset, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of my contributions. I found that my course experiences in sociocultural competence under the Psychology major helped prepare me the most for this experience, as it included experiential learning that prompted me to work with different social groups and ask questions in a way that advances dialogue and understanding about social issues.

Regarding my contribution project, I proposed a comprehensive plan to increase awareness and access to mediation services at the FairField Center. This project involved developing educational materials, implementing outreach initiatives, and assisting with fundraising efforts by creating online and physical materials that gather attention from potential donors. Through collaborative efforts with staff and volunteers at the site, I was able to help create an engaging atmosphere with content and strategies that effectively promoted mediation services and empowered individuals to seek alternative dispute resolution options.

In conclusion, my placement at the FairField Center has been a rewarding and enriching experience that has deepened my understanding of conflict resolution, community engagement, and social justice. The organization's commitment to its mission, supportive work environment, and diverse learning opportunities have provided me with invaluable skills and insights that will undoubtedly shape my future endeavors. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the FairField Center's mission and am confident that the skills and experiences gained during my placement will continue to influence my personal and professional growth in the years to come.

Spring 2024 – Kris Bergquist



For my field placement, I had the amazing opportunity to be at The Fairfield Center. This site is a mediation center that helps not only their community, but the court system(s) as well. They offer conflict resolution, restorative justice, civic engagement, communications training, and business services as their broad categories. Working for their community and the courts by helping two or more parties who are in conflict with each other and using third party and impartial techniques to work through difficult conversations while trying to come to an agreeable compromise. All while keeping in mind their mission of “listening to our people, plan, and interact effectively.

At The FairField Center, I was under my main mentor, Aaron Hagmeier, who is the director of training programs. He helps oversee what interns from James Madison University (JMU) do while at their stay, does client service coordination, helps case management and administration, and also provides mediation services. As a mentor, he harbors an amazing work environment that is extremely welcoming and warm, lifts you up to provide encouragement and confidence, and includes positive reinforcement. Additionally, there are also Anthony Devantier, the director of mediation services, and Vanessa Morales, the mediation coordinator and Spanish services provider. Both people excel at harboring useful help and uplift both interns and others in their work environment. As with any job, internships hold the potential of high stress and anxiety, but with the kind of environment this site provides, these anxious emotions start to melt away after a few days. If you are confused and/or need help, they all make sure that you do not feel out of place nor feel ashamed for asking questions.

Along with the work environment, this site also allows you to learn new skills while honing your own that you already have. The FairField Center deals with case work, so it requires a lot of focused work. To start off with, this center will usually have you attend mediation training before starting your first day. This involves understanding what mediation is, some other basic knowledge, and then using these new skills to roleplay in your own practice mediation sessions. Once this has been completed and you start working for this site, Aaron allows you to take everything in for your first few days to not overwhelm you. Many things in this field of work build on each other, so once you learn one or two things, you will build upon these, and things will all start to connect with one another. Case management is the most important task as it entails case preparation, scheduling of appointments, follow-ups with clients, reminder calls and emails, and more. You will also frequently make intake calls, which involves getting information to help the case. There is the possibility of attending court with them where you will be on “standby” for a case to be turned to mediation. Additionally, you will also observe and potentially assist in mediations with your mentors. This could be anywhere from shadowing a mediation and comparing notes after to going over the introduction with your clients.

Many of these skills are immensely useful – especially in the real-world environment. In psychology, there is a high likelihood of needing to do case work with different people. By learning case management, it allows you to get a head start for future careers. A few skills I learned over the course of my semester incorporated many new ones – including case management, learning more about the court systems, how to conduct intake calls, and how to create an agreement for the parties involved. Along with this, I was also able to better my communication skills, my confidence, and new points of views to ponder about. While many of these are crucial at this field placement site, I believe that different points of view are especially



important. This is because you will deal with a wide range of demographics while interning here and will need to understand everyone has a different situation happening. While many will be similar, and hold many of the same aspects, it is important to keep an open mind while staying impartial, yet sympathetic.

