

Practicum Placement Final Report: Coverdale Justice Society

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In this report, I will discuss the mission, values, and significance of the organization I volunteered at during my placement, followed by a description of my experience by month. I will conclude with some words of advice and suggestions for any future practicum students. As you will see throughout this report, my experience had some ups and downs; but I would nevertheless recommend Coverdale Justice Society to future students. I hope that this report provides some clarity, useful information, and meaningful advice to future students.

I. Coverdale Justice Society: Mission, Values, & Significance

Coverdale Justice Society is a Nova Scotia-based non-profit organization that provides support and specialized services to youth, women, and gender-diverse individuals across the province. Their mission focuses primarily on improving access to justice, providing housing, enhancing public safety, and assisting criminal justice system-involved individuals in reintegrating back into society post-release from correctional institutions. They offer a wide range of services and programs, such as: court support, which involves assisting people in navigating the complexity of the court process; bail support, where they help women deal with their legal obligations who would otherwise be ineligible for bail due to a lack of support and resources; and housing support, where they deliver personalized case management, outreach services, and housing to help at-risk individuals experiencing homelessness.

They have three main housing programs in the Halifax area: Caitlan's Place, Shannon's Place, and Honour House. These are designed to assist women and gender-diverse individuals who are justice system-involved and/or recently released from a correctional facility, and are struggling with homelessness. These residences consist of approximately 12-15 individual rooms

each, emergency beds, shared kitchens and bathrooms, as well as food programs. These housing programs have 24/7 available on-site support from Coverdale staff, as well as access to food, clothes, group program activities, information on services and resources, and other basic necessities, many of which are provided as donations or by Coverdale directly. At these homes and elsewhere in their program implementation, Coverdale exercises a harm-reduction approach that allows their residences to live a safe, healthy, and fulfilling life.

Coverdale's primary clients and residents often struggle with their mental health, including substance use issues, trauma, and maladaptive coping skills. Coverdale staff work tirelessly to provide these individuals with the emotional and material support that they need. For example, the housing facilities provide access to safe-use kits, as well as assistance with booking mental health and addictions appointments, and more. Coverdale staff are also equipped in conflict resolution and de-escalation practices to be readily available in the event that clients are demonstrating aggressive behaviour or mental health episodes that may be harmful to themselves or other clients and residents.

I appreciate how Coverdale's hands-on approach helps inform clients and residents of the potential consequences of their behavior, as well as support services and resources available to them; but it also allows clients to exercise their personal autonomy and makes room for them to make their own choices. The workplace environment is definitely not your average day on the job, but I really enjoyed the nature of it. The staff maintained a friendly, more laid-back environment, yet also understood and took seriously the importance of their work. As someone who appreciates more easygoing workplace relationships, yet also being challenged, this environment was very comfortable and enjoyable for me.

II. My Experience

i. January

My placement at Coverdale got off to a bit of a slow start, as there had just recently been pretty drastic management changes. The executive director who was appointed as my supervisor at first was new to her position, and was hesitant to take on students – but luckily Dr. Denike convinced her. To begin, I had a good coffee chat with this executive director about the work I'd be doing at Coverdale, and about careers in this area of work. We decided that I would be doing some research for them about other provincial reintegration services and programs across Canada and finding out how Nova Scotia could better its current system, as well as researching the experience of incarcerated mothers and the different outcomes for them and their children. This supervisor had also discussed with me the possibility of shadowing some other staff in court and in other correctional facilities, which I found myself most excited about. They had also informed me that I would be appointed a new supervisor once she began her position at Coverdale, which would be in February.

For these first few weeks, this supervisor was pretty hands-off and didn't give me much direction in terms of how to go about communicating this research for them. At first, I tried to embrace this hands-off approach as I am a very busy student with lots of extracurriculars and part time work, so I figured that the flexibility and remoteness of my role would bode well for me. However, I did ultimately want a more involved role at Coverdale; I am interested in research and do enjoy doing it, but I wanted the more practical, real-world experience of working directly with Coverdale's clients and other staff. I conducted some research on the subjects I mentioned above, which I did find interesting as these are subjects I am eager to learn about. However, I still felt confused and unsure of how to go about it in a way that was productive for

the executive director, and I still wasn't given much clarification. Nevertheless, I made sure to put in my hours each week and do as much as I could. Although, come early February, I received notice that this executive director was no longer working with Coverdale, and that I was appointed a new supervisor for the remainder of my practicum.

ii. February

I had a phone call with my new supervisor, Senna Hollihan, the Prevention Outreach Manager at Coverdale, who was much more eager to include me and give me more hands-on work as a student. Here, we set up a meeting and discussed some more opportunities she had for me. With the load of recent management turnarounds, combined with some other staff being on leave, Senna was undertaking a few other caseloads as well as her own, and overall balancing a lot on her plate – but still she managed to keep me in the loop, which I am very grateful for. At this point, about half-way through the month, I ended up stopping the weekly research work I was originally doing as Senna had some more work ideas and opportunities that were of greater interest to me. We met at the Coverdale head office to discuss me having a more involved role, where I also learned more about the work they do, the clients they work with, and the overall workplace environment, which I will get to later in this report.

