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POLI 4390

Coverdale Courtwork Society Placement

My placement took place at Coverdale Courtwork Society on Quinpool, which is a non-profit organization. The Halifax chapter was launched in 1980 and since then has grown to provide many services within the Halifax community. This wonderful organization focuses on supporting women and gender diverse people who are involved or at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. This organization acknowledges and addresses the needs of women and trans people in our community that have encountered the law and the immense struggles that come with that. They provide a variety of services such as court support and navigation, bail support and reintegration, case-management, prison visits, programming, advocacy, community education, and cultural support. As well, this organization created Caitlan's Place in 2021, which is a permanent and supported housing initiative that provides 15 single occupancy rooms that are fully furnished, and meals are provided on site. All of their programs promote self-esteem, self-awareness, and inner strength for personal healing to attempt to reduce the recidivism rates in Halifax. Some of these programs include healing trauma, healthy relationships, parenting inside out, girls and culture, grief and loss, helping women recover, etc.

Their team consists of 16 full time staff, and 12 part time/ casual staff, 5-10 volunteers (when Covid is not prevalent in the community), and 4-6 student placements. This wonderful team of women work both at the office and in the community and have been incredibly resilient throughout covid and remained successful in their work. For my placement, I was fortunate

enough to be able to go to Coverdale in person, when necessary, but overall, my placement took on a hybrid model: I would do my research from home, and I would go into the office whenever I needed to work on my larger project.

During my time at Coverdale, I was assigned 3 general projects/ assignments to be working on throughout my time: two small scale projects and one large projects. My first smaller scale project involved local entrepreneurial opportunities for the women. A lot of the women who were previously incarcerated are incredibly talented and produce fabulous artwork such as beading, painting, shoe design, etc. Therefore, one of my projects was to reach out to local Halifax businesses to see if any of them would be interested in selling any of Coverdale's Clients artwork. Finding employment is one of the hardest challenges after being released from prison (aside from housing) so job opportunities is an incredibly important area for Coverdale. Unfortunately, I heard no response from any of the business I inquired with so as an alternative, Stephanie (my supervisor) and I decided to start a Facebook page so that we can publicize their artwork and hopefully sell it! As well, they will be posting their work on Halifax Facebook Marketplace to hopefully reach a larger audience.

The second project that I worked on during my placement was producing a jurisdictional analysis on harm reduction model initiatives. Essentially, I did research on what every province in Canada is doing to implement a harm reduction model in their province to try and lower the amount of drug related overdoses. For this, I just did brief research on what every province is doing and how successful they have been in doing this. I also often discussed the budget that the provinces had in order to evaluate what priority this takes in their budget and community. As well, this research has been fascinating because many of the initiatives that were supposed to occur couldn't because of budgeting in health resources due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This

research was truly fascinating, and I learned so much about what Canada is doing to try and prevent overdoses in the country, as well as what is still needed to lower these numbers. Many provinces have experienced spikes in overdoses since the beginning of the pandemic and many provinces are experiencing 'crisis level' numbers. Although this paper is about 24 pages long, this is still an incredibly brief look at these initiatives and there are a lot more opportunities for research in this field since it encompasses so many different aspects.

The last and largest project that I undertook at Coverdale was leading the Coverdale Closet Project. Essentially, they wanted to transform their storage closet into a clothing unit that their clients could use to gain access to basic clothing, hygiene products and beauty products. Often times when people are released from prison, they are not provided with basic necessities and sometimes don't have a home to go back to, so building this closet is a fundamental feature in helping previously incarcerated women re-integrate themselves into society. This project was a lot more work than I anticipated it being. Cleaning out the closet itself was a critical yet boring task and it took up a lot more time than I expected it to. This closet had so many different things in it, and it was difficult to categorize everything and get rid of everything that wouldn't be considered a part of the closet. After I finished going through the closet, I started doing research on Ikea closets which was incredibly difficult. I have no experience with architecture, and I found it very challenging to create something myself with the dimensions I was given. This complication eventually led me to book a consultation with a specialist at Ikea and they helped me design the closet and told me exactly what to buy. Once this was finished, I realized that many of the pieces were on back order which further delayed the closet project. I started to build as much as I could with the missing pieces, but this inevitably led me to stop at certain points and all I could do was wait for the pieces to arrive. A lot of my time towards the end of my

placement was spent driving back and forth from Ikea and building the closet. This was incredibly time consuming since I do not have any experience building and this might have taken someone else less time to accomplish than myself. Despite this though, I have really enjoyed watching the closet come together knowing that it was entirely my own doing, and I made every decision regarding this closet. This also led me to the one negative side of this project, the support aspect. Since all of the other Coverdale workers are incredibly busy, I had to build this closet on my own and many times, had to get my partner to come in and help me since many of the parts required two people working on it. But besides that, building this closet has been incredibly rewarding and I have enjoyed going through the process.