As a psychology major who is interested in forensics, many of these skills help influence my career goals and make them more attainable as these are important in this field – especially case management, which would be a common task. Additionally, other psychology skills helped me during this field placement. For instance, our counseling psychology class holds many similar aspects to mediation. There is a lot of active listening during mediation sessions and knowing how to summarize and paraphrase what they say back to them. Similar to counseling, it is important to let the client(s) come up with their own solutions rather than telling them outright. As a mediator, you are simply there to help continue the conversations along – in a sense, you are like a referee.

During this course, you will also have to do what is known as a contribution project. This entails coming up with a project idea that can potentially help advance the mission of your site and/or address a need said site requires. You will do your own research that encompasses your contribution project, while also working hand-to-hand with your mentors. One piece of advice I would share is to start this as early as possible, as some contribution projects could take a long while to complete. However, the mentors at The FairField Center are extremely helpful and even if you struggle in trying to come up with an idea, Aaron will definitely assist you in brainstorming. Personally, I had a few ideas that felt small and not “good” enough to count as a contribution project, but both my mentors and the professor of the field placement class helped and encouraged me through this process. In fact, my contribution project ended up being a tag-team deal with the other intern during my field placement, and we worked together to help further this site. We helped carry out The Great Community Give that The FairField Center does every year during the spring semester – including helping plan and advertise for the event. I then personally conducted research about how mediation centers – and non-profit organizations in general – help not only the well-being of their communities, but also help alleviate the court systems by taking case work out of their hands. Additionally, I also created pieces for them to use in the future and helped organize their new system. Overall, the site has been thankful for our help and let us feel welcome. If you are even remotely interested in this site, then I would definitely recommend them!

Spring 2022 - Lexi Mason

For my Field Placement experience for the Spring semester, I was able to be at the FairField Center. Their mission statement is, “Empowering individuals and communities to live and work together”. The focus of the FairField Center is doing mediations. These vary from family, business, and restorative justice mediations. While I was there, my main responsibilities were handling case management. I was responsible for putting new cases into the system, scheduling, conducting intakes with clients, and following up on mediation appointments. When I first began to conduct intakes, I was terrified because I thought I was going to miss a key piece of information that the mediator would need before mediation. However, slowly I started getting



more comfortable with talking with the clients on the phone and making them feel more comfortable with sharing their stories with me. After a few weeks at the FairField Center, I began to feel more comfortable with the work that I was doing. I was able to handle more things on my own such as knowing how to put cases into the system, knowing how to answer clients' questions when they called, and closing cases when clients had signed their agreements. There was a grace period, but my supervisor created an environment that allowed me to not be afraid to ask questions or make a mistake. Also, while being there I was able to participate in some of the mediation trainings. I was able to do the Basic Mediation training and sit in on parts of the Family Mediation training. These trainings were eye-opening in the ways that I started to see what the mediators were taught and what their mindset was when they would go into mediation. I also received tips on how to take notes when doing intakes and when sitting in on mediations.

The FairField Center hosts many trainings throughout the year for different mediation certifications. The trainings were online, and this allowed me to be able to participate in them. I enjoyed having the opportunity to participate in these trainings that other people usually pay for. If I would have chosen to continue to get certified in mediation, the basic mediation training would have been the perfect stepping stone in that journey. I also enjoyed that my supervisor created an environment that allowed me to ask questions and not be afraid to be wrong. He encouraged me to figure out the answer on my own first or see if I could figure it out by myself before taking the easy way out. He also emphasized that it was okay to make a mistake because that was how I learned. He would never discourage me but instead helped me reason through the problem. On the other hand, I believe the limitation of the FairField Center was that it can be unorganized at times. At times we use to have to search for folders, but our supervisor had a method for his organization. However, there have been major changes to how the office is organized which have helped for the better. Almost everything in the office has its place and everything can be located easily.

I learned a lot of information regarding family law at the FairField Center. Majority of the mediations that happen involve custody, visitation, and support. I quickly had to learn what all went into custody and the different forms. I also had to learn how support was calculated and there are also different forms of support. I learned about the rules of divorce such as if a couple has children under the age of 18 then they must be separated for at least one year before they can be legally divorced. There were many more facts that I had to pick up on while being at my site. This is all to say that being at the FairField Center helped solidify my decision that I do want to attend law school after graduation. However, I am not sure what area of law I would like to go into. I had never considered family law before because I did not know what it could entail. After my experience at my site, I believe I could consider going into family law and pursuing a career in that field.

