



MercyFirst

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PRACTICUM IN

PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Introduction

MercyFirst offers a training program for graduate students in professional psychology which involves varied experiences with children, adolescents and their families. The children we serve range from infancy through late adolescence, though most are between 9 and 18 years old. The practicum experience is centered around a residential program for adolescents. In his or her training year, each practicum student has the opportunity to be involved in diagnostic assessment and treatment intervention according to a variety of modalities and with close, supportive supervision. In addition, each student is encouraged to participate in most of the supervision groups and training seminars offered in our APA accredited internship program.

Setting

MercyFirst is a voluntary, not-for-profit, COA accredited, child care agency and residential treatment center that provides trauma informed care to children and adolescents. We are one of the largest Sanctuary certified organizations in the world. MercyFirst was formed in 2003 through the merger of St. Mary's Children and Family Services and Angel Guardian Services, two child care organizations that date back to the late 1800's. Annually, we provide care to approximately 3,000 children and adolescents, ranging from infancy to young adulthood. This includes a large number of children and adolescents in congregate care and foster care in a variety of settings that are located throughout the Long Island – New York City area. There are two main facilities. The Syosset campus is an attractive 64-acre site located in suburban Long Island, New York, approximately 20 miles from New York City. The Brooklyn headquarters is housed in an attractive, historical building located in the residential community of Bay Ridge, near the Verrazano Bridge. The combined agency includes a range of residential treatment and assessment programs, outpatient programs, and group homes.

The Practicum Experience

Each practicum student is assigned to a treatment unit for the year and also provides assessment services to residents on a variety of other units. The treatment unit is typically one of the residential units on the Syosset campus, though it may also be a group home. On the treatment unit, the student develops intervention skills by carrying, under supervision, two to four individual and/or family therapy cases. In the diagnostic

experience, the practicum student performs psychological testing and mental status interviewing, also under supervision. In addition, each student frequently has the opportunity to co-lead a therapy group. We expect practicum students to commit to at least a two day per week placement (preferably three days per week), beginning in early September and ending in late June.

Programs

Practicum students work mainly in our residential programs. These include

Residential Treatment Center (RTC) Units, where children and adolescents stay for long-term (6 to 18 months) treatment of emotional and behavioral problems. These units focus on the needs of emotionally disturbed adolescents, including juvenile delinquents and sexually inappropriate boys. A full range of trauma informed treatment, including individual and group therapy, family therapy, milieu therapy, psychopharmacology, etc. is utilized on all of the units.

A Residential Treatment Facility (RTF) Unit, which provides long-term (9 months to 2 years) treatment to children and adolescents with severe and persistent mental illness, including pervasive developmental disorder, schizophrenia, and similar conditions. The RTF, which is licensed by the New York State Office of Mental Health, is organized to function in the manner of an inpatient psychiatric hospital.

A Group Home Program, with sites located in Brooklyn, Queens and on Long Island. The group homes mainly serve male and female adolescents, and a few serve adolescent mothers and their young children. In general, the group home program is less structured than the residential RTC or RTF programs, with the group home members living in the community, where typically attend a neighborhood school or, if old enough, work in the community.

A Diagnostic Program, through which residents receive comprehensive assessments on referral by the family court. The recommendations offered by our diagnostic teams are used to make placement and treatment decisions.

There is a fully accredited Special Education School on our campus.

Additionally, MercyFirst has a large Foster Care and Adoption Program, which is designed to provide foster or adoptive homes for children who may have been removed from their biological parents due to concerns about abuse or neglect.

Population

The population at the Syosset residential campus consists of boys and girls, ages 9 to 18;

the group homes have boys and girls ages 0-21; the foster boarding homes include boys and girls ages 0-21. MercyFirst accepts children from New York City, and Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties. Referrals come from County Departments of Social Services, New York City's Administration for Children's Services, New York State's Office of Children and Family Services, the New York State Office of Mental Health, Family Court proceedings, and on a voluntary placement basis. Residents present with a wide range of psychopathology, varying from adjustment disorders to psychotic disorders, and almost all have experienced trauma. Many come from disorganized and overwhelmed family backgrounds. Some families have histories of abuse and neglect. The children we serve function primarily within the average range of intelligence with deficits in impulse control and ego functioning. The core of the practicum experience typically involves the campus residential programs in Syosset, though students may also be assigned to one of the group homes for their residential treatment experience.

