ChildServe

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ChildServe is a non-profit organization that partners with nearly 4,600 families throughout Iowa to serve children with special needs. These needs range from developmental delays, disabilities, and mental health disorders.

By using a multi-disciplinary team, ChildServe puts pediatrics and families first. Rehabilitation nurses, therapists, and physicians team up to give each child a personalized care plan and growth benchmarks. Furthermore, families are partnered with staff to help them understand the condition and their child’s future care.

ChildServe incorporates the core values of care, integrity, trust, partnerships, and excellence in their relationships with children, families, staff members, and community.

Everyday Experience

As a psychology intern, I was able to work under a pediatric psychologist who specialized in diagnosing autism, attention-deficit disorders, and anxiety. Each week, I was presented with opportunities including:

- Acquire questionnaires for first-time patients
- Perform assessments such as WISC-V, WIPPSI, and ADOS
- Assist in diagnosing patients from the above tests
- Help the psychologist inform families on the results of the evaluations
- Sit in on case-study meetings
- Attend the Midwestern Psychological Association Conference and autism awareness events
- Advise families on community resources relevant to the child’s diagnosis
- Observe other specialties areas including: Mental health therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, concussion clinics, physical therapy, social workers, and applied behavioral analysis
- Listen to and understand ChildServe’s impact on children and families in the organization

Research

Apart from the day-to-day experience, I was also fortunate enough to aid the psychologist in research. This encompassed:

- Gather articles regarding gender differences in autism and social skills
- Collect references concerning gender dysphoria and social skills
- Accumulate data on the neurobiological basis of gender dysphoria

Lessons Learned

Throughout my time at ChildServe, there were a few life lessons I gained:

- Textbooks are nothing compared to real life; each child is unique, teaching something classes cannot. This easily became the most challenging part of the internship.
- I found my love for neuropsychology, the study of the brain, which would not have happened without this internship.
- I was able to put into practice the information on mental health conditions and illnesses I had been learning for the past two years at the University of Northern Iowa, which was very rewarding.
- By seeing first-hand the impact an organization has on a family, one’s passion for their field of study can grow.

Future Advice

To the students considering whether to do an internship:

- Take the chance to do something new; it will help build new connections, learn beyond the books, and potentially find a career for after college.
- Always take the opportunity to better understand the population one wishes to work with. Appreciating their perspective and life stories can create more of a passion in someone.

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