When considering the knowledge that I have from the Psychology major and how that has helped me at my site, I think about the biases that we are often taught in our classes. As previously stated, most of the cases I saw were custody, visitation, and support. Before coming into the FairField Center, I had only encountered a small portion of people in my life that had experienced these things. Therefore, I believe this had put an assumption in my mind of who these types of circumstances happen to. After my experience at the FairField Center, I have realized that anyone can go through these things. These issues are not saved for a certain



demographic or type of person. Anyone can find themselves in this situation, but no one wants to. Also, when conducting intakes, it is easy to listen to one client and blame the other. However, you are forgetting about the situation that both people are in and how that can play a factor as well. As Psychology majors, we are taught to consider the situation too. I found myself often siding with one client and then forgetting that I am supposed to be neutral or that I do not truly know the full story. It is important to realize that bigger circumstances are happening that you might not know of.

Finally, my contribution project focused on the effect of custody arrangements on child adjustment. Often when conducting intakes, I would find that parents wanted to have more control over the other parent by having full legal and physical custody of their child. However, they never considered what the child would want or how this would affect them in the long run. In my research, I found that children adjust better when they are in joint legal and physical custody arrangements. To get this message to the parents at the FairField Center I created a pamphlet. The pamphlet had the definition of legal and physical custody, the findings from my research that support joint custody arrangements, and the Virginia Code that explained that parents are allowed access to their child's records regardless of what custody arrangement they may have. I put this pamphlet in the waiting room with the other pamphlets, beside the agreements to mediate that all clients must read before going into mediation, and on the side tables. I believe my implementation has been successful because half of the pamphlets have been taken home with parents. I am unsure if this has changed their mind when going into mediation, but I hope that it has opened their mind to consider a joint custody arrangement.

Spring 2022 - Nicole Damanda

This semester, I had the opportunity and pleasure of completing my field placement at the Fairfield Center. The Fairfield Center is the first mediation center in Virginia. The Fairfield Center's mission is to empower individuals and communities to live and work together. The center offers a wide variety of services such as mediation, restorative justice, civic engagement, business services, and training programs. Their goal is to bring individuals and communities together by improving listening skills, being able to understand and communicate effectively, demonstrate fairness, and being an advocate.

During my time here, I worked alongside Aaron Hagmaier, the Director of Mediation Services at the center and Vanessa Morales, a Case Manager. I spent my time interning in the mediation services portion of the center which includes custody, visitation, child support, and divorce. Most days, the center was packed between three interns, Aaron, and Vanessa. Even though there was a lot of us, there was still more than enough to do. I also believe this allowed us to explore different services the Fairfield Center has to offer. I was able to sit in on mediations, attend staff meetings, go to GDC court, while also doing all the daily tasks as an intern. Even though COVID-19 restrictions were still in place in the beginning, this didn't seem to impact my time here.

My daily tasks primarily stayed the same through the semester and my time there. This included case management and administrative office work. My morning routine was primarily the same. I would come in, check the calendar for any mediations in the morning, if we had any,



I would prepare the room and then start the day. If there was no mediation in the morning, I would go straight into the daily tasks. Most of the mornings consisted of reminding clients of their appointment for the next day, finding a mediator, and preparing the case folders for the mediators. Finding a mediator would sometimes take a little longer than expected because due to COVID-19, a lot of our mediators were not doing mediations in-person, and if the clients preferred in-person, we would have to find an available in-person mediator.

After the morning tasks were completed, I would revisit my notes to see if I had to follow-up with any clients from the last time, I spoke with them. This included if we were touching base on rescheduling, scheduling a second session, or calling back at a certain time for their intake. Following this, I would then build any new cases we received. We would receive these cases from the surrounding courts such as HRC, Waynesboro, Staunton, and Augusta. I would build these cases in the database called Vistashare. Vistashare is where majority of the work is completed. Once these cases were built, the intake process would start. I would call the clients from the petition that was received and speak with them about the referral to mediation, if they are familiar with mediation, what to expect, and get information on their situation. I would spend most of the day conducting intakes because it is common someone doesn't answer on the first attempt to speak with them. While all of this is being conducted, the center also gets busy from the phone calls they receive. Most of these calls are clients returning the intake call they missed. These intakes are very important to understand the client's situation and to prepare the mediator to gauge an understanding where the clients stand.