Clinical Staff

The clinical staff at MercyFirst consists of psychologists, psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, social workers and psychology interns and practicum students. The Agency also employs a large number of nurses, special education teachers and other childcare and healthcare professionals. Our treatment philosophy is based on an interdisciplinary team approach in which clinicians work closely with social service and child care staff. Psychologists provide direct services through various diagnostic and therapeutic modalities, and serve as members and coordinators of the treatment teams. The major theoretical orientations represented by our supervisory staff are cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic and family systems.

Philosophy of Treatment

The philosophy of treatment at MercyFirst is based on the belief that all children are born with an innate drive towards health and adaptation. We also believe that children are born with individual differences in their ability to adapt and grow physically and psychologically within any given environmental context, and we take account of these individual differences, as well as any socio-cultural variations, in our treatment planning. Our treatment approach is trauma informed and focuses on the therapeutic milieu, in which the goal is to provide educational, recreational and psychological experiences which will foster each child's capacity for positive growth and adaptation. Psychotherapy serves as an experiential tool for examining the child's life and developing coping ability. Individual, family or group therapy is available to our residents and, depending on the staff member and the needs of the child, a cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic or family systems approach may be utilized. Psychotropic medications may be utilized as part of the individual child's treatment plan to aid in fostering healthy development and enabling the child to better avail him or herself of the variety of treatment interventions.

Philosophy of Training

The clinical psychology training program at MercyFirst is conducted along the guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC). Our purpose is to provide students with a planned and programmed sequence of supervised clinical experiences and educational seminars, utilizing a professional psychology model of training.

We believe that, in addition to developing the core clinical skills of assessment and intervention, it is crucial for psychologists working within human service settings to be sensitive to group and organization dynamics. Working together with other professionals with different backgrounds and viewpoints necessitates an appreciation of how one's treatment interventions interact with other aspects of the milieu. Practicum students will begin to learn to work on a systems level, learning consultation skills to facilitate coordination of treatment.

Practicum students have the opportunity to develop their clinical skills via interviewing and testing, therapeutic intervention and consultation in a mentor system. In this framework, students work directly under one or two primary supervisors (one diagnostic and one treatment), with the opportunity to closely observe and process all aspects of their supervisors' functioning.

Psychological services for diverse cultural and ethnic groups, especially those with economic disadvantage, is another focus of the experience at MercyFirst. Because we serve a largely minority population, practicum students learn to better understand and appreciate the role of cultural and ethnic differences in psychological functioning.

Training Objectives

Within the professional psychology training model that we utilize at MercyFirst, primary emphasis is placed on developing each trainee's skills in the following:

Assessment – practicum students learn interviewing techniques; test administration, scoring and interpretation; report writing; diagnosis; etc.

During the course of the training year, students are trained to assess a variety of clinical conditions, which can range from mild adjustment or parent-child problems to frank psychosis. Testing and evaluation compose an important part of the training experience at MercyFirst.

Intervention - via a variety of experiences, including: brief and long-term therapy; cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic and family systems interventions; and individual, group and family modalities.

Group therapy experiences may involve time-limited cognitive-behavioral approaches, such as skills building, or insight oriented process groups.

In addition, we also seek to develop the following skills:

Interpersonal Relationship and Self-Knowledge - largely through supervision and the mentoring relationship.

Consultation and Case Management - especially to the multi-disciplinary treatment team, and also to the on-grounds school.

Research/Evaluation - via seminar offerings and the encouragement of a skeptical, data-based approach to clinical work.

Training Placements

Each practicum student will typically have a full-year placement on one of the long-term treatment units, and also provide assessment services to residents on a variety of units.

Treatment Placement: Each student is typically assigned to one of the on-campus residential treatment units or, less frequently, to a group home, for a full-year experience that includes psychotherapy, clinical assessment, milieu treatment, treatment planning, and consultation with staff. On this placement, the student will gain supervised experience in crisis intervention and carry about 2 to 4 long-term individual and/or family therapy cases; there may also be opportunity to co-lead a therapy group. (1 hour of individual supervision per week)

Diagnostic Placement: In the diagnostic placement, students learn to evaluate children from a variety of cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds. They also consult with the diagnostic team on appropriate long-term clinical interventions and placement planning for the children they evaluate. Practicum students on a three-day per week placement will typically complete about one psychological test battery, with write-up, approximately every three to four weeks. (1 hour of individual supervision per week)

Supervision

Each practicum student receives at least one hour of individual supervision in psychotherapy each week and at least one hour of individual supervision in psychological assessment each week. Additional group supervision may be offered. Thus, each student receives a minimum total of about 2 hours of individual supervision per week (not including seminars). In practice, additional, informal supervision is readily and routinely provided. Practicum students may be assigned to supervisors with either a cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, or family systems orientation.

