

Samuel Laverty

New Jersey Psychological Association

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### End-of-Year NJPA Grant Report

My name is Samuel Laverty, and I am a second-year school psychology student at Rutgers' Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology. This past academic year, I worked under Drs. Linda Reddy, Nicole Wiggs, and Briana Bronstein at Rutgers' Paraprofessional Coaching Project as a practicum student, and I was able to take part in this practicum experience thanks largely to financial support provided through the generosity of NJPA. Because of the tremendous grant opportunity that NJPA had afforded to the Paraprofessional Coaching Project, I was able to earn a myriad of practicum hours, with my holistic experience having been extensive, comprehensive, and well-rounded.

During my practicum experience with the Paraprofessional Coaching Project, I received one full hour of group supervision with Dr. Nicole Wiggs, Dr. Briana Bronstein, and my peers every week for the entirety of the academic year. In addition, there were many weeks in which this group supervision hour was supplemented with another dedicated hour of individual supervision with Dr. Briana Bronstein, one of my primary project supervisors. During the fall of last year, I had gained many hours of intensive virtual training for behavioral assessment inventories such as the BOSS and the CSAS. Moreover, I had spent much time learning about the foundational principles of behavioral observation, intervention planning, and consultative work within the context of a variety of schools. Additionally, this practicum experience gave me

the opportunity to work collaboratively alongside my supervisors on relevant projects that the coaching team had been involved with at the time, as well; I spent numerous hours working directly in Dr. Alex Alperin's Piscataway office on behavioral coding and organizational tasks, all the while ensuring that proper social distancing and COVID-19-related safety protocols were adhered to. The Paraprofessional Coaching Project also offered me a large number of didactic training through a variety of shared publications, webinars, and online discussions.

Under the NJPA grant, I found my experience working as a practicum student in the Paraprofessional Coaching Project to be largely positive. The entirety of the coaching team was friendly, cooperative, and supportive; even though the project had taken a more data-driven, virtual approach than a traditionally physical and in-person approach, I felt as though my supervisors were still nonetheless accessible and available, and I had no outstanding difficulty in reaching them whenever the need arose. I often found group and individual supervision sessions to be particularly insightful, and I enjoyed being able to receive feedback and input from other members of the team in a respectful, caring, and safe setting. I did not feel as though the practicum workload was too excessive, although I simultaneously feel as though ample work was offered in accordance with a great breadth of team-oriented projects.

At the start of the school year, I had been very much worried about the financial aspect of my graduate schooling, especially on account of the novel COVID-19 pandemic. However, the NJPA grant in coordination with the Paraprofessional Coaching Project mitigated my anxiety toward graduate funding in an invaluable way, and it gave me the opportunity to carry out consultative practicum work for monetary gain as well as experiential gain. Last September, I had also been fearful that the COVID pandemic would effectively ruin my practicum experience, as many schools had remained closed through the fall and there were far fewer opportunities for

practicum students to carry out consultative work in genuine academic and scholastic settings. However, although I had initially dreaded that this might prove an insurmountable challenge, the Paraprofessional Coaching Project was still able to offer a wide array of work to me, whether it be through training, behavioral coding, didactic learning, or supervisory work.

In conclusion, I truly feel that the Paraprofessional Coaching Project was a versatile and flexible practicum experience. Moreover, the additional support on the part of NJPA even further augmented my practicum experience insofar as it offered me tremendous financial comfort in a time where I was physically unable to work in person. I am extremely appreciative of everything that NJPA has done to directly support GSAPP, and I found the Paraprofessional Coaching Project to be a wholly enriching and elevating practicum experience thanks largely to its grant support.