After clients mediated, most of the time they would come to an agreement. We would receive the draft that the mediator wrote up and fix any issues within the agreement, then email this to the parties for them to sign. If the clients did not sign the agreement because something was missing or they needed it reworded, if it's a mutual understanding between both parties, it would be fixed and sent back out to them to sign. If the clients mediated and didn't come to an agreement, they most likely would go to court if they don't come back for a second session before their scheduled court date. After we received the completed signed agreements, we oversaw billing the courts and closing the cases.

My first impression of the sight was a little overwhelming. It is a little small, so it seems cluttered. It may be a little overwhelming at first, but the training received from Aaron and Vanessa set me up for success. Throughout my time there, the center was under home construction; it was being decluttered and reorganized. Now, the center is a lot more organized and easy flowing. There were many advantages of being an intern here. Not only did I learn a lot about the courts in relation to separation/divorce, but I was also given the opportunity to sit in GDC court on Wednesdays. Aaron was always willing for the interns to explore different parts of the center, which allowed me to attend different types of mediation through the GDC court. I would go with one of the GDC mediators and sit in court and potentially mediate there if there was a case for us. Another advantage of interning here is the amount of support received from the staff. They were all open to helping and teaching me all there was to the Fairfield Center. They also were supportive in helping with the next steps of life post-graduation. The staff here really made the experience with how personable everyone is. As far as disadvantages, the only barrier might be the clutterers surrounding the desks, but that again is only due to the number of cases we encounter daily. Some limitations of this site are, it is very heavy on speaking with



clients daily, and if one is shy or doesn't have proper phone etiquette, it might be a little more challenging.

Towards the end of the internship, I developed a contribution project that related child developmental stages and the mitigating effects that separation/divorce may have on children. The intention for this was to help educate clients on their children's developmental process and how they could keep both parents involved with helping raise a child even though they may be separated. I felt like this was important because some of the mediation sessions I sat in on, the child's developmental process was never mentioned, and I felt like this could be crucial to address to the clients.

In the beginning, I didn't know what I wanted to do with psychology, so I figured being placed anywhere wasn't a bad idea because the experience will speak for itself. From my time here, I do not think I would get into mediation, but that doesn't mean that this site didn't teach me vital information for my career goals. I learned how to properly take intakes from clients, sit in on court proceedings, and sat in on mediation sessions. All which hold useful skills for my future career goals, which is to be a counselor. Gaining the skills to speak with clients and listen to them was a big take away I got from the center as well as one I will carry with me throughout my future careers.

Spring 2021 - Ashley Sedlazek

The FairField Center's mission is to improve people's ability to listen, plan, understand, and communicate with others fairly to strengthen community ties. The center began as the first mediation service in Virginia and offers a multitude of services, including restorative justice, conflict resolution, business, communication training, and civic engagement. There is a goal of building communities of engagement, appreciation, and cooperation through the many services and resources provided. The center focuses on helping people who could not deal with their issues on their own and aiding them to formulate a more effective way to communicate. In communicating better, people are often able to establish an agreement and implement that agreement into their lives to alleviate future conflict.

As an intern, I had the responsibilities of managing mediation sessions, gathering client information before sessions, and answering the mediation services phone whenever needed. The center mainly received client-pay cases, Juvenile and Domestic Relations court referrals, General District Court referrals, and police referrals. I would call each client regarding their personal information, information about why they were referred or why they want to mediate, what they need help with, and what they would like to bring up in mediation. I was able to provide clients with any information about their mediation session, coping skills, and any resources they needed. Resources I would include for clients would be costs for mediation, how to file a petition at court, mental health facilities, disability services, and many more. Occasionally, I was able to sit in during mediations and observe. At the end of the day, I would prepare for mediation sessions the next day by doing confirmation calls as well as by gathering court reports and case notes that I would email to the mediator. I would send the clients their agreement to mediate and their client evaluation forms for the mediator. I was also responsible for creating the zoom links for the sessions and sending those links to the clients and the mediator.



