As an intern at the Crisis Clinic, my primary job as is answering the 24-Hour Crisis Line. This means that on each of my regular weekly shifts, I sit at one of the phone stations at the clinic and answer calls as they come in. As a trained phone worker, I received 60 hours of classroom training in the fall that prepared me to handle a wide range of crisis situations. We were trained in how to handle suicide, domestic violence, grief and loss, substance abuse, and many other types of emotional crisis. Though each call is different from any other, the extensive training prepares volunteers for the wide range of situations we may encounter.

Though my training prepared me for a variety of different types of calls, each call is a new learning experience. Since each caller’s situation is unique, there are unique supports and resources that I can give each person. Each shift I have had on the phone lines has taught me something new about handling a crisis, supporting a caller, or connecting a caller to the county’s mental health resources.

In addition to my regular weekly shift, I also fill in occasionally as a substitute for other volunteers who need to miss one of their shifts. Right now I am also being trained to work on the Crisis Chat line, which is similar to the phone line, except that volunteers interact with clients through an online chat interface rather than on the phone. The training process for this position involves shadowing another volunteer for one of their chat line shifts, and participating in a few practice chat conversations with a supervisor. I have
completed two of the required practice chat conversations, so I expect to be working on the chat line within the next two weeks.

Being an intern at the Crisis Clinic has helped me develop skills not just for how to help a client through an emotional crisis, but also how to work collaboratively with other professionals in a work environment. I have learned how helpful it is to have a support system around me as I do this kind of work, and to be able to share with my coworkers the highlights and low points of the day’s work. Since volunteers are not allowed to discuss phone calls with anyone outside of the clinic, it is crucial to get support from the people who are on my shift. Some of the calls I handle are quite emotionally draining, and I don’t know how I would be able to process and cope with these more difficult calls without my shift mates and supervisors there to support me.

I am also learning that I love to get specific feedback from my supervisors. My supervisors will often comment on my performance after I finish a call, which really helps me understand what I am doing well and what I could improve on. Some of the feedback that I have gotten recently is that I did a good job setting boundaries with one of my callers, and that my calm voice tone helped a caller calm down and feel more understood when she was talking to me. Getting specific comments like this from my supervisors helps me develop and refine my skills so that I can be more helpful to future clients.

The work environment at the clinic is such that you will never know how busy your shift is going to be. It will unpredictably shift from extremely quiet, with hardly any calls coming in, to extremely busy, with barely enough time to catch our breath between calls. Sometimes this is good, because we never know what the afternoon will bring, and it means that our work never gets boring. Sometimes, though, it makes me feel like as
individuals, we can get lost in the shuffle of it all. When the room is overwhelmingly busy, and each person is on the phone having a separate conversation, there is no one to say hello when you arrive or say goodbye as you leave. I am independent enough that this doesn’t bother me, but I do value the moments when the work slows down and we have the time to catch up with one another. I appreciate being a part of a work environment where everyone cares about one another, and when the work slows down we can laugh together about inconsequential things. I have learned that it is important to be lighthearted and find small pieces of joy throughout the day, especially when doing such serious and emotional work.

**Final Reflection**

For the past three months, I have been volunteering as an intern at the Crisis Clinic. As a phone worker on the 24-hour Crisis Hotline, I help callers who are in an emotional crisis to identify coping strategies and find a solution to their crisis. Through this experience, I have learned so much about how to help people in crisis. One of the most important things I’ve learned is how to connect and empathize with callers, as well as how to make them feel heard. Establishing a connection with the caller is important because it enables them to trust you and open up to you. I’ve also learned how to structure each call in a way that will best help the client. This process is essential, because it allows you to gently guide the caller through the conversation in a way that allows them to identify their own resources and coping strategies. Another important thing I have learned is how to assess for a client’s safety. This is a necessary thing to determine, since many clients we deal with are suicidal.
It is hard to identify what I have liked best and least about my time with the Crisis Clinic, because it has been such a good experience overall. I have learned so many important skills, I have experienced a lot of personal growth, and I have gotten to work with so many good and caring people. I know that the work I do there is important, both to the organization and to the individuals I speak to on the phone. There is very little that I have disliked about my internship. Sometimes the work can be quite stressful, and I leave some shifts feeling emotionally drained; even so, it is ultimately very rewarding work, and there are many ways volunteers can seek support from each other and from our supervisors after a difficult shift.

My own work contributed to the Crisis Clinic in a couple of ways. I was an integral part of the phone room team on my shift each week, answering countless phone calls through which I was able to help clients. Additionally, by working as a substitute on other volunteers’ shifts as needed, I was able to relieve some stress from other volunteers. I also helped my supervisor with a project that took about six and a half hours: this project was essential to the administrative functioning of the clinic, and by taking ownership of the project, I allowed my supervisor to spend her time in ways that were more productive for her. I know I have contributed a lot to the clinic, but I have benefitted from my work there as well: I have gained many useful skills and incredible experience that many undergraduate psychology students are not able to get. These skills and experiences will be helpful to me later in life as I pursue a career in the mental health field, and will give me an advantage if I decide to pursue a career in counseling.

Working on the Crisis Line has helped me identify some of my professional strengths. I know that I am dependable, I work well on a team, I am an empathetic
listener, and I learn and adapt to new work environments quickly. The project I completed for my supervisor also taught me that I am innovative and able to come up with timesaving ideas that can benefit the organization. My internship helped me develop and identify these strengths, as well as developing the specific crisis management skills I discussed above. I know that I still have room for improvement, and as I continue to volunteer my time at the Crisis Clinic, I will continue to learn and improve these skills. One thing I actively want to improve is my ability to learn from each call so that I will do better on similar calls in the future.