Aside from building the closet, I also provided Coverdale with a “Coverdale Closet Report” which explained to them what I have accomplished so far, and what still needs to be accomplished. Although I did not have the opportunity to fully stock the closet due to the time constraint of this placement, I am very happy with the work that I did and I provided a foundation for whoever takes on this project next. This report sets up success for whoever continues to work on the closet after me and provides a bit of guidance, since that is something that I wish I had when I started leading this project. As well, I also provided them with a volunteer structure so when we are able to have volunteers back in the office, they have a list of tasks that they will need to do to maintain the closet throughout the year. Lastly, I provided them with a structure of how the closet should be run and recommendations for when it should be available to the public.

My placement at Coverdale looked relatively consistent every week, which I viewed as a positive thing. I am someone who likes to organize their weeks in advance and knowing exactly what I had to do each week was helpful, since I was given my projects at the beginning of the

semester and was allowed to manage my time whatever way I wanted to. Based on this structure, I decided to work on the closet for about 4 hours a week and work on my smaller projects for about 3 hours a week. Working on the closet entailed either going into the office to clear out the closet space, organize, take measurements, etc or if I was not in the office, it would consist of spending time looking for organizations that have done similar projects that I could model the Coverdale Closet off of and looking at Ikea closet ideas that matched the measurements of the closet. The other 3 hours were normally spent reaching out to local organizations to see if they had any art opportunities available to the women and researching harm reduction model initiatives that are used across the Canadian provinces. The composition of what I had to do each week kept things interesting and I liked that I was not working on one singular projects, and that I had many different projects to work on each week. I also liked the fact that I got to choose how I spent my time and that I was not given hard deadlines. They were aware of the fact that the closet may not be entirely finished by the time that my placement was done just because large scale projects have a lot of moving parts and could not be constrained to a specific due date. I tried to get as much work done as possible but given my late start, Ikea delays, and unfortunately getting Covid the last week of my placement, this inevitably meant that I would not be able to complete this project. Nonetheless, I loved that I could make my own schedule and I truly enjoyed the amount I spent at the office, and the amount of time I spent researching.

I really enjoyed my time at Coverdale and watching all my projects come together was an amazing feeling. I feel like I gained valuable research skills, along with general experience of what it would be like to work in non-profit organization work environment. As well, I genuinely loved the research that I was doing and was incredibly interested in the topic which helps a lot. There are a few important things about this placement that I would like to note in case someone

is thinking of doing their placement at Coverdale. I think it is important to mention that all of the work I did was incredibly independent, and I was not given a lot of guidance on how to go about building the project or what my jurisdictional analysis should look like. This was the first job/volunteer experience where I was not told exactly what to do and it was a bit of an adjustment learning to trust myself and the decisions I made. Every decision I made at Coverdale in regard to the closet they loved, and it helped boost my self-esteem. If you are someone who would rather be told what to do and prefers structure when they work, this may not be the placement for you, but if you are looking for a more hands off placement and the opportunity to gain experience leading a project, then this may be the organization for you. I will note though that the closet was very independent and by the time that someone does this placement, they may not be working on the closet and their experience may be more hands on than described here.

Another aspect of this placement that I would mention is that communication was a challenge at the beginning of the semester. The director of Coverdale is an incredibly busy person and sometimes does not have time to get back to you or will not answer your messages/emails for multiple days on end. This was incredibly challenging since I was only assigned my projects at the end of January and therefore had to make up my hours throughout the semester. Once I had been given my projects, it was uphill from there but getting that initial meeting in was challenging and frustrating because I felt bad nagging the director since she is a super busy woman. But besides that, my placement was wonderful and rewarding and I would recommend it to anyone who is looking to gain experience in a local non-profit organization.