Through my field placement experience, my workplace skills improved immensely. I was able to engage in learning outside of a classroom and apply my knowledge in psychology to the real world while helping clients. I worked with my supervisor and two other interns during my time, in which we all learned how to communicate effectively regarding case management. I improved in my communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, creativity, and time-management skills through the many tasks that were required of me. I believe that I am much more prepared after I graduate to be able to effectively intern or hold a job in the field of psychology. Something that I wish I could have done was be more involved in the restorative justice conferencing cases since it aligns more with my ultimate career objectives. I only dealt with mediation cases, since my internship was not with restorative justice.

My ultimate career goal is to become a forensic psychologist, which requires me to conduct forensic mental health assessments. During my time at the FairField Center, I was involved with helping the courts and I conducted interviews for mental health and drug issues with clients as well as any other issues that needed to be addressed during mediation. This allowed me to get some experience with dealing with the courts and interviewing defendants and/or offenders. I am happy I was able to apply what I learned as a psychology major, specifically my knowledge in abnormal psychology, to the field of social work and give back to the community. I am glad I was able to give back to the community using the resources I was provided to have the ability to help those who truly needed it. Sometimes, clients in serious need of help were able to vent about their problems which indeed helped them cope. It is heartwarming knowing that I was able to do that for clients.

Through interning at the FairField Center, I learned a multitude of things. I learned how to effectively interview people, how the court process works, and what mediation exactly is. I did not know anything about mediation before I came here, and now I know exactly what it is and how helpful it can be for people. Conflict resolution is something that can be so difficult to do, and I appreciate these trained mediators for what they do for people. They allow people to solve their issues that they could not solve on their own and allow them to voluntarily choose what they want to do rather than having a judge decide for them. I feel mediation is a great way for people to have a more positive attitude about the court system in that it allowed them to have more freedom in the outcome of their case.

For my contribution project, I decided to research restorative justice. Even though I did not deal with restorative justice cases during my time at the FairField Center, I was very interested in it and wanted to know more. The director for restorative justice, Sue Prail, helped me get general information about what exactly restorative justice is and how healing it can be for the victim, offender, and community it impacted. My main research focus was the benefits of restorative justice on the victim, offender, and community, as well as the tools to strengthen it. I created a worksheet that described exactly what restorative justice is, the benefits of it shown through empirical research studies in general and for victims and offenders, and the tools that help strengthen it. I plan on showing it to the restorative justice director to evaluate and learn anything new from. I also was interested in showing the worksheet to any client that is interested in restorative justice conferencing or anyone who wants to know more about it. I also created a creative follow-up survey that allows clients to pinpoint exactly what they liked and did not like



about the process of restorative justice and how the FairField Center can improve on that for the future.

Fall 2020 – Abby Kiros

This semester, I had the opportunity to complete my field placement at The FairField Center, the oldest and first mediation center in Virginia. The FairField Center is a nonprofit mediation center that is in Harrisonburg. Their mission statement is to “help people listen, plan, and interact effectively.” They attempt to help parties resolve issues by creating a plan focused on finding solutions for the parties involved while building a deeper understanding between them, through dialogue.

The services they offer include mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice services, and training programs. Their training programs include mediation training, workplace and business training, restorative justice training, and co-parenting classes. The site primarily deals with mediation cases, and a majority of these are court-ordered, specifically regarding custody, visitation, or support of children, as well as divorce matters. The FairField Center works with the General District Court (GDC) and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts. (JDR) in Staunton, Waynesboro, Augusta, or Rockingham/Harrisonburg. Not all of the cases received are court-ordered. Some clients pay out of pocket to use mediation. The majority of these cases are related to marital problems, particularly divorce. They are an active participant in the community. They are known for helping individuals who are disadvantaged within the Harrisonburg area, such as aiding individuals to prepare for job opportunities or finding possible job opportunities for them. Lastly, they are also responsible for organizing and coordinating the Harrisonburg International Festival.

As an intern, I worked alongside Aaron Hagmaier, the Director of Mediation Services at the site. Most days, Aaron was the only one at the Center due to Covid-19. Because of this, I was unable to interact and work with many of the mediators and other staff member. Additionally, because of Covid-19, I did not have a lot of the same experiences as previous interns at this site, yet I was still able to make the most of the situation. For instance, I was unable to go to court, watch more mediations and in-person mediations, and go through mediation training prior to starting.

