

My experience as a VA Boston social work trainee

Baylee Williams

When I was selected for a position as a social work intern at the VA Boston/Causeway Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC), I was overcome with feelings of gratitude and excitement. Growing up in a military family, I had originally planned to work as a Nurse for the Army. Due to a medical condition, I was not able to pursue this career. Instead, I began to pursue a career in mental health services and fell in love with studying the human brain and behavior. I found I was able to apply my eagerness for providing support for service members, Veterans, and their families in the world of mental health recovery. At the time, I was an undergraduate college student at Queens University in Charlotte, a small college in North Carolina, which helped build the foundation for my career in clinical social work.

I spent the bulk of my time as an undergraduate researching the impact the processes of deployment and reentry have on service members' mental health, and their relationships. I participated in clinical internships working with incarcerated individuals and their families. As I worked with this population, I noticed a similar thread of how family members respond to the absence of their loved ones during incarceration and the difficulties of reentering into the community. I continue to apply the lessons I earned from working with this population to the work I am doing today.

Currently, I am wrapping up a year-long internship at the VA Boston PRRC. I matched with this position through my graduate program at the Boston College School of Social Work. I was thrilled to be working at the PRRC, with a program that uses a framework of rehabilitation and recovery to provide mental health care to Veterans. I learned a great deal from Veterans and the PRRC staff. I have grown both professionally and personally in ways that exceeded all my expectations. I feel so lucky to have had this training opportunity.

During my internship with the PRRC, I provided individual and group therapy to Veterans diagnosed with serious mental illness. I participated in the delivery of group therapy following structured models, including Illness Management and Recovery, Social Skills Training for individuals with serious mental illness, and Seeking Safety. I developed a group therapy curriculum with my supervisor, helping Veterans apply solutions-focused therapy tools to evaluate relationships. I led this group weekly for several months. I used this group therapy curriculum as part of my graduate program and developed a number of revisions for the next iteration of the group. I also had the opportunity to lead a 30-minute mindfulness practice several days a week for any staff or Veterans who wanted to attend.

After my time at PRRC has ended, I will be moving back to Charlotte, North Carolina. I will be pursuing work in inpatient and residential programs. My long-term goals are to continue gaining work and educational experiences that will help me become a well-rounded mental health treatment provider. Down the road, I am hoping to use that experience to be able to provide effective, recovery-oriented therapy to Veterans and their loved ones through individual, couples, group, and family therapy. I will take every lesson I learned during my time at the PRRC and apply it to the new experiences I have. I will remember my time here fondly.