

Internship Paper Reflection: Les Aramons Foyer

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Interning at Les Aramons Foyer in Montpellier, France was an eye-opening experience for me. I learned so much about the French healthcare system in relation to patients with mental disabilities. The Foyer was a place where patients either resided or attended during the day time where they could find community, express their creativity, and learn valuable skills.

My role at the Foyer was to teach movement therapy classes, help patients complete various activities of daily living, and assist other employees in the day-to-day functioning of the Foyer.

One of my largest roles was teaching movement therapy classes in preparation for “la spectacle” or the final showcase at the end of the year. The final showcase was an opportunity for the residents to show their families what they had worked on over the past year in their movement therapy, gardening, or visual arts classes. During movement therapy lessons I lead the class through open-ended exercises to get everyone moving and spark creativity. The students in lower level classes would then have the opportunity to work on their improvisation movement skills and share with the class. The residents and day students loved being able to show off their skills to their new favorite song and this exercise served to create an accepting, non judgemental community within the class. In the upper level movement therapy classes I challenged them more with choreography and different creative concept games. We would create moving pictures using an open ended prompt that the students would then express adding their movements one at a time to create a comprehensive tableau. I also created choreography pieces for them that we rehearsed each week in preparation for the showcase.

Completing activities of daily living at the Foyer was also a big part of my responsibilities as an intern. Each day I made sure that each of my students got their appropriate meal that was suited for their dietary regime, helped residents make their beds, and ensured that their rooms were tidy. I took patients outside for walks in the garden during lunch time and became very close with some of the residents. I took the train home with some of the day students who were going the same direction as me. I genuinely enjoyed making these connections and getting to know these students.

Working for several months in this facility I became intimately familiar with the workings of the Foyer and understood the positives and negatives of this facility. Obviously there are no institutions in the United States that operate in the manner that the Foyer does. The Foyer offers long term residential care that is financially accessible to all citizens through the universal health system. Here people with mental disabilities have the opportunity to build community, learn new skills, and acquire work experience which is very valuable for those who are trying to integrate into society at large. However facilities like the Foyer house people all across the spectrum of mental disability; there is no specific care or acknowledgment of specific conditions. As a result there are certain people who cannot thrive in this environment, those who need more specialized care or those who exhibit antisocial behavior. I also noticed that the staff at the Foyer held rather regressive, unproductive attitudes towards their residents and students. For instance they would complain about certain residents' lack of progress or antisocial behaviors or say demeaning things behind their back about their intelligence. This was really disheartening to see from mental healthcare professionals and obviously does not create a positive environment for encouraging care.