My day-to-day tasks primarily consisted of case management and administrative work. This included reminding clients of their mediation session for the following day, prepping cases for mediators, building cases using a database called VistaShare. Once these cases were built, I would call each of the individuals involved to conduct an intake. We would do multiple intakes a day and took up most of my time while I was there. On average, intakes would take 5 to 16 minutes, sometimes even longer. These intakes were a vital source of information that we needed to get to successfully conduct a mediation session. After clients meditated and were able to reach an agreement, we would receive a draft of the agreement from the mediator. After receiving the agreement, I would fix any issues, such as formatting. Once this step was complete, we either mailed or emailed to the clients a copy for them to sign. I was also responsible for post mediation processes, such as billing courts or clients, closing cases, and filing agreements to the courts.



It took a while to learn how the site worked and all my new responsibilities. The site can be very busy at times, but this was exacerbated by limited staff. If you like structure, then this may not be the best site to choose. One learning hurdle I faced was how to handle intakes. Sometimes, clients were not responsive to my questions, but other times I was unsure what to ask or how to ask it. Although this was stressful at the start, once I got the hang of intakes, this stopped. I began to enjoy taking intakes. It was interesting to hear about people's lives and stories. Some of the intakes were difficult because they included child sexual abuse by a parent, domestic violence, mental health issues, situations where Child Protective Services (CPS) was involved, and an array of other cases surrounding topics similar to these.

For each of our sites, we were required to develop a contribution project. The project focused on creating a new implementation based on your site, and ultimately this new idea should help your site and even the community. For my project, I was interested in how Harrisonburg schools use restorative justice practices for the students. After talking to Sue Prail, the Director of Restorative Justice, and April Howard, a member of the school board office, I learned that the schools in this area use a model known as the incident-driven approach.

While conducting more research on this approach I found an alternative approach. This new model is known as the whole-school approach, unlike the incident-driven approach, this focuses on using restorative justice principals, throughout the entire school to create a positive, holistic school environment. This model is a three-tiered system (1) universal/prevention focus and community building (2) targeted interventions (3) the intensive intervention. Schools that continue to use the incident-driven approach or punitive punishment are exacerbating the racial divide within the school system, which is extremely damaging for students of color. Black students tend to be expelled or suspended at much higher rates, which in turn will impact their education. However, using this approach decreases disparities between students while also strengthening teacher-student relationships. After viewing the positive outcomes and effectiveness of whole-school approach, I wanted to implement this model into the Harrisonburg school system and, hopefully, other schools throughout Virginia.

For schools to successfully adopt this new approach, the first step they must take is to create an assessment, which has a series of questions based on an outline, that allows schools to develop an individualized plan based on their needs. After this assessment, the school can slowly adopt this new approach while using a general step-by-step plan that can be modified for each school. Trying to administer the whole-school approach will take four years to complete; each stage takes one year to complete and may be costly.

Later in life, I want to work with the law and the justice system. The FairField Center works alongside the criminal justice system and deals with the courts often. This experience allowed me to grasp a deeper understanding of these processes, predominantly in the JDR courts. Communication is essential for the line of work I want to go into. Many tasks that I faced helped me get out of my comfort zone and, while doing so, helped my communications skills improve significantly. I was able to learn how to talk to various types of people while also being professional. Even though this was not the experience I imagined it to be, I am glad that I did it. The FairField Center is a unique establishment that can be somewhat difficult to adjust to. But at the end of the day, I am grateful for this opportunity; I have learned skills ranging from interpersonal communication to case management and organization. The FairField Center has



helped me grow as an individual in the community while having more of an open mind and understanding of people, especially those different from me.

Fall 2020 – Anna Flanagan

For my psychology capstone, I was placed at the Fairfield Mediation Center during my fall semester of 2020. The Fairfield Center's mission is to provide "a broad range of conflict resolution services and training for individuals, businesses, and organizations with one goal in mind: SOLUTIONS." As their mission statement demonstrates, the center deals with a wide range of services, some including; restorative justice, training programs, referrals from the Virginia Supreme Court, workplace and business dispute training, Staunton police referrals, and much more. The Fairfield Center also is responsible for organizing the Harrisonburg International Festival as part of their mission in civic engagement. However, with this year, and COVID19, many of these programs were cut, or put off to the side for the time being.

