

The Gentle Path Experience  
By: Abby Watson

In early January of 2014 I started the journey into an eight-month practicum at Gentle Path Counselling Services. As a Graduate student working towards a Master of Arts Degree in Counselling Psychology, this was to be the final passage of my academic journey. When I met with Judy for the first time to discuss what expectations I had for myself as a student, I was feeling somewhat overwhelmed and uncertain of how I would be able to juggle the role of a student intern with the other life roles I had at the time.

I wondered how I would be able to effectively handle a practicum placement with my full-time job, family and home-life obligations, as well as my own self-care, concurrently. I told Judy about my feelings and she did not hesitate in telling me that it would, without a doubt, be difficult at times to do it all. She did not lure me into a false sense of security by saying “It will all work out”, and I appreciated her honesty. She then proceeded to tell me about her own life experience, and how she too had to juggle multiple life roles when working towards her educational and professional goals. I found this information to not only be motivational in my situation, but inspirational as well.

Taking Judy’s words of wisdom with me on this journey has allowed me to find a healthy balance between my different life roles, and to be fully present in each of them without worrying about the others. Ironically, I feel more balanced now than I ever have before, and I believe that I owe this to my experience at Gentle Path.

The opportunities for not only professional and academic growth, but personal growth as well have been plentiful during my time with Gentle Path. Attending and facilitating at the Women of Worth group and attending the Codependents Anonymous group have helped me to understand the inner workings of therapeutic groups. Both of these groups have also given me an enormous boost in self confidence while public speaking.

Creating and facilitating a new women’s educational group has also been an experience like no other. I had the opportunity to facilitate this group at International Women’s Day at the Church of the Good Sheppard as well as at the Crescent Valley Resource Centre. Each facilitation experience was different from the others and from this diversity, I became more flexible and comfortable in this role.

Counselling clients on a one-on-one basis has enriched my counselling skills and has also proved integral to my resourcefulness and independence as a counsellor. Having the opportunity to hone my skills and gain insight into the path that I would like to take as a counsellor has been maximized thanks to the openness of Judy and Gentle Path staff. Words cannot express the gratitude I have for Gentle Path and the kind, caring individuals that make up the organization.

Gentle Path has been a nurturing, inspiring, and safe place to spend the past eight months of my practicum placement. I know that I will take all that I have learned here with me into my future endeavours as a counsellor. As a result of Gentle Path's supportive and encouraging environment, and the wonderful staff that occupy it, I have learned many new things. Judy Urquhart's openness to accepting students in her practice provides new counsellors and social workers, myself included, with the chance to grow as professionals, and also as human beings. This opportunity allows student counsellors and social workers to actualize their goal of becoming helpful resources within our community.