Senna had me begin my Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) for Nova Scotia training to assist her with some data entry work. HIFIS is a homelessness management information system that, as stated on the [Government of Canada](#) website, “is designed to support the day-to-day operational activities of Canadian homelessness service providers” as a “comprehensive data collection and case management system.” Further, HIFIS “enables participating service providers within the same community to access, collect, and share local real-time homelessness data to ensure individuals and families accessing services are

prioritized and referred to appropriate services at the correct time” (Government of Canada, 2025). This training took about 3.5 hours, and consisted of online video tutorials on how to use the HIFIS database. While the training was not the most exciting, I am definitely glad to have learned how to use this system. By completing this training I was then able to assist Senna with some of her caseload and better my understanding of information systems and databases.

iii. March

March was probably my most exciting month at Coverdale. Senna and I spent a day where she took me on a tour of the three housing facilities that Coverdale has. We were also joined by Summer, Coverdale’s community justice outreach worker, who I also learned a lot from. First, we stopped at Honour House, one of their newer residences, where I met some of the staff who work there and learned more about their jobs. Honour House is 4 floors, each with a 3 bedroom apartment-style home, consisting of a shared kitchen, living space, and bathroom. The most at-risk or in-need residents are on the top floor, where the office also is, and the most self-sufficient are in the basement. It was a very clean and welcoming environment, with very knowledgeable and supportive staff. Next, we went to Caitlan’s Place and Shannon’s place, where I met some other staff and practicum students, as well as some of the residents. These were more typical house layouts, but pretty much had the same set up. I had some interesting conversations with the staff about their experience working at these residences, and I felt that I learned a lot – even just from witnessing short interactions between them and their clients.

I spent some time shadowing some staff at Caitlan’s Place – which was definitely a highlight of my placement. I got the opportunity to look at their big binder of incident reports, where I could learn more about each client, their situation, how they are adapting to life post-release, or navigating their justice system obligations. As a student who is also studying

psychology and is interested in mental illness, treatment, and how it relates to offending behaviour, I found these reports really interesting to look into. I also helped out with distributing lots of food that was donated to them, as well as safe-use kits that had been delivered. I met some of their other residents, and it was interesting to get to know each of their individual personalities, values, likes and dislikes, or anything else that was going on in their lives each day. Some days were relatively quiet compared to the usual, as the staff told me – but it still gave me a very thought-provoking and valuable experience.

iv. April

I will be continuing my placement at Coverdale for the rest of the month of April, even though this report will be submitted at an earlier date. I wanted to spend some more time there to make up for some hours lost towards the beginning of my placement when they were sorting out their management and dealing with a complicated transition phase. However, I want to include what I will continue to do in this report. For my remaining time at Coverdale, I plan to take on some more shadow-shifts at Caitlan's Place or any of the other housing facilities, where I hope to learn even more about the nature and experiences of their clients. I will also be attending a Restorative Justice Training session with the new executive director of Coverdale, as well as some other students and staff. Lastly, I plan to assist my supervisor with some of her caseload, likely through HIFIS, as well as shadow her some more as she assists their clients with transportation or other legal services.

III. For Future Practicum Students

Despite the bumps in the road near the beginning, I would highly recommend Coverdale to future students – especially those that are interested in social work, offender reintegration and rehabilitation, or honestly any area of criminology and the justice system. My biggest piece of

advice is to advocate for yourself as a student; it can be easy for some organizations to brush off students or not give them a super involved role, but it is more important that you clearly express what you want out of the role. If I had been more honest with myself and with my initial supervisor with what I wanted to do at Coverdale, I likely would have gotten off to a better and quicker start to my placement. While it ended up working out with my new supervisor – which I am very grateful for – I probably would have had some more unique or interesting opportunities had I stood my ground earlier. Additionally, don't hesitate to reach out to Dr. Denike with any concerns. She is deeply understanding and only wants the best for her students. Overall, just speak your mind and indicate clearly what you want from the experience, right at the beginning!

IV. Conclusion

I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to volunteer at a place like Coverdale. I loved having a more practical form of learning apart from my typical coursework. Experiencing this kind of environment is a type of learning that can only happen beyond the classroom. For me, as a student in a program where co-op terms were not an option, I am eternally thankful that this practicum was available to me. I want to thank Dr. Denike for providing this opportunity to myself and other LJSO, POLI, and GWST students, and for being so understanding, supportive, and eager to make sure that our experiences were the best they could be. I also want to extend my thanks to my supervisor, Senna, for understanding my situation and doing her best to include me as a student, even though she was as busy as could be.