During my semester interning at the Fairfield center, although it was in the midst of COVID19, I was still able to engage in a wide variety of new learning experiences and handle many responsibilities. My site manager at the center was Aaron Hagmaier, who helped introduce me to mediation and guided me to success throughout my semester. As an intern, I started off learning the ropes of the database our mediation center uses called VistaShare. This is essentially the nucleus of information for our entire center. This was the first and most important responsibility to learn to navigate. Any person the center has ever had a case with, and any person we have ever had a phone conversation with goes into VistaShare. As an intern, Mr. Hagmaier also taught us how to have an intake interview with clients before mediation. An intake interview is when you call a client who is referred to our services to ask them a long list of personal information as well as ask them to explain the situation that led them to mediation. Oftentimes these clients are very understanding and want to help you as much as you want to help them. However, some clients are very vulnerable and do not want to talk to an intern who might not have all the answers. As an intern, these calls took the longest for me to learn and do correctly. Even towards the end of my site experience, I was learning new ways to better handle talking to clients and find ways to get information without saying the wrong thing. During my time at the center, my site manager really wanted to see us grow and let us explore our own way of taking these calls by giving us minimal direction. He really pushed us to think outside the box, ask the hard questions, and after the call was over, we would talk about how we could have done things differently. This was crucial in the development of my skills at the center.

The most interesting part of my time at The Fairfield Center was the mediations that we got to watch. Many of the mediations I got to watch during my time had to do with divorced parents who had to sit down and create a parenting plan for their children. These often were regarding custody, visitation, or support of their children. It was interesting to see the mediators at the center really working as an unbiased third party to help mend and solve disagreements firsthand. The mediations always start off with an orientation to help guide clients into the understandings of how mediations work. After an agreement is met, or sometimes not, the mediators have a debrief on the parts of the mediation that could have gone better as well as parts that went well. Since this was during COVID, most of our mediations were over Zoom. Towards



the end of the internship, we began to have a few in person, with a majority of them over virtual platforms. This was new territory for the center, but fortunately, with everything moving online, the center was able to have more of an outreach to clients. Now that mediations were online, we had fewer cancelations, and we could talk to people all over the world to settle disputes.

The remaining part of my time at the site had to do with paperwork, billings to the courts, and more behind the scene work. This at first seemed less interesting, but once I understood and got the hang of the process, it became more interesting and was one of the more enjoyable parts of my experience. The phone calls and all that goes on at the site can seem quite hectic, but when I was doing paperwork, and paying attention to fine details, the work became relaxing. I can almost compare it to completing a puzzle. Mr. Hagmaier often asked us to read into a story or into a case. We often had to take what information we had and do more digging and research on top of this to understand a case more than the papers showed. This was quite arguably the most valuable part of my experience at the center as well. This taught me to have attention to detail and to not scan or look over information but to really delve into it deeply and get the most information I could. I felt like the work I was doing at the center was really important, and you could see our effort making a viable impact when mediations made it to an agreement.

Toward the end of my internship, and through the Field Placement class itself, I was able to put forth a contribution project that I was really passionate about at my site. At my site, I decided to focus on the topic of mediator burnout and compassion fatigue as well as how to retain facilitators. At the Fairfield Center, mediators deal with a lot of emotionally charged cases and are constantly working in a hectic environment with little to no breaks. I saw firsthand how they affected my site manager and other facilitators. My contribution project aimed to create a biweekly workshop, where mediators could come together and talk about methods for combating burnout as well as learning mindfulness techniques to cope with stressful situations. With the mediators doing so much for the community, I wanted to see what I could do to make them feel appreciated, and to help them overcome the worst of their burnout symptoms. In the end, I put forth a plan for a mediation workshop, a list of topics for mindfulness techniques to teach, and flyers for the mediators so they can continue their journey to burnout recovery outside of the workplace.

Overall, this experience has dramatically developed my ability to act professionally under pressure, and to hold an incredible amount of responsibility when it comes to case management. The valuable skills that I gained from The Fairfield Center are immeasurable and I am beyond grateful to my site supervisor for pushing me beyond my limits of what I thought I was capable of as an undergraduate intern.