

Suzanne Fico Testimonial

Suzanne Fico is the Student Assistance Counselor at Rumson-Fair Haven High School (RFH) and is also an adjunct professor for the Department of Professional Counseling at Monmouth University. She has hosted many interns from the department over the years and has had an incredibly meaningful and positive experience with them. The counselor interns at RFH serve as a resource for students and an outlet for them to voice their concerns and struggles. Giving the students an opportunity to seek counseling from the interns has made a tremendous impact at the school, allowing any student that needs assistance the chance to be heard. Counselor interns are required to get the substitute teaching certificate which gains them access to the classroom as well. Suzanne normally has five interns working for her at once, each taking on his/her own caseload of approximately 30-35 students. They also run groups on various topics, including stress, anger management, and the pressures of being a man or woman.

Over the last year the RFH Wellness Committee, comprised of the Superintendent and Board of Education, created a Wellness Room at the school. This room is a safe place for students to go for counseling, meditation, and to decompress during times of high stress. There are computers available, water, calming music, dim lamps, and comfortable rugs in the room. The counselor interns work in this Wellness Room to do preventative counseling, psychoeducation, and to develop relationships with the students. One of the goals of this is to decrease the stigma that surrounds seeking counseling and help students see that it is okay to get help. By working with the student before a problem worsens, counselors are preventing terrible circumstances from happening which could be harmful to a student.

Suzanne spoke highly of Monmouth counseling interns and said that students' lives have been transformed due to the support from the interns. Additionally, parents are starting to see the value in counseling and are now more open to their children participating in it. This is a major shift over the last few years as parents value having well-adjusted children. Suzanne stated that many parents go into "autopilot," getting absorbed into fast-paced lifestyles and overlooking issues that may be happening with their children (or themselves). By having conversations with them and helping to turn autopilot off, parents are able to reduce the counseling stigma in their own households giving their children the go ahead to seek help when needed.

Overall, Suzanne feels that all schools should utilize counselor interns, especially from Monmouth. These interns come in qualified with much of the knowledge and skills they need to perform well. They are open to learning and taking advantage of new experiences in order to broaden their counseling expertise. This ultimately gives the interns a leg up in seeking and applying for employment once they graduate. Many of the interns Suzanne has worked with, as well as other alumni, have successfully gotten jobs after graduation. They can easily adapt to a new position and excel there. The need exists in many schools for more counselors, not just on the intern or part-time level, but the full-time level. Students need one-on-one attention which hiring more counselors can provide. As Suzanne put it, "if you establish a need you establish jobs," meaning if schools realize the value in hiring more counselors job creation would increase. There may be less interns but in turn more opportunity for graduates to get jobs. The department is grateful to Suzanne for providing a valuable experience and we are proud of our interns for doing such great work in the community.