Education Programs

In addition to their weekly supervision, practicum students have the opportunity to attend most of the seminars offered in our APA-accredited internship program. They are also encouraged to attend the case conferences conducted by the internship program and the periodic staff development programs offered for all MercyFirst employees. The seminars available to practicum students address topics such as assessment, treatment of the juvenile delinquent, treatment of the sexually inappropriate adolescent, diversity, ethics, research, and psychopharmacology.

There is also a colloquium program, sponsored by the MercyFirst Clinical Department, in which outside experts present on important clinical issues. Recent colloquia have addressed the following topics: family therapy; trauma and PTSD; severe psychopathology in children and adolescents; psychotherapy supervision from a psychodynamic perspective, intervention in high conflict divorce; applied behavior analysis; program evaluation. Workshop leaders are typically highly esteemed professionals from the Long Island/New York City area. In recent years they have included psychologists and other mental health professionals affiliated with institutions such as Adelphi University, Hofstra University, Pace University, St. John's University, Long Island University, Minuchin Center for the Family, North Shore-Long Island Jewish Medical Center.

Development of Professional Identity

A major goal of the training program is the development of each trainee's identity as a professional psychologist. Psychology practicum students see their supervisors contribute to many different aspects of the agency's program, and psychology staff lead many of the agency's professional activities. Within the agency, psychologists serve on various committees which monitor and modify the treatment programs.

Psychodiagnostic testing is considered a prominent part of the overall treatment planning process, and we view testing as the psychologist's special contribution to a full understanding of the child's cognitive and emotional development. Thus, testing and assessment are integral components of the training experience at MercyFirst.

During the year, practicum students have the opportunity to meet with the Coordinator of Training and other senior clinical staff to discuss issues relevant to their training. Feedback about the training program is solicited by the Coordinator of Training. Problems with agency staff, or conflicts with supervisors, if they arise, are open for discussion. Ethical issues, including problems with confidentiality within a system requiring multi-disciplinary collaboration and careful record-keeping of treatment that is often court mandated, are discussed.

Trainee Requirements

The psychology practicum training program is open to psychology graduate students who have completed at least one year (preferably two years) of academic course-work in an accredited training program in professional psychology. Applicants must have completed at least one graduate course in intellectual evaluation and one in personality assessment prior to the start of their training. Additional course-work and experience in psychological assessment as well as in psychotherapy is strongly recommended.

All applicants are encouraged to speak to current and former trainees about our program. Names, telephone numbers and email addresses are available upon request.

The training year at MercyFirst begins in early September, shortly after Labor Day. Practicum students are expected to work at least two days per week (preferably three) and to continue their placement at least until the last week of June; those who can continue through the summer are encouraged to do so.

Application Procedures

Interested individuals may download and print a copy of the psychology practicum application, which is available at our website, www.mercyfirst.org. The completed application should be submitted according to the schedule announced each year by PSYDNYS-NYNJADOT, the organization of psychology training directors in the New York metropolitan area. Generally, PSYDNYS-NYNJADOT sets a date in late January as the earliest date on which applications can be accepted by a training site. Applications submitted as close as possible to the PSYDNYS-NYNJADOT submission date are given preference. A complete application consists of:

- . a fully completed practicum application form;
- . a current curriculum vitae;
- . a graduate transcript;
- . two (2) letters of recommendation, including
at least one from a current or past clinical supervisor;
- . a work sample, preferably consisting of a psychological assessment report.

The application and supporting documents should be mailed to the following address:

Dr. Stephen Migden, PhD, ABPP
Coordinator of Psychology Training
MercyFirst

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It is the applicant's responsibility to see that all materials are received by MercyFirst in a timely manner.

Once a completed application is received and approved, a personal interview will be scheduled.

*MercyFirst reserves the right in its discretion to modify any of the information and/or experiences described in this brochure.
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