

Social work training at VA Boston

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I heard about the Social Work Intern position at VA Boston through my field advisor during my second-year placement meeting. My field advisor was excited to help me apply. Throughout the application process, she reminded me of how great an opportunity it would be to gain clinical experience working with Veterans. I had no experience working with Veterans before my placement at VA Boston, but I was fascinated by the Veteran identity and the VA as an organization. With my field advisor's support, I was given the opportunity to work in the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) department of VA Boston, within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

Ponniece Champlin, LICSW (HUD-VASH Gold team intake specialist), was integral to my understanding of homelessness among Veterans. My role as the Social Work Intern in the HUD-VASH program was to conduct biopsychosocial assessments and enroll Veterans into the HUD-VASH program. Biopsychosocial assessments are important clinical tools that enable providers to understand circumstances that may have led to the Veteran becoming homeless and aid providers in creating a treatment plan that will encourage Veterans to maintain stable housing. I also had the chance to work with Jolee Griffin, LICSW (HUD-VASH red team clinical case manager), to understand the HUD-VASH program. Working with Jolee allowed me to see the phase-based process in action and gain a deeper awareness of homelessness among Veterans and mental health issues with the Veteran population. Both roles helped sharpen my clinical skills, including motivational interviewing, rapport building, and cultural competence.

Training at VA Boston has given me confidence in my abilities as a social worker. I felt supported by my supervisors, the VA system, and other social workers in various departments within the VA. Although COVID-19 changed the way my placement looked this year, I received high-quality training from my supervisors and the opportunity to meet, assess, and interact with Veterans. I had access to an abundance of educational training that was helpful for my clinical development. Lastly, the shadowing opportunities helped me connect with other social workers in the VA and better understand social workers importance in the VA system.